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JDN 2-19: Hitting the Target but Missing the Mark

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ABSTRACT: Predoctrinal deliberations about the employment of the US armed forces, captured in Joint Doctrine Notes, remain critically understudied. Using comparative text analysis, this article identifies changes in recent Joint Doctrine Note depictions of military strategy. These changes risk distorting the logic of military strategy, sacrificing means-ends integration to organizational impulse, and raising the prospect of future shortfalls in US strategic effectiveness.

In December 2019, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff released a new Joint Doctrine Note (JDN) on military strategy, JDN 2-19. The note differs from its predecessor, JDN 1-18, in significant ways. Perhaps most notably, 2-19 expands on conventional characterizations of military strategy. Per JDN 2-19, strategy encompasses more than the designated employment of the military instrument “to secure the objectives of national policy.”¹ The document specifically requires the creation of “friendly advantages . . . at the expense of the competitor or adversary.”² This modification, we contend, risks removing military strategy from its foundational logic, substituting organizational impulse for means-end integration and jeopardizing future strategic effectiveness.

The following sections provide theoretical grounding, evidentiary support, and practical context for our argument. First, the article examines classical accounts of the logic of military strategy, asking whether shifting doctrinal depictions of strategy run counter to that logic. The article then provides a comparative textual analysis of select sections from JDN 1-18 and JDN 2-19, lending substantiation to the claim that the two differ from each other in meaningful ways. The article identifies evidence of divergent portrayals of military strategy, highlighting JDN 1-18’s emphasis on means-ends integration and JDN 2-19’s embrace of military organizational impulse. Finally, the article addresses the implications of this variance for the future of US strategic effectiveness, particularly in the context of re-emergent great-power competition. The article warns JDN 2-19 may be a harbinger of regression in US military strategic thought and urges decisionmakers to *engage* rather than *evade* the complexities of means-ends integration.

1. Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), *Strategy*, Joint Doctrine Note (JDN) 1-18 (Washington, DC: JCS, 2018), I-7, https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/jdn_jg/jdn1_18.pdf?ver=2018-04-25-150439-540.

2. JCS, *Strategy*, JDN 2-19 (Washington, DC: JCS, 2019), II-3, https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/jdn_jg/jdn2_19.pdf?ver=2019-12-20-093655-890.

Means-Ends Integration: Logic and Obstacles

Clausewitz defines strategy as “the use of engagements for the object of the war.”³ This definition, along with the well-known “war is an instrument of policy” dictum, informs most contemporary understandings of military strategy.⁴ They also distinguish its chief function: bridging military means to political ends.⁵ Absent this function, “there is no rationale for how force will achieve purposes worth the price in blood and treasure.”⁶ Underscoring strategy’s rational-utilitarian logic, Richard Betts notes that

one must be able to devise a rational scheme to achieve an objective through combat or the threat of it; implement the scheme with forces; keep the plan working in the face of enemy reactions (which should be anticipated in the plan); and achieve something close to the objective. Rational strategic behavior should be value maximizing, choosing appropriate means according to economic calculations of cost and benefit.⁷

In other words, strategic effectiveness (success in bringing about the attainment of political ends) requires consideration of the costs of military options relative to one another, the costs of these options relative to the benefits of specified policy aims, and such costs relative to risks inherent to the strategic situation. Further utility-relevant deliberations might center on the prioritization of military resources, the sequencing of military activity, or the theory of how success will be achieved.⁸

Though superficially straightforward, the rational-utilitarian reconciliation of means to ends is susceptible to “thousands of diversions.”⁹ Though it may not guarantee battlefield success—the enemy, after all, gets a vote—political-military integration is almost certainly necessary for strategic success.¹⁰ Fog (uncertainty) and friction (danger, physical exertion, and intelligence gaps that impede action) are ever-present factors in war and strategy.¹¹ Political leaders are inclined to seek ambitious and ambiguous political ends absent an understanding of the limits of military force; military leaders are liable to curb political inputs that run afoul of military expertise. Strategic cultural biases,

3. Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, indexed ed., trans. and ed. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 128.

4. Clausewitz, *On War*, 605–10.

5. Colin S. Gray, *Modern Strategy* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1999), 17; and Richard K. Betts, “Is Strategy an Illusion?,” *International Security* 25, no. 2 (Fall 2000): 5–6.

6. Betts, “Is Strategy an Illusion?,” 5.

7. Betts, “Is Strategy an Illusion?,” 6.

8. Eliot A. Cohen, “What’s Obama’s Counterinsurgency Strategy for Afghanistan?,” *Washington Post*, December 6, 2009, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/12/04/AR2009120402602.html>; and Jeffrey W. Meiser, “Ends+Ways+Means=(Bad) Strategy,” *Parameters* 46, no. 4 (2016): 81–91.

9. Clausewitz, *On War*, 178.

10. James Mattis, “Meet the Press,” NBC, video (no longer available), October 13, 2019; and Barry R. Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain, and Germany between the World Wars* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984), 25–29.

11. Clausewitz, *On War*, 122.

tense or imbalanced civil-military relations, and leaders' cognitive psychological pathologies interfere with strategic decision making.¹²

Attempts at evading or bypassing the myriad predicaments of strategy are apt to prove untenable. The purposeful engagement with means-ends dilemmas is both necessary and advantageous.¹³ This engagement affords alternatives to brute-force attrition, enhances the value of existing resources, acts as a force multiplier, provides options for besting equally capable adversaries, and mitigates the costs of defeating weaker ones.¹⁴

While most obstacles to means-ends integration fall outside the control of the Joint Force, one exists well within its purview: the military's organizational penchant for pursuing certainty. This quest for certainty may influence the adoption of standardized procedures, the reliance on technocratic expertise, or the related preference for offense (and annihilation). In theory, offense enables management of an uncertain and threat-riddled security environment; defense requires responsiveness to that environment. Offensive plans, capabilities, posturing, and operations—the argument goes—alleviate fog and friction.¹⁵ This perspective colors military technocratic protocols that help depoliticize use-of-force policy debates, augment military budgets, and enhance organizational autonomy.¹⁶

Despite their ostensible appeal, offensive plans, capabilities, posturing, and operations do not yield cure-all effects. Friction, for example, is largely impervious to defensive *and* offensive plans, as adversary behavior ensures war rarely proceeds “according to expectations.”¹⁷ Further, blind adherence to offense may yield an outbreak of war consistent with the spiral model or may result in strategic failures: the adoption of (perceived) offensive capabilities or posturing may spark rival fears and in-kind responses, seeding unforeseen war, as illustrated by the onset of World War I.¹⁸ Notwithstanding the offensive arms race that triggered that war and indications that military technologies of the time favored defense, both the Entente Powers and the Central Powers went on to assume offense-centric strategies. France, which implemented a distinctly offensive “single combat doctrine” despite apparent barriers to its success, spent much of the war seeking to overcome the plan's costly shortfalls.¹⁹

Given the problems outlined above, what tools might serve as effective checks against undue organizational impulse or as effective

12. Betts, “Is Strategy an Illusion?”

13. Posen, *Sources of Military Doctrine*, 25–29.

14. Betts, “Is Strategy an Illusion?,” 6, 8, 50.

15. Posen, *Sources of Military Doctrine*, 48; and Russell F. Weigley, *The American Way of War: A History of United States Military Strategy and Policy* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1973), xxii.

16. Posen, *Sources of Military Doctrine*, 49; and Jack Snyder, “Civil-Military Relations and the Cult of the Offensive, 1914 and 1984,” *International Security* 9, no. 1 (Summer 1984): 109.

17. Betts, “Is Strategy an Illusion?,” 37.

18. Snyder, “Civil-Military Relations,” 119.

19. Stephen Van Evera, “The Cult of the Offensive and the Origins of the First World War,” *International Security* 9, no. 1 (Summer 1984): 60.

safeguards of means-ends integration? Scholars skeptical of military self-regulation in strategy call for active civilian intervention in strategy processes.²⁰ Others offer a somewhat less cynical alternative. Military mindfulness, encompassed in doctrine, enhances the likelihood of overcoming organizational blind spots and achieving strategic effects.²¹

The following comparative analysis of the texts of Joint Doctrine Notes 1-18 and 2-19 seeks evidence of competing predoctrinal characterizations of strategy. More specifically, the discussion examines 2-19 for recurrent text indicators linking the organizational preference for offense as the presumed mitigation of uncertainty. Does the language of JDN 2-19 evince bias for organizational predisposition, and if so, does that bias risk distorting strategy's means-ends logic?

Ends-Ways-Means versus Organizational Impulse

Doctrine outlines standards for the management of force employment or “fundamental principles” for the conduct of operations.²² Strategy-centric doctrine connects operational conduct to the logic of strategy. Such doctrine does not advance a particular strategy or set of strategies over another but provides guidance for identifying and overcoming barriers to strategic effectiveness.²³ Both JDN 1-18 and JDN 2-19 provide insights into ongoing deliberations about the substance of US military strategy and how this strategy should be depicted in Joint Doctrine. The comparison that follows reveals a doctrinal shift away from strategic process thinking as it relates to the formulation, implementation, assessment, and adaptation or innovation of military strategy. Should the contents of JDN 2-19 be reflected in doctrine, their inclusion could have significant ramifications for the Joint Force's approach to military strategy.

Strategy Formulation

Comparison. Both JDN 1-18 and JDN 2-19 introduce strategy formulation as a task founded on rationalist means-ends logic, noting this process requires consideration of the following questions:

1. Where do we want to go, or what are the desired ends?
2. How do we get there, or what are the ways?
3. What resources are available, or what are the means?
4. What are the risks and costs associated with the strategy?²⁴

Beyond this point, the documents' strategy-making guidance diverges. Joint Doctrine Note 1-18 repeatedly calls for the development of “ends-ways-means-risks/costs” connections that aid the strategic

20. Posen, *Sources of Military Doctrine*, 49, 53–54, 58–59.

21. Betts, “Is Strategy an Illusion?” 39; and Gray, *Modern Strategy*.

22. Aaron P. Jackson, *The Roots of Military Doctrine: Change and Continuity in Understanding the Practice of Warfare* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2013), 6; and Posen, *Sources of Military Doctrine*.

23. Posen, *Sources of Military Doctrine*; and Jackson, *Roots of Military Doctrine*.

24. JCS, JDN 1-18, I-1, I-2–I-3; and JCS, JDN 2-19, I-1.

situation and ultimately serve political ends.²⁵ Strategy formulation requires the regular engagement of assorted participants: elected officials, political appointees, career bureaucrats, and military leaders. Curtailing their inputs jeopardizes means-ends alignment and unity of effort.²⁶ Further, mechanistic routine should be avoided, as such routine risks producing “unimaginative, pedestrian and predictable” strategies the adversary can “easily anticipate and counter.”²⁷

Joint Doctrine Note 2-19 asserts the configuration of strategy cannot rest on “inadequate” ends-ways-means-risks/costs calculations. The strategy formulation process demands military leaders articulate ways to “impose order on the environment” and “generate friendly advantages over the adversary.”²⁸ Politicians are relevant to the strategy-making process insofar as they must designate “the limits of actions and resources available.”²⁹ Beyond that point, military leaders must translate strategy’s conceptual narrative for “supporting military campaigns” into operational plans. Strategy development is a “function of [operational] creative art.”³⁰

Analysis. Joint Doctrine Note 1-18 recognizes strategic effectiveness benefits from the incorporation of various civilian and military perspectives in the strategy-making process. The document suggests rationality and ingenuity are also critical to the attainment of political ends. The language of JDN 2-19, however, implies strategy operates in service of operational art and design (respectively, the cognitive and methodological frameworks for producing an operational approach) rather than the inverse.³¹ Strategy formulation, 2-19 implies, leaves little room for consideration of the ambition or ambiguities of political ends—such considerations exist within the realm of campaign management. This approach may result in stovepiped, if not limited, civilian participation in strategy making. Likening strategy development to operational design, which entails standardized planning, JDN 2-19 encapsulates technocratic biases for securing “order” and “advantage” over ends.³²

Strategy Implementation

Comparison. Joint Doctrine Note 1-18 and JDN 2-19 also differ from each other on strategy implementation. While 1-18 accepts that environmental conditions should inform strategy, it ranks political ends as the most critical determinant of strategic behavior.³³ The note concedes strategic approaches, or ways—observation, accommodation,

25. JCS, JDN 1-18, vii.

26. JCS, JDN 1-18, II-8.

27. JCS, JDN 1-18, IV-4.

28. JCS, JDN 2-19, II-2.

29. JCS, JDN 2-19, II-2.

30. JCS, JDN 2-19, I-1, II-3, vi.

31. JCS, JDN 2-19, IV-1; and JCS, *Joint Planning*, Joint Publication (JP) 5-0 (Washington, DC: JCS, 2017), xxi, IV-1, IV-4–IV-6.

32. Regarding standardization, see JCS, JDN 2-19, IV-1.

33. JCS, JDN 1-18, III-2–III-3.

compromise, shaping, persuasion, enabling, inducing, assurance, deterrence, compellence, subduing, and eradication—differ in accordance with political objectives and strategic circumstances. Varying conditions along the strategic competition continuum may only call for nonkinetic shaping operations; indeed, they may require the military *do nothing* but hold, wait, and observe.³⁴

Like its predecessor document, JDN 2-19 acknowledges strategic activity serves political ends. Yet 2-19 more specifically pegs strategy implementation to other priority factors. A strategic approach should expressly accommodate “variables in the environment,” “the organization [the strategy] serves,” and the tools of operational art.³⁵ The document limits its coverage of strategic ways to assurance, coercion (deterrence and compellence), and forcible action. While 2-19 does not ascribe a particular strategy type to “forcible action,” it notes such action entails pitting “strength against strength” to “remove . . . the enemy’s ability to hold the initiative” and “subdue the enemy.”³⁶ Thus, forcible action seems synonymous with the offensive.

Analysis. Joint Doctrine Note 1-18 suggests a broad and flexible range of strategic approaches, including nonkinetic and shaping strategies, hold utility for addressing political ends in the face of change and uncertainty.³⁷ In contrast, JDN 2-19 treads familiar territory, fixing strategic behavior to organizational interests in and operational art’s tools for assuring order over environmental variables.³⁸ By this logic, strategic action is largely synonymous with, and perhaps even subservient to, operational art. Further, 2-19 implies that securing order over the environment (particularly through kinetic operations) is apt to call for offensive and forcible action, which the text depicts in terms that roughly characterize strategies of annihilation and attrition.³⁹

Whereas 1-18 treats strategy implementation as the realization of political-military integration designs, 2-19 links strategy implementation to organizational interests in creating and sustaining competitive advantage. But strategic activity cannot be confined to operations alone. Exclusive focus on operational art risks forsaking strategic effectiveness for a business-as-usual implementation process.

Strategy Assessment

Comparison. Assessment weighs the suitability of military activity to “the strategic situation,” the designated end, and “its subordinate objectives” and requires estimates of one’s—and the adversary’s—aims,

34. JCS, JDN 1-18, III-2.

35. JCS, JDN 2-19, II-3, II-1, III-1, II-5.

36. JCS, JDN 2-19, IV-1, II-3–II-5.

37. JCS, JDN 1-18, III-2–III-3, viii–ix.

38. JCS, JDN 2-19, II-3.

39. Antulio J. Echevarria II, *Military Strategy: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 13–25.

capabilities, and strategic circumstances.⁴⁰ Joint Doctrine Note 1-18 advances conceptual guidance for “permeat[ing]” ends-ways-means-risks/costs estimates across dynamic political ends and environmental conditions.⁴¹ Assessments are not only critical gauges of a strategy’s likely effects but serve as validity tests of underlying strategic assumptions and the broader strategic situation.⁴² Absent recognition of this function, assessments serve “tactical and operational gains, but not . . . desired political objectives.”⁴³

Accordingly, JDN 1-18 warns against reliance on “magic formula[s] for calculating risk” or standardized protocols for guaranteeing estimate accuracy. Allowing that even effective strategies require updating for continued success, the document prioritizes prudence, urging strategists to refine skills for “recognizing and avoiding” assessment traps.⁴⁴

In contrast, JDN 2-19 adopts a notably different approach to assessment, calling for “a formal methodology to assess . . . risk”—specifically covered in the Joint Chiefs of Staff Manual, *Joint Risk Assessment*. The manual upholds risk as “the probability and consequence of an event causing harm to something valued” and centers predominantly on estimates of environmental risk.⁴⁵ The “Joint Risk Assessment Model,” which purports to ensure risk can be capably managed utilizing “objective” measurements, is central to the manual.⁴⁶ The model incorporates and depends upon the specification of risk calculation and risk classification formulas.⁴⁷ Though *Joint Risk Assessment* situates this model within a broader “strategic planning construct,” the manual says relatively little about the relationship between risk and strategy, or how risk estimates might assist to gauge a strategy’s likely or actual effects (particularly with respect to ends).⁴⁸

Analysis. Though they employ intermittently overlapping terminology, JDN 1-18 and JDN 2-19 depict assessment in discernably different terms.⁴⁹ JDN 1-18 regards assessment as a complex and imperfect process and urges strategists to seek broadly analytical and holistic impressions of ends-ways-means-risks/costs estimates. The document implies individual discretion and expertise, not necessarily technocratic procedures and objective measures, hold considerable utility for establishing present strategic impact or future strategic direction. JDN 2-19 ostensibly gives precedence, instead, to the assessment of risk

40. JCS, JDN 1-18, III-4; Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans. Samuel B. Griffith (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 63–71; Michael I. Handel, *Masters of War: Classical Strategic Thought*, third revised and expanded edition (New York: Routledge, 2001), 236–48; and Clausewitz, *On War*, 585–86.

41. JCS, JDN 1-18, IV-1, ix.

42. JCS, JDN 1-18, IV-1–IV-6, II-2 (Figure II-1).

43. JCS, JDN 1-18, II-5.

44. JCS, JDN 1-18, IV-1, IV-2, IV-4.

45. JCS, JDN 2-19, VI-1; and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS), *Joint Risk Analysis*, CJCS Manual (CJCSM) 3105.01 (Washington, DC: JCS, 2019).

46. JCS, CJCSM 3105.01, B-1, 4–5, 7.

47. JCS, CJCSM 3105.01, 4–5, 7.

48. JCS, CJCSM 3105.01, A-2.

49. JCS, JDN 1-18, IV-1; and JCS, JDN 2-19, VI-I.

absent its relation to strategy, conveying seeming indifference to the broader requirements of assessment or the matter of how they might impact strategic effectiveness.

While the assessment content in JDN 2-19 does not specifically hint at the prioritization of offense, discussions of assessment do center on organizational concerns that drive the propensity for offense: risk (more broadly, uncertainty) inherent to the security environment. In short, JDN 2-19's emphasis on (environmental) risk assessment reflects operational predilections for mitigating uncertainty.

Strategy Innovation and Adaptation

Comparison. Changing circumstances are apt to require strategic updating. Updating may take the form of innovation over the long-term or grand-scale change “institutionalized across an entire organization”—a new doctrine, organizational framework, or technology.⁵⁰ Alternatively, updating may take the form of incremental adaptation based on knowledge gleaned in combat and carried out during the immediacy of war. As JDN 1-18 observes, “No strategy is infallible . . . significant changes in the strategic situation should force the strategist to adjust the strategy’s ends, means, and/or ways.”⁵¹ Strategic updating may be responsive to changes in the security environment, but these updates ultimately serve “[n]ational interests and policies.”⁵² Joint Doctrine Note 1-18 cautions against innovating or adapting by rote. The note further warns that organizational blinders and standard operating procedures undercut the “objectivity, open-mindedness, insight, and/or creativity” required for augmenting strategy in accordance with a variable strategic situation or evolving political ends.⁵³

Joint Doctrine Note 2-19 acknowledges the national military strategy links force innovation and adaptation to the “requirements of law, policy, and defense strategy.”⁵⁴ But the note predominantly centers on the organizational determinants of innovation (force design) and adaptation (force development). Force design involves testing new concepts against mid- to long-term “challenges in the strategic environment,” while force development entails identifying “capability requirements” for countering near- to mid-term challenges.⁵⁵ Force design and force development reinforce the organization’s purpose and reflect the senior leader’s vision for its future direction. Organizational-level innovation and adaptation encompass, naturally, organizational interests in shaping future investments.⁵⁶ Notably, however, JDN 2-19 does not include substantive coverage of either strategic innovation or strategic adaptation.

50. Williamson Murray, *Military Adaptation in War: With Fear of Change* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011); and Theo Farrell, “Improving in War: Military Adaptation and the British in Helmand Province, Afghanistan, 2006–2009,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 33, no. 4 (2010): 567–94.

51. JCS, JDN 1-18, IV-3.

52. JCS, JDN 1-18, II-1.

53. JCS, JDN 1-18, IV-6.

54. JCS, JDN 2-19, III-1.

55. JCS, JDN 2-19, V-1–V-2, III-1.

56. JCS, JDN 2-19, III-2, V-1.

Analysis. Joint Doctrine Note 1-18 accounts for the innovation and adaptation of *strategy* in light of changing political ends and emerging environmental challenges, and for the possibility that updating mechanistically can undermine the likelihood of strategic effectiveness, potentially undercutting the “better or more permanent . . . condition.”⁵⁷ In contrast, JDN 2-19 seemingly shows greater concern for the innovation and adaptation of *capabilities* in alignment with organizational purpose and the vision of senior military leaders.⁵⁸ Though it briefly acknowledges force innovation and adaptation share links to policy, 2-19 heavily implies military means are more apt to guide political ends than the inverse. Because the note prioritizes updating capabilities to the neglect of updating strategy, it intimates political ends are essentially static and largely dependent on means alone.

Conclusion

Joint Doctrine Note 2-19 aligns with JDN 1-18 in several respects. Both define strategy in means-ends terms. Both account for the dynamism and ambiguity of political ends and the strategic environment. And both recognize military strategy operates at several levels, involves diverse actors, and crosses multiple time horizons. The two documents also differ from each other in meaningful ways. Joint Doctrine Note 1-18 reveals consistent adherence to the classical strategy archetype, admits that means-ends integration is rife with, but responsive to, obstacles, and warns against the adoption of technocratic solutions to strategic dilemmas. Joint Doctrine Note 2-19 exhibits clear departures from the classical strategy model, conveys an apparent preoccupation with environment over ends, and suggests a predisposition for technocracy.

Joint Doctrine Note 2-19 gives considerable lip service to strategy’s means-ends integration logic. Initially, the note accedes that policy guides strategic choice and action, and the text further distinguishes military strategy from institutional strategy, planning, campaign plans, and the organizational determinants of force development and design.⁵⁹ Yet in subsequent chapters, JDN 2-19 focuses on those exact subjects— institutional strategy, planning, campaign plans, and organizational mechanisms for shaping future capabilities. These chapters broadly overlook the political-military dimensions and discourse inherent to strategy.

Likewise, 2-19 explicitly states the purpose of an institutional strategy is to “[translate] higher-level policy,” yet the text simultaneously suggests the starting point for institutional strategy is securing or maintaining operational advantages for the institution.⁶⁰ These two logics cannot coexist without one eclipsing the other, and in effect, JDN 2-19’s preference for organizational and operational prescriptions belie its stated concern for means-ends integration. This approach further

57. JCS, JDN 1-18, III-1, IV-1, III-3–III-4.

58. JCS, JDN 2-19, III-1–III-2.

59. JCS, JDN 2-19, II-3, III-2.

60. JCS, JDN 2-19, III-2.

informs and reinforces the notion that strategy rests on generating friendly advantages. Joint Doctrine Note 2-19's particular concern for the attainment of edge over ends aligns with theoretical and historical accounts of the military organizational pathology for offense.

Comprehensively, JDN 2-19 risks distorting the foundational logic of military strategy and legitimizing the substitution of organizational impulse for means-ends integration. Its reflection of organizational and technocratic biases, particularly those which undergird the preference for offense, warrant concern. Joint Doctrine Note 2-19 falls shy of accounting for the possibility that organizational aims do not necessarily serve national security ends. Further, this perspective hazards a willingness to accept "edge" as an end unto itself, rather than a means to national security ends and raises important questions for consideration. Does JDN 2-19 imply environmental variables merit regulation but political dynamics warrant avoidance? Does the document discount the need for active political and military participation across the strategy cycle? As articulated, does JDN 2-19 hazard a propensity to evade rather than engage with the civil-military complexities of strategy?

The assumption that military strategy distinctively hinges on the establishment and preservation of friendly advantages does not adequately account for contemporary security realities. The notion is both reductive and dangerous, given the possibility competitors may perceive overt bids for edge—particularly under shifting geopolitical realities—as offensive threats. The United States can ill afford to accept the risks of adventurism, or assume further costs to finite national resources, under conditions of mounting great-power rivalry.

The collapse of the American "unipolar moment" calls for restraint in the realms of both grand strategy and military strategy.⁶¹ The reemergence of interstate strategic competition suggests the United States cannot afford to "cow all potential challengers" and "comfort all coalition partners."⁶² Further, America should not risk enticing adversaries to conflict. Yet strategy that hinges on the quest for persistent military edge quite plausibly involves significant costs and risks, including arms races, war spirals, and strategic failures.

The disjuncture between the language of JDN 2-19 and the need for strategic prudence is a relic of the unipolar moment and is indicative of the "strategic atrophy" that the *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy* warns against.⁶³ Decades of US strategic drift—exemplified by the interventionism of the 1990s, the 2003 invasion of Iraq, the 2011 participation in the NATO strikes on Libya, and the January 2020 drone strike on Qassem Soleimani—call for greater engagement with

61. Charles Krauthammer, "The Unipolar Moment," *Foreign Affairs* 70, no. 1 (1990): 23–33.

62. Barry R. Posen and Andrew L. Ross, "Competing Visions for U.S. Grand Strategy," *International Security* 21, no. 3 (Winter 1996–97): 32.

63. James N. Mattis, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America: Sharpening the American Military's Competitive Edge* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2018), 1.

the political dimensions of strategy.⁶⁴ The drone strike, carried out just weeks after the publication of JDN 2-19, continues to draw scrutiny. Questions of legality aside, the strike's underlying objectives, and thus the matter of its strategic effectiveness, remain largely unclear.⁶⁵ The fact that JDN 2-19's thematic content is broadly consonant with the character of the strike—assertion of force absent delineation of purpose—suggests the need for a more rigorous approach to military strategy.

Future strategists will be called on to devise increasingly flexible, adaptive, and resource-efficient options for countering great-power competitors, confronting the persistent condition of terrorism and addressing human security challenges such as pandemics. Joint Doctrine Note 1-18 provides an imperfect but utilitarian roadmap for matching military means to political ends. The document's coverage of tools for recognizing and surmounting strategic dilemmas, and its inclusion of historical cases in which political-military discourse is central to the resolution of those dilemmas, could prove critical to future strategists.

It may be the case that JDN 1-18 encapsulates the exception to—and not the rule of—US strategic pursuits, and that JDN 2-19, in turn, represents a conventional preference for the American way of battle. As military leaders determine whether to forge ahead with offensive conceptions of strategy or relink strategy to its political underpinnings, they should recall Joint Doctrine Notes are not definitive but instead represent an ever-evolving discussion about the foundational tenets of military strategy. Strategy may yet be salvaged from its detractors and employed to purposeful effect.

Joint Doctrine Note 2-19 encompasses constructive updates to US strategic thought. Facets of JDN 2-19—its consideration of innovation, for example—appropriately account for substantive gaps in JDN 1-18. Further, this evaluation of 2-19 is far from exhaustive, warranting circumspect rather than definitive projections about the note's implications for future strategic effectiveness. It is entirely plausible JDN 2-19 mirrors military leaders' frustration with the struggle of political officials to identify or resource adequately the aims of the US unipolar moment, the counterterrorism decade, or the initial return to interstate strategic competition. Faced with such conditions, it seems reasonable doctrine might prioritize environment and edge over the political ends.

Yet as Betts reminds us, strategists are often plagued by ambitious or ambiguous political objectives; they are the hallmarks of strategy's

64. Stephen M. Walt, *The Hell of Good Intentions: America's Foreign Policy Elite and the Decline of U.S. Primacy* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018).

65. Natasha Turak, " 'Dangerous Escalation' and 'Severe Revenge': The World Responds to the US Killing of Iran's Top General," CNBC, updated January 5, 2020, <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/01/03/qasem-soleimani-death-world-responds-to-us-assassination-of-irans-top-general.html>; and Tamara Wittes, "Around the Halls: Experts React to the Killing of Iranian Commander Qassem Soleimani," *Order from Chaos* (blog), Brookings Institution, January 3, 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2020/01/03/around-the-halls-experts-react-to-the-killing-of-iranian-commander-qassem-soleimani/>.

illusory nature.⁶⁶ These hallmarks call for the persistent and rigorous pursuit of political-military integration. They do not provide justifiable cause for removing strategy from its purpose.

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66. Betts, "Is Strategy an Illusion?"