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## **Preparing for Asymmetry: As Seen Through the Lens of Joint Vision 2020**

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PREPARING FOR ASYMMETRY:  
AS SEEN THROUGH THE LENS  
OF ***JOINT VISION 2020***

Melissa Applegate

September 2001

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## FOREWORD

Since the mid-1990s, the concept of strategic asymmetry has begun to receive serious attention from the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD). The 1997 Quadrennial Defense Review, for instance, stated, “U.S. dominance in the conventional military arena may encourage adversaries to use . . . asymmetric means to attack our forces and interests overseas and Americans at home.” But while American strategists and defense leaders sense the importance of strategy asymmetry, much analytical work remains to be done before it is fully understood.

To help with this process, the Strategic Studies Institute has begun a Special Series on Strategic Asymmetry. The study that follows—*Preparing for Asymmetry* by Melissa Applegate—is the first of these. In it, the author assesses the revisions to *Joint Vision 2020*, DoD’s roadmap to the future, that must be undertaken in order to prepare for asymmetric challenges.

The Strategic Studies Institute is pleased to offer this work as part of the ongoing assessment of the challenges and opportunities posed by strategic asymmetry.

DOUGLAS C. LOVELACE, JR.  
Director  
Strategic Studies Institute

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF THE AUTHOR

MELISSA APPLGATE is currently a senior intelligence advisor at the Defense Intelligence Agency. She served as an intelligence officer in the U.S. Army from 1981-94, participating in Operations JUST CAUSE and DESERT STORM. She has served at tactical, operational, and strategic levels, in both conventional and special operations organizations. Ms. Applegate is a graduate of Michigan State University and received a Masters of Military Arts and Sciences from the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College in 1994.

## SUMMARY

The U.S. military's joint vision of how it will approach conflict in the future, *Joint Vision (JV) 2020*, is vulnerable to asymmetry. The tremendous relative military combat power of U.S. forces and our commitment to expanding that lead means that, for potential adversaries, asymmetric approaches will be their only recourse. Asymmetric strategies—intentional or opportunistic—will seek to counter the operational concepts underpinning *JV2020*. Successful asymmetric approaches could prevent the United States from fighting as designed or even at all. Alternatively, asymmetry may not defeat U.S. forces, but could prevent them from winning. Asymmetry affects the whole force and must be addressed in that context. Reliance on *overwhelming offensive military power for warfighting* and adopting a *defensive strategy against asymmetric approaches* will not ensure mastery of the asymmetric domain.

This monograph describes how the current vision invites defeat or slow degradation of military effectiveness by asymmetric means. It provides a background of why it is so hard to change and makes the argument for why we must adapt to the emerging potential of asymmetry. Gaining insight into the dynamics driving the significance, scope, and impact of this problem set leads to the conclusion that *JV2020* operational concepts must be broader and more adaptive in nature. Mastering the asymmetric domain is a legitimate, challenging mission area that will require the same investment in time, energy, and intellectual capital that has been spent to achieve supremacy in conventional warfighting. This monograph proposes a set of complementary operational concepts that, incorporated into *JV2020* through a transition process, will lead to an enhanced vision that incorporates asymmetric challenges,

and result in a transformed vision that better supports U.S. forces to anticipate, prepare for, and respond to asymmetry.

This document is the output of The Army-Marine Corps Warfighter Working Group, Task 4 on Asymmetric Approaches. Army lead is the Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations (ODCSOPS) with the Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence (ODCSINT) in support. Marine Corps lead is the Deputy Commandant for Policy, Plans, and Operations (DCPP&O) with the Commanding General Marine Corps Combat Development Command (CG MCCDC) in support.

# PREPARING FOR ASYMMETRY: AS SEEN THROUGH THE LENS OF *JOINT VISION (JV) 2020*

## INTRODUCTION

We used to worry about losing. Now we worry about winning perfectly.

Senior Defense official  
December 2000

*Joint Vision 2020 (JV2020)* represents a vision of how U.S. military forces can fight and win the nation's wars of the future. It reflects the immense military power and capability that is expected to result from the bold orchestration of technology, people, and operational methods, blended in a way that constitutes the perfect application of the American Way of War. *JV2020* envisions conflict and victory on U.S. terms through the application of power projection, precision, lethality, and speed. If allowed to fight as designed, the overwhelming force characterized in *JV2020* is, in fact, perfectly unbeatable. While *JV2020* acknowledges the diverse nature of asymmetric threats across the conflict spectrum, its application is most appropriate in traditional, force-on-force confrontations. The potential impact of asymmetry, as a conflict dimension of its own or as an intentional direct response to *JV2020*, demands an expansion of the way U.S. forces plan, prepare for, and respond to future operational environments.

Will the emerging global security environment provide the opportunity to execute *JV2020* as envisioned? In the absence of Cold War ideological bipolarity and the historical precedent of the world wars, conflict has evolved (some would say devolved) into something not new and different, but more closely resembling Machiavellian struggles hopelessly intermixing the aspirations of individuals,



groups, and states into a nameless mosaic. The basic nature of conflict may remain constant, but the quality and scale of conflict, like part of an historical cyclical continuum, has changed, at least for now and the foreseeable future. These changes—some fundamental, others subtle—have altered the dynamics of the protagonists, motives, objectives, and intent of various parties; the tools available; the threshold for justified military action; and the definitions of victory.

These changes present an asymmetry to the American Way of War. *JV2020* implicitly assumes that conflict will take on a familiar form suited to the operational and enabling concepts more fitting of the old paradigm. It acknowledges the emerging threat asymmetry brings to the environment but does not acknowledge the possibility that asymmetry *may be all there is*.<sup>1</sup> The tremendous relative U.S. military advantage today, and our commitment to expanding that lead, force adversaries toward asymmetric approaches.

Ensuring American “positive asymmetry” does have benefit; clearly it is in our best interest for adversaries to have to react to us.<sup>2</sup> We are not looking for symmetric threats. However, steadfast pursuit of new and improved conventional capabilities—essentially getting better and better at what we are already the best in the world—may leave the United States without the proper tools and techniques to fight the emerging threat and shape the victories of the future. Worse, following a predetermined course based on past successes may create a false sense of security and blind the United States to problems just over the horizon or opportunities to shape our future.

Asymmetric approaches can no longer be considered secondary or peripheral to conventional threats; U.S. forces must master the asymmetric domain with the same intellectual energy devoted to conventional warfare—because asymmetry is not just a threat. To a large extent, asymmetry represents the challenge posed by the vast dissimilarity between our own capabilities and

warfighting methods and how they translate into effectiveness, or ineptitude, against the existing or emerging threats U.S. forces can expect to face. *JV2020*, as the symbol of American military preeminence in the future, is vulnerable to the application of asymmetric strategies, events, and situations. The strengths inherent in *JV2020* operational and enabling concepts are countered by a relatively rigid reliance on—and anticipation of—familiar forms of conflict. Essentially this vision remains confident in and comfortable with the American Way of War.

To ensure U.S. forces are capable of operating effectively in a changing global conflict landscape, *JV2020* concepts must be broader and more adaptive in nature. Understanding the complex cause and effect implications of asymmetry and using that understanding to adapt *JV2020* will improve the ability of the U.S. military to conduct operations effectively. Adapting this vision to fit multidimensional contexts against a broad range of conflict environments, and at the same time reducing vulnerabilities, will be key to ensuring critical operational success. Operational concepts, force structure, joint planning, doctrine, and training and education all must evolve in a way that legitimizes and attacks the challenges of asymmetry. Successfully adapting the joint vision using these mechanisms will produce a force with true mission dominance.

This monograph will explore why and how the construct of *JV2020*—indeed our approach to joint vision—needs to be adapted to compensate for asymmetric dynamics. It will show how the existing vision increases the attractiveness of asymmetric approaches to potential adversaries and how they will seek to exploit one or more of the operational and enabling concepts to preclude U.S. involvement or degrade the effectiveness of U.S. forces. It will then explore several compounding problems that exacerbate the potential effects of asymmetry on U.S. forces facing the complex conflict environments of today and tomorrow and contribute to the need for change. It argues that transformation and “leap

ahead” concepts currently in vogue must legitimize the potential consequences of asymmetry and the environments and conditions under which they will flourish. The future vision must be adapted to successfully meet the challenges we undoubtedly will face, but not at the cost of “dumbing down” the force to provide a level playing field for the rest of the world. Finally, it will offer a broad set of concepts for inclusion in the joint vision to take this strategic document beyond acknowledgement of asymmetry and toward an adaptive, more responsive model for planners and decisionmakers.

### THE THREAT TO *JV2020* FROM ASYMMETRY<sup>3</sup>

We live in a wondrous time in which the strong is weak because of his moral scruples and the weak grows strong because of his audacity.

Otto von Bismarck

A challenge posed for any potential adversary of the United States is clear: they cannot, or will choose not to, meet the United States on our terms; that is, symmetrically. The emerging concepts of asymmetry stem directly from an adversary’s recognition of U.S. strength, both present and future. Generally, the rest of the world believes the United States is the dominant global power and will remain so for some time. The superiority of U.S. military concepts, technology, and capabilities has been a key theme in foreign military assessments since the Gulf War. Many express an expectation and concern that our military advantage will only grow as we move steadily toward the operational capabilities expressed in the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff’s *JV 2020*.

These realizations are driving potential foes to the conclusion that there is little to be gained by engaging the U.S. military on our terms. In fact, most believe that they cannot prevail against a U.S. military that has the full support of our leadership, citizens, and key allies, and one

that embodies the *JV 2020* concepts of dominant maneuver, focused logistics, precision strike, and full dimensional protection, enabled by information superiority.

Accordingly, adversaries are increasingly pursuing technological and operational counters to demonstrated and future capabilities as described in *JV2020*. In fact, *JV2020* may be the conceptual model driving many adversary force development and asymmetric approaches. A conflict spectrum dominated less by large, force-on-force battles and more by disorganized, civilianized, and primitive warfare, conducted by individuals and nonstate actors, offers limitless opportunities to employ niche capabilities against a construct like *JV2020* with potentially crippling effects. Regardless of the intentional or opportunistic means used—terrorism, information operations, the threat or use of mass casualty weapons, or a more specific technology or operational concept—adversaries who engage the U.S. military will be seeking to counter one or more of the key components of our joint vision.

Adversaries will seek to break the “continuity of will” between U.S. leadership, the American people, and our allies. While we think dominant maneuver, adversaries think counteraccess or denying forces easy access to key theaters, ports, bases, and facilities and important air, land, and maritime approaches and lines of communication. Adversaries will develop targeted abilities to counter our ability to assemble and move the right force package in time to any point on the globe and to sustain that force once it is there. They have or want a host of counterprecision-strike capabilities; some of the more notable include the growing use of a variety of cover, concealment, and deception technologies and methods including deep underground facilities and multispectral obscurants. Finally, adversaries are emphasizing any number of counterprotection capabilities that are designed to inflict mass casualties even against well-protected or dug-in military forces.<sup>4</sup>

What is most worrisome about these various asymmetric approaches is that they offer potential adversaries relatively low cost opportunities to achieve disproportionate results. What adversaries seek is a set of capabilities that we are either unwilling or unable to counter in the timeframe that matters. The real threat is that we would be unable to employ our forces as designed and that the tremendous potential capability embedded in the *JV2020* concept would be rendered indecisive or irrelevant. In other words, if asymmetric approaches are successful, we will find it hard to fight the way we want to and we may not be able to fight at all, the result being military irrelevancy or impotency.

Operational planning, supported by the intelligence community, has focused on the defensive capability to combat asymmetry. Terrorism, the proliferation of mass casualty weapons and technologies, foreign information operations, and cyber attack capabilities, for instance, are all priority intelligence missions; operational response options to these threats continue to proliferate at the Service and joint levels. This is only natural because it is at the capability end of the asymmetric paradigm where the real damage to American interests, property, and lives, actually occurs. Those efforts are critical and need to be sustained.

But if we “over focus” only on the means or target of attack, we will miss the true implications asymmetry represents. A singular concentration on the deadly consequences of an asymmetric opponent’s catastrophic attack may blind the United States to the more insidious, albeit less deadly, threat of slow mission failure or force ineffectiveness. We must build a broader and deeper insight into the motivations, perceptions, objectives, and vulnerabilities of our asymmetric adversaries. This understanding, a necessary precursor to effective response, may ultimately allow the United States to master the asymmetric domain.

The need to evolve *JV2020* into a visionary document that not only acknowledges asymmetric dynamics, but one that provides effective operational and enabling concepts to deal with them is a first step. We cannot ignore the potential for a conventional competitor to emerge on the horizon with the intent and willingness to fight the American Way of War, although at present this scenario appears unlikely. The more difficult challenge will be to identify adaptive procedures and processes that will make sense of the emerging threat landscape and then educate the force to use them and to develop new ways of thinking about conflict.

## INVITING DEFEAT BY ASYMMETRIC MEANS

I'll be damned if I permit the United States Army, its institutions, its doctrine, and its traditions to be destroyed just to win this lousy war.

Senior Army officer,  
speaking about Vietnam

Asymmetric dynamics and the frustrating challenges they pose to U.S. forces more comfortable with conventional force-on-force combat are in and of themselves potentially capable of preventing U.S. forces from fighting as designed or even at all as alluded. But other factors are influencing how and why asymmetry has evolved as a challenge to the concepts in *JV2020* that cannot be ignored if the problem is to be solved productively; a quick discussion follows.

### Quality of Conflict.

*JV2020* acknowledges the changes to the global security environment and the impact they have had on how the United States perceives threats to its national interests, and how potential adversaries see the United States. Still, beyond that acknowledgement, the document proceeds to outline operational and enabling concepts that are designed to allow U.S. joint forces to win against enemy military forces anywhere in the world. In other words, it sets the

stage to win under a construct of state against state warfare. The quality of conflict in the early 21st century, however, does not appear compelled to follow traditional, 20th century paradigms familiar to the United States. Rather, conflict is characterized around the world more by what has been termed fourth generation warfare, “the state’s loss of its monopoly on war and the return to a world of cultures in conflict.”<sup>5</sup> Today and for the foreseeable future, U.S. national survival or vital interests are generally not at stake and the onset of modern warfare is far removed from the life and death struggles of the world wars or the Cold War. This is not to say global or regional warfare with global implications will not occur; it simply argues that within the *JV2020* timeframe, the objectives, motives, and intent of others are much more personal and less cataclysmic in nature; the scale and scope of conflict more localized.

The traditional measure of threat—capability plus intent equals threat—applied to today’s global security environment is an elusive equation. Major potential adversaries *may* develop military forces to counter the United States conventionally by 2020, *may* demonstrate the willingness to invest the enormous resources that would be required just to close the gap that exists today, and *may* convey intent to harm the United States. Those factors are much more difficult to assess today; they were known or assumed during the Cold War. Additionally, there is no indication that the United States plans to stand still while that happens. Nor should it. To retain our status as sole superpower, it is in the interest of this country to stay several “leaps ahead” of any potential rival.

The central question becomes how best to maintain supremacy while remaining capable of conducting effective operations in a world where conflict occurs, but rarely the type of conflict envisioned by *JV2020*. Further, the United States must decide whether conflicts that fall short of this threshold are legitimate missions worthy of the same levels of effort in terms of doctrine, training, education, and

tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTP) development that we have placed for years on conventional warfighting.

## Offense, Defense, and Victory.

Historically, this nation has considered victory in war as paramount. We do not set out just to fight the nation's wars, we plan to fight *and win* the nation's wars. The whole point of *JV2020* is to provide an adequate roadmap for U.S. military forces to prepare to win—decisively. It is inherently offensive in nature, in keeping with the American Way of War. In conflict that falls below the *JV2020* warfighting threshold, U.S. forces can control situations, can seize initiative, and achieve specific objectives; but the last 10 years of protracted operations have forced the United States to redefine victory on several levels.

The U.S. military relies on an offensive strategic approach as the bedrock to victory, evidenced throughout *JV2020*. This makes perfect sense for a country where “winning is not everything; it is the only thing” and “the best defense is a good offense.” There is usually little talk of “overwhelming defensive force,” and it would be difficult to “close with and destroy” an enemy from a defensive mindset. Defense is essential, but offense wins the war—in whatever form it takes. Traditional force-on-force conflict is wedded to this concept and has historically proven successful. In such traditional conflict scenarios, asymmetric approaches employed by an adversary are simply smart tactics; a good offensive strategy will still produce victory.

In a world where adversaries recognize the futility of fighting the United States “mano a mano,” and who adopt asymmetric strategies to prevent the United States from fighting as designed or at all as a baseline construct, asymmetry takes on a different dynamic. U.S. military preeminence has placed adversaries in a position where some form of a modernized Fabian (asymmetric) strategy is



only logical. Fabian tactics have not been used by the United States since the Revolutionary War because they represent a strategy of weakness intended for use against an overwhelmingly dominant opponent. A conventional military force intent on fighting “by the rules” will be sorely challenged by a Fabian strategy. Hannibal could not defeat such a strategy against Rome; neither could Napoleon in Russia—it was, at the time, essentially asymmetry at its finest.<sup>6</sup> The effectiveness of offensive U.S. supremacy—indeed how we will achieve victory—against a conflict spectrum that avoids or ignores us, where adversaries embrace asymmetry through technology, niche capabilities, and effective manipulation of world opinion—remains to be proven.

### Why It Is So Hard to Change.

If force-on-force warfare is receding, and we recognize the changing quality of conflict, why is adaptation to and victory in this new messy world of proliferating problems so difficult? Primarily, it is because—from an historical standpoint—we are not ready to take the chance that we will not be ready for war. We may be in a period of “strategic pause,” but it is impossible to say how long that will last. Therefore, it is difficult to convince the leadership that a major shift in terms of force structure and operational methods is needed to more effectively manage asymmetric threats that fall outside the conflict spectrum (as isolated incidents) or exist at the lower end where asymmetry dominates.

Many would argue these traditional concepts of overwhelming power, massive technological advantage, and intimidating deterrent capability provide a level of comfort and security. To a degree, this is true; these concepts serve to ensure there will be no more Pearl Harbors or Task Force Smiths. In a world of asymmetry, however, they offer no guarantees against another Din Bin Phu or Khobar Towers. Still, the comfort level such force provides

and the firm belief that this degree of power will succeed against any and all enemies all the time make change inherently hard.

Meanwhile, in the foggy world of predicting the future, it is difficult to know how best to shape the force, so incremental improvements to existing capabilities represent a "safe" approach; besides, radical visions of future warfare can call existing doctrine, capabilities, and force structure into serious question. There are many futurists with expertise in one area or another who can present emerging technologies and theoretical capabilities that may be available, with military applications, but more dangerously, those which do not require a military at all to have devastating effects. The answer to these forecasts is unlikely to be iterative improvements to existing capabilities or a continuation of massive organizational forces.

### Why We Must Change.

Many will argue that with the resources available to our great nation, we can afford to maintain this dominant warfighting force and adapt it to any and all mission requirements; that such an "insurance policy" is well worth the investment. Indeed, this force and *JV2020*-similar operational concepts won Operation DESERT STORM; if the exponential advances of the last 10 years are added on, this strategy prevents the emergence of a near peer competitor, or so the thinking goes. Why not continue to build on it? Several reasons come to mind.

First, overwhelming U.S. military capability does not effectively deter regional or internal conflicts from igniting or becoming entrenched as protracted cycles of violence. Threats of American intervention may play a role in major power state decisionmaking, but it has not proven to be an effective conflict prevention mechanism among lesser powers and substate warring factions. Additionally, there are few concrete indications or evidence that the existence of

a powerful U.S. military can deter nonstate actors from pursuing their objectives. Indeed, such a force, globally deployed, offers lucrative targets of opportunity to those dedicated to demonstrating American weakness (Khobar Towers and the U.S.S. *Cole*, for example) or circumventing military operations through asymmetric approaches.

Second, there is no adequate capability within the *JV2020* force construct to achieve full victory or *win* against the kind of conflicts that characterize today's global security environment. Civil wars, insurgencies, cross-border incursions where the United States is not a target, or there is no identified "enemy" force, are especially problematic. U.S. forces operating under *JV2020* can control events, situations, and terrain, but only by exerting constant pressure and perpetual presence. These types of conflict inherently place self-imposed restrictions on the implementation of *JV2020* in that the threshold of these conflicts usually falls below requirements for "overwhelming force."

Third, *JV2020* continues to apply the same long-standing assumptions that remained valid throughout the Cold War—we can get there from here, in the time planners have scheduled, with the appropriate tools and forces, and that we will be able to fight as designed upon arrival. With no direct operational or enabling concepts dedicated to overcoming the potential for asymmetric approaches in *JV2020*, U.S. forces are left to defend, adapt, or develop operational concepts in an ad hoc manner—because asymmetric approaches still lack formal legitimacy under *JV2020*. Because of their close association to "warfare on the cheap," or "warfare without rules," or just plain free-for-alls, asymmetric dynamics also tend to rate a lower priority in terms of devising effective response mechanisms. There is no institutionalized strategy or effective operational doctrine embedded within *JV2020* to cope with these dynamics other than defensively—which historically is not the way America fights and wins its wars.

Fourth, allies cannot or have made conscious decisions not to keep pace with the advances in lethality, precision, C4ISR, etc., based on current or projected defense spending. There are few indications our allies are in a position or are willing to expend the resources necessary to become full partners under the doctrine of overwhelming force as we have defined it in *JV2020*. This poses unique challenges in a strategic environment where stated policy is one that dictates we will act unilaterally if necessary, but will always prefer to operate in concert with our allied partners. Alternatively, allies may look more to building their own capabilities with their own vision and purpose, which may in the end create more problems than they solve in terms of interoperability and C4ISR in the event of real war. Allies may also lead the way in terms of developing operational concepts to manage lower threshold conflicts for which U.S. forces and operational concepts may not be able to “pull back on the throttle” enough to integrate effectively.

Finally, the dominant force we have built very likely may be driving military developments by potential adversaries in response to their perception that they may be targets of the “Shape, Prepare, and Respond” or whatever strategic construct the new administration develops. In other words, the forces and capabilities envisioned in *JV2020* and on the drawing board today may be driving not only conventional military developments by potential adversaries, they likely are also making asymmetric approaches more and more attractive. This “perception-reaction” to U.S. military vision is not an argument to “dumb down” U.S. forces in an effort to “level the playing battlefield.” Rather, it is an effort to show the need for a more inclusive *JV2020* strategy that incorporates asymmetric dynamics as equally significant factors for consideration by decisionmakers, force planners, strategists, and operators.

## Can We Adjust *JV2020*?

How can we take today's conventional force, retain its capabilities of overwhelming power, make it more suitable for existing challenges and complex environments, and at the same time prepare it for future warfare? Within budget constraints? Without undue risk? How can we define and achieve victory in a way that is understandable without a traditional battlefield environment? If the quality of the conflict does not warrant full investment in "overwhelming" force, then how do we posture the force with adequate operational methods that ensure victory when victory is measured more as defeat avoidance and tactical objectives met? In essence, how can we apply the same offensive spirit we have brought to the warfighting concepts in *JV2020* to the complexities of asymmetry to produce a future vision that does more than acknowledge the problem?

Current understanding and classification of asymmetric threats tends to look at the capabilities and actions themselves, and not the nature of the problem. We have no institutionalized offensive strategy to deal with asymmetry. Existing focus on most dangerous threats—real, perceived, potential, or theoretical—produces a fundamental challenge to operational forces and intelligence tasked with dealing on a daily basis with less dangerous, more likely frustrating challenges. Somehow, this complex global security environment must be reconciled with existing *JV2020* concepts in order to transition the military to take its place as the premier force of decision. Leap-ahead concepts must take into account more than just technology, precision, and firepower. Rather, leap-ahead capabilities must span the operational continuum and include the entire "asymmetric spectrum."

*JV2020* emphasizes the need for new doctrine, organizations, training, and education of leaders and people "to take advantage of technology."<sup>7</sup> Yet the complexity of asymmetry demands more than just adaptation of highly advanced technology into existing methods. It requires a

new, more inclusive set of planning processes and procedures, innovative doctrine, and TTP that promotes adaptive command, and demands intelligence that incorporates all aspects of potential operational environments and outside elements that can influence events. A transformed *JV2020* force will require new ways of thinking about and innovative methods of executing a broad range of missions. This co-evolution-to-transformation must be achieved with a realistic sense of risk and a clear eye on threats and opportunities. Balancing the ability between threat response and proactive influence to shape the future global security environment must underlie the building blocks of *JV2020*. In this way, we can transform from a Cold War-based force-on-force construct to a future force capable of accomplishing national military objectives, to apply the right tools against a broad spectrum of complex, context-dependent situations to achieve real victory in the global security environment of 2020.

## THE NEED FOR AN INCLUSIVE VISION

Sacred cows make the best hamburger.

General John Sheehan  
former USACOM Commander in Chief

Asymmetry cannot be treated as a “lesser included case.” U.S. forces can—and must—embrace asymmetry as a challenge for which there are effective solutions. These solutions may not look quite like the American Way of War as we have known it, but effective ways and means of including asymmetry as an integral aspect of the joint vision can be developed. Operational concepts must accommodate the management of change to allow transition, or coevolution, from existing ways of doing business to institutionalize the multidimensional challenges of asymmetry. The objective result will be a transformed military “means” to address new “ways” of conflict to achieve “ends” in the 21st century.

Existing paradigms and methods will not adequately defeat or neutralize asymmetry. No matter how intractable “known” state enemy asymmetries are, they are the easiest to deal with—they are extensions of historical conflicts. Current planning and thinking facilitates understanding and development of effective counters. More challenging are the “unknowns”: existing or emerging conflict environments or nonstate opponents and the potential asymmetric approaches they can employ. We must bridge the gap between the known and unknown by preparing our people and transforming our methods.

Broadening the operational and enabling concepts that form the baseline for *JV2020* to incorporate and institutionalize asymmetric dynamics through enhancements to these concepts will pave the way toward a more comprehensive vision that does more than acknowledge the changing global security environment. It will provide an outline for developing foundational tools needed by decisionmakers, joint planners, and operators to explore all the dynamics of conflict, legitimize and integrate the implications of asymmetric challenges, and develop effective solutions.

### The New Model—Preparing the Force to Master the Asymmetric Domain.

Essentially, the U.S. military must master the asymmetric domain. Currently, *JV2020* seeks success by achieving full spectrum dominance and relying on four primary operational concepts—dominant maneuver, focused logistics, precision engagement, and full dimension protection, all enabled by information superiority and interoperability. Proposed guidelines that will be useful for military forces coming face-to-face with asymmetric dynamics are offered below. The proposal enhances existing concepts to emphasize the areas that will be critical to focus on in dealing effectively with asymmetry. These enhancements involve changes to planning, training and

education, and operational and campaign strategies through focused mitigation and balanced response.

*Planning.* The goal of *JV2020*, “full spectrum dominance,” places it squarely within the offensive sphere of a strategy of annihilation—the defeat or neutralization of an enemy’s military power. Current planning constructs, as the baseline for the military decisionmaking process, provide the vehicle that defines the military ways and means to achieve this goal. The military generally uses either the deliberate planning process or the crisis action planning process as a means to assess long- or short-term threats; explore, synchronize, and analyze various courses of action; identify required forces and actions; and as a coordination mechanism for the organizations involved. These processes use various forms of estimates to lay the groundwork for any planning that follows. Different organizations excel at different planning processes, depending on their mission focus. For example, joint theater special operations forces (European Command’s [EUCOM] Special Operations Command [SOCEUR] comes to mind) are adept at the crisis action planning process. Large theater forces like the U.S. Forces in Korea (USFK) have institutionalized war planning to a science.

Offensive, conventional military campaigns crafted with an exclusive reliance on defensive TTP to address asymmetry will be inadequate to ensure future victory—in any form. For operations where deliberate, opportunistic, or inadvertent asymmetry may arise (essentially all operations), planning constructs need to be broader in scope and provide a deeper insight into adversaries. Planning must not rely on historically valid assumptions and must be more contextual in nature. Additionally, asymmetric threats may arise as a direct result of U.S. actions or perceptions of U.S. intent, so all planning must wargame how employment of forces using *JV2020* operational concepts will affect the contextual situation on the ground. Simply being there creates the opportunity for asymmetric approaches to be used against U.S. forces.



It will no longer be enough to focus on “enemy” forces, their composition, disposition, weapons’ characteristics, and targets alone. Estimate formats should be broadened to incorporate the contextual terrain; essentially, full spectrum analysis must be applied to all potential planning scenarios. Out-of-theater influencing factors, individual and group dynamics, civilian attitudes, perceptions, and the actions that arise from them, are examples of how estimative processes must be “stretched.” Logistics and transportation estimates as well must provide in-depth analysis of alternative approaches to mission accomplishment in light of potential anti-access strategies.

Additionally, it is not just the enemy’s main military effort any more; planners must orient on the totality of efforts by all players within a given operational environment. Operational plans must focus directly on existing concepts of “essential tasks”; they must clearly state their critical path to success so that other supporting elements can focus their efforts to ensure objectives are achieved. With the proliferation of asymmetric possibilities, and since every counteraction invites innovation, it is unlikely that every eventuality can be planned for or defeated. Therefore, it will be critical to clearly identify the U.S. main effort, what parts of the operation must be protected, and where risk will be assumed.

Finally, operational planning constructs must reach out more and more effectively to include other contributing players. Allies, coalition partners, other agencies, humanitarian organizations, and private sector elements all offer varying capabilities in terms of preventing or mitigating (or causing!) asymmetric approaches in support of—or to the detriment of—military forces and their pursuit of military objectives. Planning must, as a matter of course, incorporate consideration of these elements and the role they play and how they will, or will not, affect operations.

Practically speaking, adapting planning processes in a way that truly masters the asymmetric domain will require

an investment in time, effort, and resources at the national, joint, and service levels. Leadership must challenge the brain trust of the military to broaden how planners assess and prepare responses to operational environments across the spectrum—in effect, to adapt to new ways of looking at conflict, its root causes, and determine what courses of action will be effective, initially and over time. Effective, broad-based—whole context—planning processes, institutionalized at all levels, will produce the kind of innovative answers needed to achieve “victory” against asymmetry.

### Training and Education.

In the movie, *The Patriot*, the British General Cornwallis and his troops are confounded by the operational methods employed by the South Carolina irregular militia. The inability of British forces and leadership to anticipate, prepare for, and respond to the asymmetric approaches employed by the militia resulted from their expectation—grounded in their training and experience—of how warfare was *supposed* to be conducted. The beauty of the militia’s approach was that it was so unexpected, so unnatural, “so ungentlemanly,” and so *unfair*. It is ironic that U.S. forces may find themselves in the role of the British today when facing asymmetry—hamstrung by the unexpected, the unnatural, and the unfair, from a host of actors who have no intention of being gentlemen.

Preparing U.S. forces to operate in a world where asymmetry appears to be the only logical option for adversaries will require some significant and innovative adaptations to training and education methods. Essentially, the likely use of asymmetric approaches by adversaries requires a U.S. force trained to face a multiplicity of asymmetric strategies and Fabian tactics, from a host of players in a vast array of complex environments, all intended to foil our ability to deploy and fight as designed. We cannot rely on training to face a

like-minded enemy military force as a successful approach for military preparation against asymmetry because the world of conflict is no longer a simple blue versus red equation, but increasingly a blue versus red versus green versus orange mélange. The challenge of training and educating a force for asymmetry will be an imposing one for the military training system that has perfected the preparation of forces for war for over 50 years.

Successfully preparing U.S. forces will mean allowing asymmetry to be a valid, legitimate partner in training, education, exercises, and experimentation. Training and education must begin to incorporate asymmetry as a fact of life; one which requires military personnel to adapt the way they learn and think about the complex operational environments they face and the potential for asymmetry to be a dominant challenge. We must institute a building block approach to training and education that over time builds forces with the knowledge and wisdom to operate against asymmetry. Educating U.S. forces to embrace and cope with uncertainty will be a key component to developing adaptive leaders who can effectively manage the demands of future operational environments.

The force must become adept at internalizing what are now considered different ways of learning about and coping with future conflict, but which, over time, will become second nature. Similar to the way planners now use the crisis action planning process as a guideline to prepare for an operation, their training and education allow them to adapt this process to emerging situations. They know which steps must be taken and which can be bypassed, based on experience and insight but within established parameters of recognized military mission areas. In the same way, forces trained throughout their careers to assess and plan for potential operational environments—incorporating asymmetric dynamics as a matter of course—will facilitate adaptive courses of action most suitable to achieving success.

Exercises must allow asymmetric “red teams” to bring the full force of their potential to bear. Initially, this is bound to stop some exercises in their tracks; an asymmetric approach could present a “warstopper” event that stymies U.S. forces and prevents them from achieving other training objectives. Over time, however, as exercise participants are allowed to explore the dynamics of asymmetry involved, a new level of learning will be achieved. Insight into how to anticipate asymmetric approaches, how various actors can bring asymmetry to bear on mission phases, and how the effects of asymmetry can be reduced or mitigated will be gained and provide a true value-added for the training audience.

Experimentation and threat exploration are probably the most valuable vehicles in force preparation for asymmetry. They offer the best opportunity to develop the methods and organizational structures that will defeat asymmetry or render it irrelevant to U.S. operations. Through experimentation and exploration, unconstrained by rigid adherence to existing doctrine and operational concepts, potential offensive strategies or pro-active response mechanisms to asymmetry can emerge.

#### Operational Campaigns and Strategies—Focused Mitigation and Balanced Response.

In conflict, especially the type below the threshold requiring the full use of military power as designed, applying massive firepower clearly has the power to stun, to freeze, to intimidate, and to punish, but it also may serve as a lightning rod for asymmetric approaches and strategies. Proportionality—and perceptions of what constitutes it—does count. In a global security environment that does not universally view the United States as a benign superpower, the use of overwhelming power can have cascading effects or unintended consequences. U.S. forces must be prepared to anticipate the potential for asymmetric

consequences of their operations in an operational environment as well as on a global audience.

Understanding how opponents view U.S. military capabilities, the impact of being on the receiving end of U.S. firepower, the long-term effects of U.S. force presence in an operational environment and how those factors affect achieving end state, all play a role in developing effective broad operational campaigns and strategies. The concepts of focused mitigation and balanced response are intended to ensure military decisionmakers and planners take into account the immediate, mid-term, and long-term effects of full spectrum dominance in asymmetric terms. For example, the use of massive speed, lethality, and precision against a much weaker opponent likely will achieve specific military objectives. But it also may “justify” the use of dangerous asymmetric approaches by weaker opponents: chemical or biological weapons, terrorism, or suicide missions intended to inflict massive casualties. It may invite opponents globally to commit to carrying out an asymmetric event as a way of opposing U.S. policy or to show support for the target of our operations.

Applying appropriate tool-to-task, proportional concepts for each phase of an operation and determining appropriate priority of effort will be critical. These concepts will require maximum conceptual and organizational adaptability if U.S. military forces are to ensure their ability to rapidly counter emerging asymmetric approaches and speed the process by which an asymmetric approach becomes insignificant, ineffective, or halted altogether.

Focused mitigation and balanced response concepts also require U.S. courses of action at all levels that mitigate or prevent disproportionate or negatively cascading effects. They require an evaluation of how—real or perceived—disproportionate application of U.S. conventional power can have negative ramifications that may prolong U.S. involvement and prompt asymmetric response. If dominant maneuver and precision engagement are successful

concepts that win wars, the potential use of asymmetric strategies in response to U.S. actions requires operational concepts and thinking that go beyond immediate battlefield concerns to consideration of ramifications during course of action development. The potential for asymmetric response to U.S. actions must then be assessed for the area of operations, the theater as a whole, transit points, and the homeland. Operations must, as a minimum, attempt to ensure objectives are achieved without triggering an asymmetric response—or that U.S. forces have planned and prepared for such an outcome. Precision engagement operations must be applied in a way that includes physical precision (steel on target) and psychological precision (shaping a military operation to influence attitudes, perceptions, and actions).<sup>8</sup> Detailed risk management and risk avoidance assessments against potential asymmetry will be key in preparing for any precision operation. Finally, alternative options may in the end prove more effective upon reflection and analysis. The challenges of the changing quality of conflict may require military forces to develop alternative strategies and capabilities, force structure and design, or innovative applications of military power that today are in short supply but which may be better suited to achieve a desired outcome than full spectrum dominance alone.

### Coevolution and Transformation.

The process of adapting and enhancing the operational concepts of *JV2020* to fully legitimize and incorporate asymmetric dynamics cannot happen overnight. Revising planning processes, building and implementing the necessary training and educational tools, broadening the way the military thinks about and acts on asymmetry, and developing effective operational capabilities to defeat asymmetry will take time. A period of transition will be required. The operational concepts proposed here would overlay and complement the existing concepts found in *JV2020*. The intent of this transition is to build the

processes; refine doctrine, organization, training, materials, leadership, personnel, and facilities; (DOTMLPF) and institutionalize consideration of asymmetric dynamics as a relevant, legitimate concern at all levels among all disciplines.

The end-state transformation would essentially fully integrate the asymmetric domain into the *JV2020* construct. The transformation would result in the problem of asymmetry becoming manageable and with some exceptions, a normal part of military operations today and tomorrow. Transformation would institutionalize understanding of the scope, significance, and impact of the problem set, and provide the necessary tools and processes to support U.S. planning and operational responses to asymmetry. Some asymmetric threats will still fall outside the military's ability to anticipate or will require a unique response outside the normal parameters of strategy, plans, and operational processes. Adapting the concepts proposed in this monograph will, however, increase the military's ability to build pro-active solutions—an offensive strategy—to limit the potentially negative effects and win against the asymmetric problem set.

## CONCLUSION

In today's military where dominance theory prevails, and where the services compete fiercely for warfighting missions and capabilities, asymmetry is an orphan. Mastering the asymmetric domain will likely not offer opportunities for overwhelming victory associated with conventional warfare because asymmetry in any form is unlikely to ever threaten the nation's survival. It is often considered a "distracter mission" or is relegated to the purview of specialized units and organizations outside the mainstream of the conventional force. The asymmetric domain remains, however, a challenge worth pursuing because it will affect the whole force; it is this domain that offers adversaries opportunities to demonstrate that the

U.S. military is not invulnerable; that if it cannot be defeated, then perhaps it can be prevented from fighting and winning.

We must accept that change is hard, and change is not welcome. For every leader who looks forward, there will be a hundred looking back. If the leadership is really determined to “leap ahead” to the future, it cannot do so selectively—it must move the whole force. Skipping a generation of technology and weaponry may be a very smart move. This leap ahead, however, must be matched by a similar jump over the hurdles of the past and the realities of the existing and projected global security environment. It must bring forward strategy, doctrine, training, leadership, and manpower on parallel paths to meet the challenges out there as they are, and not as we would have them be, to fit the traditional American Way of War. We must realign the way U.S. forces think and plan for potential adversaries, and increase understanding of their motives, objectives, and intent. Disregarding asymmetry as an “also ran” to conventional warfare will likely lead to a U.S. military “all dressed up but not invited to the dance.” The answers exist; we can master the asymmetric domain, but only if there is a willingness to embrace its complexities, legitimize its existence, and use the brute force brainpower that exists within to adapt our capabilities to the realities of conflict in the 21st century.

## ENDNOTES

1. Director for Strategic Plans and Policy, J5; Strategy Division, *Joint Vision 2020*, Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, June 2000, p. 6.

In the face of such strong (U.S.) capabilities, the appeal of asymmetric approaches and the focus on the development of niche capabilities will increase. By developing and using approaches that avoid U.S. strengths and exploit potential vulnerabilities using significantly different methods of operation, adversaries will attempt to create conditions that effectively delay, deter, or counter the application of U.S.



military capabilities. The potential of such asymmetric approaches is perhaps the most serious danger the United States faces in the immediate future . . .

2. Steven Metz and Douglas V. Johnson II, *Asymmetry and U.S. Military Strategy: Definition, Background and Strategic Concepts*, Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, January 2001. This monograph describes how America's overwhelming power represents "positive asymmetry" which can be used effectively to reduce or negate the effects of adversary's "negative asymmetry."

3. This section and the Appendix are drawn from draft congressional testimony on asymmetric threats to *JV2020*, but its inclusion here does not reflect the endorsement of this monograph by any element of the Department of Defense.

4. The Appendix provides a detailed overview of how specific asymmetric approaches could be employed successfully against the operational and enabling concepts embedded in *JV2020*.

5. G. I. Wilson, F. Bunkers, and J. P. Sullivan, *Anticipating the Nature of the Next Conflict*, p. xxx. The authors detail their view of the changing nature of conflict and offer their reasoning for the difficulty in shaping the U.S. military to conduct operations in future conflict environments.

Two central ideas shape what we see as emerging with fourth generation: the nation-state's loss of its monopoly on war and the return to a world of cultures in conflict. Of concern is a fourth generation opponent who might have a non-nation-state base, such as an ideology or religion. Our national security capabilities are designed to operate within a nation-state framework. Outside that framework, they have great difficulties. Wilson, Bunkers, and Sullivan go on to state that the Clausewitzian model of warfare, with its Trinitarian baseline, represents an anomaly in that for most of history war was not as neatly compartmented. War was messy, fought for many reasons, not just "rational" reasons of state. In the view of the authors, future conflict will increasingly be nontrinitarian, and formal Trinitarian militaries "are often ineffective against it."

6. *A Military History and Atlas of the Napoleonic Wars* states "(Czar) Alexander . . . taught by defeat . . . decided to remain on the defensive militarily." When Napoleon invaded Russia, the Czar's plan was to

withdraw slowly to the fortified camp at Drissa and receive a French attack against entrenched Russian forces while Bagration struck the French right rear. While the plan quickly fell apart, the Russians executed a steady retreat to the vicinity of Smolensk. While the battle of Borodino was magnified by Tolstoy into an apocalyptic struggle, the Russian goal throughout was to preserve the bulk of the fighting force, both on and off this battlefield. Circumstances forced the Czar to stumble onto the only strategy that had proved successful centuries earlier against Hannibal—Fabian tactics. After seizing Moscow, “Napoleon faced the grimmest problem he had yet known. After a campaign unequalled since Ghengis Khan, . . . the very size of Russia (and the presence of Russian forces in the field) left his successes indecisive . . .” By maintaining a force in being and refusing to give Napoleon the knockout blow he so desperately desired, the Russians defeated Napoleon with the help of their strongest ally, winter. The Russians succeeded with this asymmetric strategy because they did not allow Napoleon to fight his forces as they were designed and never offered an opportunity for decisive victory.

7. *JV2020*, p. 3.

8. The distinction between physical and psychological precision is explored in Steven Metz, *Armed Conflict in the 21st Century: The Information Revolution and Post-Modern Warfare*, Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, August 2000, pp. 77-81.

## APPENDIX

### ASYMMETRIC APPROACHES AGAINST *JV2020* OPERATIONAL AND ENABLING CONCEPTS

*JV2020* recognizes that U.S. military forces are not likely to become involved or stay engaged without a collective national willingness to commit our forces and stay the course. Adversaries seem to understand this concept also and either have or desire a variety of what can be considered counter-will capabilities. Generally, these would be designed to deter or preclude the United States from choosing the military option or to make the United States disengage short of our military objectives. These capabilities will focus on severing the “continuity of will” between the U.S. national leadership, the military, the people, our allied and coalition partners, and world public opinion. Asymmetry of resolve and asymmetry of objective provide the foundation from which counter-will strategies will prove most effective. If adversaries understand where the U.S. threshold of will exists, they can focus on achieving their objectives with the relatively secure knowledge that the United States will not employ overwhelming force with its inherent risks under less than vital circumstances or will lack the will to “stay the course.”

Examples of counter-will capabilities both present and future include information operations that enable an adversary to shape or persuade domestic and foreign public opinion, the use—or threat of—mass casualty weapons, either in theater or against U.S. or allied homelands. Infrastructure attack capabilities focused on threatening U.S. and allied territory and populations and inflicting, causing, or allowing extensive collateral damage as a means to pressure the United States to end hostilities could also be

used. Another example would be deploying in complex terrain such as urban or built-up areas to lure the United States into a prolonged, high-casualty engagement.

*JV 2020* also emphasizes the importance of dominant maneuver and focused logistics; that is, the need to assemble and move the right force package in time to any point on the globe and to sustain that force once it is there. While we think dominant maneuver, adversaries think counter-access or denying American and allied forces easy access to key theaters, ports, bases, and facilities and important air, land, and maritime approaches and lines of communication. Additionally, if adversaries are not successful in preventing an intervention, they may see an advantage in countering dominant maneuver by simply not offering to meet the United States on a battlefield in a way that is conducive to U.S. operational methods. Without a "battlefield," it will be difficult for the United States to employ its forces as designed, regardless of environment. It will be exceedingly difficult to "close with and destroy" if no "battle" is offered, or if few targets are presented. The United States may have the lethal power to destroy and the capability to seize and control, but will that alone offer the United States not only a way out, but also achieve a military victory recognized as honorable and respected by the rest of the world?

Again, any number of counter-access means either available or under development, if used successfully, could significantly invalidate many long-standing, inviolate planning assumptions. Examples include more traditional standoff military systems such as antiship cruise missiles or other strike assets that can attack forces approaching a given theater. Employing dozens of smaller naval platforms, missile patrol boats, catamarans, and the like to swarm approaching forces with hundreds of missiles and torpedoes would offer an alternative to the development of naval forces able to take on the United States. The use of naval mines—even older technology mines—in important maritime areas could severely impact time phased force and

deployment data (TPFDD) flow. Sabotaging prepositioned stocks or key in-theater bases and facilities could slow deployment and negatively impact our ability to respond quickly and decisively. Attacks within the United States or on allied territory—especially against more vulnerable civilian infrastructures—to disrupt mobilization, deployment, and sustainment activities could severely impair operations. Fomenting instability in foreign states to overturn U.S.-friendly leaders and pressuring key in-theater allies to deny U.S. access could prevent the United States from employing military power as designed and could remove the imprimatur of legitimacy.

Another key *JV2020* tenet is precision engagement; adversaries have or want a host of counterprecision-strike capabilities. Some of the more notable include the growing use of a variety of cover, concealment, and deception technologies and methods, including deep underground facilities and multispectral obscurants, to hide key activities and assets from U.S. precision intelligence and strike platforms. The use of human shields placed in front of key facilities to protect those facilities from U.S. attack offers a cheap but highly effective tool of choice, especially in operations where there is significant asymmetry of objectives and resolve. The pursuit of counterstealth technologies would enable adversaries to engage key precision strike elements and the development of radio frequency weapons and ground-based lasers could defeat or degrade precision-munition sensors or destroy strike platforms.

*JV2020* also emphasizes the importance of full dimensional protection for U.S. and allied forces. Adversaries are emphasizing any number of counterprotection capabilities that are designed to inflict mass casualties even against well-protected or dug-in military forces. Counterprotection capabilities include terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, and missile delivery systems, and even volumetric and other conventional weapons with massive destructive effects. The

asymmetry of objective and resolve once again comes into play, as does the concept of threshold. If one side or another wants to draw the United States deeper into a conflict, they may pursue a counterprotection strategy that inflicts a high level of American casualties, which, in turn, might ratchet up our resolve or threshold of intervention. A similar strategy, depending on the situation, might also serve to hasten the withdrawal of U.S. forces, similar to the evolution of events in Somalia.

Finally, *JV2020* underscores the importance of information and decision superiority. In this area in particular, potential adversaries have and are developing extensive capabilities for information operations to include electronic warfare, psychological operations, physical attack against our critical information systems—including attacks against key satellite down-links and ground stations. Denial and deception, computer network attack, and more exotic technologies such as directed energy weapons or electromagnetic pulse weapons, all offer means to prevent U.S. forces from fighting as designed or effectively employing their system of systems in a manner that produces the synergy envisioned.

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