M1A2 Abrams tanks assigned to 1st Battalion, 68th Armor Regiment, 3rd Armored Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, fire during a Defender Europe 22 live-fire exercise 27 May 2022 in Drawsko Pomorskie, Poland. Defender Europe 22 is a series of U.S. Army Europe and Africa multinational training exercises taking place in Eastern Europe. The exercises demonstrate the ability of U.S. forces to conduct large-scale ground combat operations across multiple theaters in support of NATO, communicating U.S. resolve in the region and deterring adversarial aggression. (Photo by Capt. Tobias Cukale, U.S. Army)

Reframing Operational Art for Competition

Maj. Steven R. Chase, U.S. Army

Operational art is a fundamental concept in contemporary U.S. military planning, but there are shortfalls when applying operational art doctrine in an environment with increasing interstate competition. Those shortfalls demonstrate a need for reframing how operational art enables competition short of conflict. Adopting *communicate, coerce, conciliate,* and *cooperate* as competition mechanisms addresses that need. Lessons from the Korean War and its aftermath validate the need for those mechanisms, with reinforcing observations from modern conflicts. The competition mechanisms complement existing

doctrinal frameworks, allowing a greater range for conceptual planning in operational art.

Operational Art and Competition in Army Doctrine and Joint Integrated Campaigning

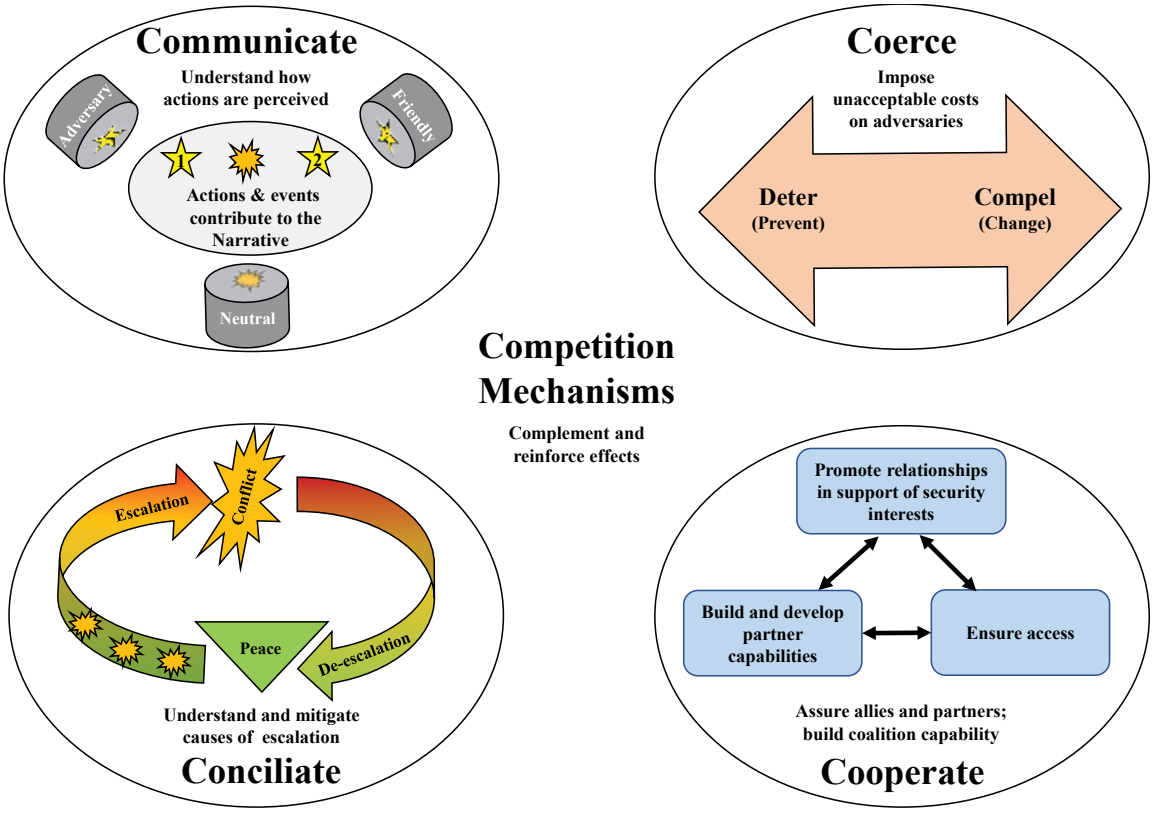
The 2022 *National Security Strategy* highlights the changing distribution of power across the world, emphasizing competition with China and challenges from other state actors.[1] The U.S. Army updated doctrine accordingly in Field Manual (FM) 3-0, *Operations*, defining "operations during competition below armed conflict."[2] While FM 3-0 provides a comprehensive description of the Army's contribution to strategic objectives during competition, discussion of operational art remains focused on the application of defeat mechanisms during conflict.[3] Joint doctrine includes mention of competition mechanisms, and the *Joint Concept for Integrated Campaigning* provides an example suite of competition mechanisms for operations across the competition continuum.[4] However, joint doctrine does not develop a conceptual framework for competition that highlights the need for escalation management. Army and joint doctrine define and describe operations in interstate competition, but the corresponding conceptual frameworks defined in operational art require modification to support those operations.

Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 3-0, *Operations*, states that for Army forces, "Operational art is the pursuit of strategic objectives, in whole or in part, through the arrangement of tactical actions in time, space, and purpose."[5] Operational art is a cognitive approach, supporting conceptual planning that informs detailed planning. Conceptual planning is critical to understanding the increasingly complex interstate competition observed by the Army and the joint force.[6] FM 3-0 is nested with the definition of operational art from ADP 3-0 and describes how commanders use operational art to develop an operational approach, "the main idea that informs detailed planning."[7] However, its discussion of operational art focuses on defeat mechanisms during conflict. FM 3-0 describes commander actions during competition as setting conditions and demonstrating the capability to impose defeat mechanisms on an adversary.[8] Focus on defeat mechanisms in operational art primes the reader for a conflict-centric mindset. Like Daniel Kahneman's discussion on mental association, a detailed definition of defeat mechanisms without discussion of competition mechanisms prompts planners to associate operational art with conflict more than competition.[9] That association is necessary when competition escalates to armed conflict, but it constrains creativity when applying operational art below the threshold of armed conflict. Additionally, with the *National Security Strategy* aiming to avoid competition escalation into conflict, Army doctrine should consider escalation management and the mechanisms that enable it.[10]

In contrast to Army doctrine, the *Joint Concept for Integrated Campaigning* defines a conceptual framework for competition and provides a suite of example competition mechanisms.[11] However, the competition framework of "contest, counter, and improve" has limited mention of the necessity of escalation management among nuclear-armed powers; *Integrated Campaigning* only specifically mentions the threat of nuclear weapons from North Korea.[12] While *Integrated Campaigning* does acknowledge the risk of unintended escalation during competition, its framework and competition mechanisms do not call out an element dedicated to de-escalation.[13] That oversight generates risk when using military forces in interstate competition. It highlights the need to develop a conceptual framework for competition with mechanisms that recognize how military forces can advance strategic objectives short of armed conflict with nuclear-armed adversaries.

Applying deterrence, compellence, and

Maj. Steven Chase, U.S. Army, is an engineer assigned as the operations officer for the 588th Brigade Engineer Battalion, 3rd Armored Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division. His most recent assignments include planner on the 4th Infantry Division staff, operations officer in the Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff Engineer in U.S. Army Europe and Headquarters Company commander in the 2nd Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment. He holds a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering from the University of South Carolina, a master's degree in engineering management from the Missouri University of Science and Technology, and a master's degree in military operations from the U.S. Army School of Advanced Military Studies.



(Figure by author)

Figure. Proposed Competition Mechanisms

narrative theory in conjunction with doctrine to the Korean War reveals four candidate mechanisms: communicate, coerce, conciliate, and cooperate. The figure depicts the proposed framework for those mechanisms. This framework utilizes the fundamental coercion of military force, either deterrent or compellent, while acknowledging the need to manage escalation through conciliation and build relative advantage through cooperation with allies and partners.[14] While deterrence theory often encompasses conciliatory actions, communication in conjunction with force employment, and cooperation with allies, this framework specifies each to highlight their importance during competition with adversaries. Conciliation, usually in the form of assurances and concessions, underscores the requirement for escalation management to prevent conflict.[15] Cooperation describes the value of allies and partners in creating a relative advantage in multipolar competition. The fourth mechanism, communication, acknowledges how actions and decisions shape competitor perceptions in the operational environment.[16] In combination, those mechanisms provide a conceptual framework for applying military force in competition while accounting for the need to manage escalation and build coalitions. The following sections define each mechanism in detail and then describe how they complement each other in combination.

Communicate

The communicate mechanism focuses on how tactical, operational, and strategic actions constitute a narrative. The invasion of Korea in 1950 suggests the importance of that mechanism. Actions and decisions form the narrative that shape perception in friendly, neutral, and adversarial parties.[17] That perception is a vital component of the competition-to-conflict continuum.[18] For a narrative to communicate the strategic intent, messages must repeat in each action and event; they must communicate a cohesive theme.[19] Actions surrounding the Korean War's initial

hostilities demonstrated a failure to communicate a deterrent narrative to North Korea and its patron, the Soviet Union.

The period leading up to North Korea's invasion in June 1950 demonstrated that the U.S. narrative was one of indifference. Redeployment of American combat troops from Korea in 1949 showed decreased U.S. resolve.[20] Secretary of State Dean Acheson's statement that excluded South Korea from the U.S. defense perimeter was strategic messaging contributing to the same narrative.[21] Joseph Stalin's decision to support North Korea's invasion was based partly on those signals from the United States.[22] The lack of forward forces in Korea, coupled with strategic messaging, conveyed a narrative that encouraged aggression instead of deterring it. Shortly after North Korea's invasion, American intervention reversed that perception and significantly contributed to South Korea's defense.[23] However, the Army's multidomain operations (MDO) concept anticipates that future conflicts will not allow a similar reversal in commitment.

The U.S. Army's MDO concept anticipates that adversaries in the future will attempt to consolidate gains and de-escalate before U.S. expeditionary forces arrive.[24] Rapid, limited conflicts like Russia's invasion of Georgia in 2008 and Crimea in 2014 support that prediction. While Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine has been more prolonged than previous conflicts, Russian strategic leaders' underlying assumptions appeared similar to those from 2008 and 2014.[25] MDO and contemporary trends reinforce the Korean War lessons that a cohesive narrative is essential to communicating resolve in competition. Yet, communicating a narrative is not the only consideration; competition also requires cost imposition through coercion.

Coerce

Competition requires a credible threat against adversary actions.[26] Coercion is the mechanism for that threat, and North Korean decision-making before the invasion in 1950 suggests that imposing unacceptable costs is necessary in competition. Coercion consists of a sliding scale between two types of actions.[27] The first is deterrence, or dissuading aggression.[28] The second is compellence, or forcing an adversary to act against their will.[29] In each application of military force, the adversary's assessment of the credibility of the threat matters.[30] Forces effective in coercing one competitor may not work against another, despite common misperceptions that certain types of military assets have universal coercive value.[31] The composition of the South Korean army leading up to June 1950 demonstrated how the adversary's assessment of those forces encouraged escalation, contrary to U.S. perception of the region.

North Korean decision-making in the summer of 1950 considered U.S. airpower but continued with invasion planning focused on ground force capabilities.[32] American policy decisions limited the U.S. military presence in Korea, based on presumptions of the deterrent value of naval and air forces in addition to false assumptions on the credibility of South Korean forces.[33] Despite U.S. policy makers' thoughts on the security situation, Kim Il-sung based his invasion criteria on ground force overmatch directly across his border.[34] The lesson from the 1950 invasion is not that U.S. policy was wrong, but that American assumptions ignored North Korea's perception of the possible costs imposed by South Korea's army.[35] Kim Il-sung's decisions highlight that coercion is an essential component of competition, a notion echoed in MDO.

The Army's MDO concept seeks to build credibility through expanding its network of allies and partners in addition to developing and demonstrating capabilities.[36] The value of demonstrated capability was shown in the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War. Azerbaijan's extensive military modernization tipped the balance of power in their favor, while Armenia's atrophied military capability presented low costs to an invasion.[37] MDO and the Nagorno-Karabakh War highlight a lasting lesson from the Korean War: coercion is a necessary addition to operational art's cognitive approach in competition.

Cooperate

The third competition mechanism is cooperation. *The National Security Strategy* recognizes cooperation with allies and partners as the United States' most important asset during an era of strategic competition.[38] This mechanism articulates the requirement to support nonantagonists while coercing adversaries.[39] Section 301 of Title 10 in the U.S. Code defines three purposes of security cooperation: "build and develop allied and friendly security capabilities …, provide the armed forces with access …, and build relationships that

promote specific United States security interests."[40] U.S. Army doctrine echoes the importance of security cooperation during competition in FM 3-0.[41] While demonstrations, a show of force, or other actions with military forces may not achieve a coercive effect, they may still assure allies or otherwise ensure access in a region. The U.S. response following North Korea's seizure of the USS *Pueblo* in 1968 demonstrated such an instance and the importance of cooperation, even if it did not have a compellent effect on North Korea.

On 23 January 1968, North Korean forces seized the intelligence-collection ship USS *Pueblo* in international waters, along with its eighty-three-man crew.[42] A North Korean raid several days prior on the Blue House, the residence of the president of South Korea, compounded the situation and created tension between the United States and South Korea.[43] South Korean military and civilian leaders signaled an intent to withdraw their forces from Vietnam and potentially "go north," escalating conflict with North Korea.[44] To assure South Korea of American commitment to the alliance, despite limited available forces from the conflict in Vietnam, Operation Formation Star provided a show of force of naval forces in the region.[45] The operation did not compel North Korean forces to release the prisoners of the USS *Pueblo*, later resolved through negotiations. However, it did assure the South Koreans and prevent an escalation on the peninsula.[46] The incident highlights that during competition, cooperative actions that promote relationships with allies but do not necessarily have a significant effect on adversaries are still a necessary application of military force. A modern example of the importance of cooperation during competition is Ukraine's leverage of cooperative actions in response to Russia's invasion in 2022.

In the opening days of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Ukrainian forces used stockpiled ammunition and weapons to slow the Russian advance.[47] However, as the conflict continued, NATO support with weapons and munitions augmented shortfalls in their national stockpiles, and Western nations became their "strategic depth."[48] Security cooperation activities provided the industrial capacity to sustain large-scale operations in Ukraine and increased their operational and strategic endurance.[49] While not engaging in direct conflict with Russian forces, NATO countries continued to compete with Russia via security cooperation with Ukraine. Cooperation with Ukriane shows the importance of coalitions in competition and conflict, but conciliation is also necessary to manage escalation.

Conciliate

The final competition mechanism is conciliation. It is the requirement to acknowledge the causes of conflict and address them, demonstrated in the Korean War's Chinese intervention. Lawrence Freedman recognized that "removing the causes of conflict and disagreement" is an effective mechanism for managing escalation.[50] The threat of force is not the only mechanism in competition; assurances are sometimes more effective or necessary to de-escalate tensions with a potential aggressor[51] Examining U.S. actions leading up to the Chinese intervention in the Korean War offers insights for this mechanism.

In the wake of stunning success following the Incheon landing in September 1950, strategic leaders of the UN forces deliberated on whether to continue their counteroffensive north of the thirty-eighth parallel in Korea.[52] However, those deliberations ignored the increasing regional tensions and signals from China.[53] Conciliation in this instance was not about ceding victory to the North Koreans but recognizing that China's view of American actions was akin to encirclement.[54] Eventually, UN forces continued to maneuver north of Pyongyang and triggered Chinese intervention in October 1950, expanding the war.[55] The takeaway from China's intervention is that operational art must recognize the causes of conflict, especially tangential tensions that might escalate regional competition into conflict. The temporary ebb in hostilities in early October 1950 conveyed the Korean conflict as a local crisis, masking the broader regional competition with China. Similar considerations are apparent in MDO, where "avoiding global and strategic escalation" is a component of the military problem.[56]

The Syrian Civil War personifies Army MDO concerns about escalation. Despite calls for regime change, U.S. intervention focused on counter-Islamic State operations and excluded the use of force to remove President Bashar al-Assad from power.[57] The broader competition between external actors required some conciliation to prevent regional escalation, especially with Russia.[58] Expanding options, even for an adversary, can maximize the win-sets for all sides and prevent a wider war.[59] Army MDO and

the Syrian Civil War reinforce the Korean War lesson that conciliation is a necessary addition to operational art's cognitive approach.

Competition Mechanisms in Combination

Like defeat or stability mechanisms, the competition mechanisms work best in combination—reinforcing effects toward desired future conditions. In Korea, Operation Paul Bunyan in 1976 demonstrates how U.S. forces managed a crisis without escalating into a broader war. It highlights the deliberate use of all four competition mechanisms through the application of military force.

Following the 1953 armistice between North Korea and UN forces, the demilitarized zone along the thirty-eighth parallel was a flashpoint for cross-border hostility between North and South Korea.[60] One such escalation occurred in August 1976, when a disagreement over trimming a large tree near Panmunjom in the Joint Security Area (JSA) ended with North Korean (Korean People's Army, or KPA) soldiers attacking the U.S. and South Korean work party and killing two American officers.[61] While U.S. policy makers did not know if the KPA attack was a deliberate escalation or a heat of the moment brawl, tensions on the peninsula were high following Team Spirit 76 and other U.S.-led exercises that featured nuclear-capable fighter-bombers.[62] The U.S. response was Operation Paul Bunyan, a large-scale show of force coupled with ground forces cutting down the tree at Panmunjom; the operation did not execute military reprisals against KPA soldiers or facilities out of concern for escalation into a general war.[63] Kim Il-sung's response to the show of force was remarkably free of rhetoric. Subsequent concessions from North Korea on JSA operations suggested that the operation achieved the intended effect without escalating into a general war.[64]

Senior U.S. defense officials acknowledged a need to retaliate and demonstrate resolve against North Korean aggression, exercise restraint, and prevent escalation into a large-scale conflict.[65] The subsequent operation demonstrated how combining the proposed competition mechanisms resulted in favorable conditions for the United States without escalating in the broader context of the Cold War. All the while, leaders at echelon recognized the need to continually assess the situation and reframe their approach.[66]

Operation Paul Bunyan demonstrated effective strategic communication and a cohesive narrative through the tactical actions during the operation. Before the Chinese intervention in 1950, the United States relied on intermediaries for diplomatic communication, increasing the likelihood of misapprehension observed in earlier examples.[67] In 1976, the United States had diplomatic and military communication channels with North Korean forces and diplomatic channels with China.[68] As a result, there was a significant increase in communication between adversarial elements. From a narrative perspective, the tactical actions conveyed messages that reinforced the seriousness of strategic communication. The U.S. show of force during Operation Paul Bunyan was multidomain, rapidly executed, and massive in comparison to previous border operations post-armistice.[69] There were ground troops with a visible reserve, a prominent airpower presence in strategic bombers and fighter aircraft, and an aircraft carrier task force. All of those elements conveyed a narrative of resolve to North Korea.[70] Simultaneously, the absence of military strikes against KPA forces conveyed a message of restraint. The immediacy of the actions and their scope reinforced the effectiveness of military coercion while communicating conciliatory elements to prevent unintended escalation.

While not specific to Operation Paul Bunyan, U.S. actions leading up to and during the operation reinforced the coercive capability of military forces on the peninsula. In contrast to the opening days of North Korea's 1950 invasion, South Korea had modern tanks, and many troops experienced combat in Vietnam.[71] Their army was a capable ground force that formed a credible deterrent against North Korean escalation. In addition to existing forces on the peninsula, Operation Paul Bunyan brought a multidomain force that demonstrated a significant threat and served to compel North Korean concessions in the JSA.[72] The unique difference between Operation Paul Bunyan to pre-1950 conditions was the gradual build-up of South Korean forces and the continued U.S. presence with modern and capable ground forces.

Cooperation also played a significant role in setting conditions for success of South Korean and American forces during Operation Paul Bunyan. The South Korean military forces in 1976 starkly contrasted to those of 1950,

with a significant increase in military capability largely due to U.S. security cooperation. Access to U.S. forces enabled the rapid response of Operation Paul Bunyan, and the gradual buildup of South Korean forces increased the credibility of forces at the DMZ and its subsequent deterrent value. Each of those elements was crucial in the immediate response during the incident and in maintaining a credible deterrent throughout other escalatory periods with North Korea. However, while coercive measures and a credible deterrent enabled the success of Operation Paul Bunyan, there were conciliatory measures that limited escalation from the U.S. response.

Operation Paul Bunyan demonstrated both strategic and operational conciliation. U.S. détente with Russia and rapprochement with China in the early 1970s conciliated major powers at the strategic level.[73] It also pressured both North and South Korea to negotiate a settlement.[74] The strategic environment of 1950 presented a stark contrast to that of 1976. U.S. efforts on the diplomatic stage significantly reduced the likelihood of Chinese or Russian intervention in response to Operation Paul Bunyan. Operationally, planning considered the red lines that might have forced escalation from North Korea. The U.S. operation limited military commitment to a show of force instead of strikes on KPA targets.[75] There was explicit consideration of how to exercise coercive operations while including conciliatory elements.

Operation Paul Bunyan showed how a successful approach combines competition mechanisms. At the same time, previous examples highlighted how overreliance on any singular capability ignores the complex characteristics of interstate relations observed in current U.S. national security guidance.[76] Operation Paul Bunyan combined many traditional deterrents like nuclear-armed aircraft, credible ground forces, and a significant maritime presence in an operational approach that utilized a competition framework. The cumulative effect was to communicate resolve, compel an adversary, and manage escalation to prevent a broader war.

Conclusion

Comparing the current cognitive approach for operational art against requirements from the *National Security Strategy*, joint concepts, and Army doctrine demonstrates a conceptual gap. Required to fill that gap is a conceptual framework in doctrine for competition mechanisms like communicate, coerce, conciliate, and cooperate. Analyzing U.S. involvement in the history of conflict between North and South Korea demonstrates the validity of those mechanisms. Additionally, Operation Paul Bunyan in 1976 shows the potential for success when combining competition mechanisms in an operational approach. Overall, they offer an adjustment to the Army and joint force's cognitive approach to operational art, enabling a more effective arrangement of tactical actions to achieve strategic objectives.

The implication for the future force is not that competition mechanisms create another checklist in planning. Instead, the mechanisms prime planners for thinking outside the conflict space and provide a cohesive framework to utilize military forces in competition.[77] Failure to shape the competition environment has profound implications during crisis and conflict, demonstrated by Russian aggression in Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in 2014.[78] Alternatively, the successful application of competition mechanisms can stymie an aggressor's actions, like Ukraine's increased strategic depth against Russia's invasion in 2022. Additionally, as the United States learned after the Chinese intervention in Korea, conflict with one actor can escalate competition with another. A similar balancing act between great-power interests was apparent in Syria's civil war. Operation Paul Bunyan in 1976 showed that the complementary application of competition mechanisms can achieve strategic objectives while limiting escalation, effectively employing military forces short of war. In each instance, actions in competition require deliberate consideration when applying operational art. ■

Notes

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9. ADP 3-0, *Operations*, 2-4, 2-5; Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011), 52–54.

10. The White House, *National Security Strategy*, 9.

11. Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Concept for Integrated Campaigning*, v–vi, 14–22.

12. Ibid., 3, 9, 14–16.

13. Ibid., 9, 15–16, 21, 31.

14. Thomas Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (London: Yale University Press, 2008), 32–34; Michael J. Mazarr, *Understanding Deterrence* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2018), 11, accessed 25 November 2022, https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PE295.html. Schelling acknowledges the "diplomacy of violence" and the coercive value of military force short of armed conflict. Mazarr describes how assurances are a necessary component of deterrence in addition to the classic acknowledgement of threats.

15. Mazarr, *Understanding Deterrence*, 4–5.

16. Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 35; Mazarr, *Understanding Deterrence*, 11.

17. FM 3-13, *Information Operations* (Washington, DC: U.S. GPO, 2016), 1-1, 1-2; H. Porter Abbot, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 13. FM 3-13 describes how actions in the physical domains, in and of themselves, can transmit a message in the cognitive domain. Abbot defines narrative as "the representation of an event or a series of events." Each supports the notion that actions taken in the physical domains contribute to larger themes in a narrative, complemented with information via other messages.

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19. Abbot, *Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, 13, 95. Abbot describes narratives as the "representation of an event or a series of events," where the interpretation of a narrative relies on repetition of abstract themes and concrete motifs. Since signals of intent are a form of narrative, deliberate repetition of themes is one way to reinforce that intent and reduce the likelihood of misinterpretation.

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21. Don Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas: A Contemporary History* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 9.

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24. James McConville, *Army Multi-Domain Transformation: Ready to Win in Competition and Conflict*, Chief of Staff Paper #1 (Arlington, VA: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 16 March 2021), 1, accessed 17 June 2021, https://api.army.mil/e2/c/downloads/2021/03/23/eeac3d01/20210319-csa-paper-1-signed-print-version.pdf; *Army Multi-Domain Transformation*, 5; TP 525-3-1, *The U.S. Army in Multi-Domain Operations 2028*, 7, 9, 11.

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26. McConville, *Army Multi-Domain Transformation*, 17–18.

27. Lawrence Freedman, *Deterrence* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2004), 111.

28. Mazarr, *Understanding Deterrence*, 11.

29. Freedman, *Deterrence*, 110; ADP 3-0, Operations, 2-5; JP 5-0, Joint Planning, IV–42. Both ADP 3-0 and JP 5-0 identify "compel" as a stability mechanism, but it still has utility as a component of coercion. Freedman's analysis of deterrence theory acknowledges that coercion includes measures both to prevent or change an actor's behavior.

30. Freedman, *Deterrence*, 110–11.

31. Bryan Frederick et al., *Understanding the Deterrent Impact of U.S. Overseas Forces* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2020), xiii, xiv, xv, accessed 25 November 2022, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2533.html; Jacob Aronson et al., "Making Use of History," in Sisson, Siebens, and Blechman, *Military Coercion and US Foreign Policy*, 42–56.

32. Millett, *The War for Korea*, 12, 46, 49–51.

33. Ibid., 75, 84.

34. Ibid., 35–37, 45–50, 75.

35. Ibid., 51–52, 75.

36. McConville, *Army Multi-Domain Transformation*, 15–19.

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41. FM 3-0, *Operations*, 4-10–4-12.

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49. Ibid., 1-2, 55–57.
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54. Ibid., 134.
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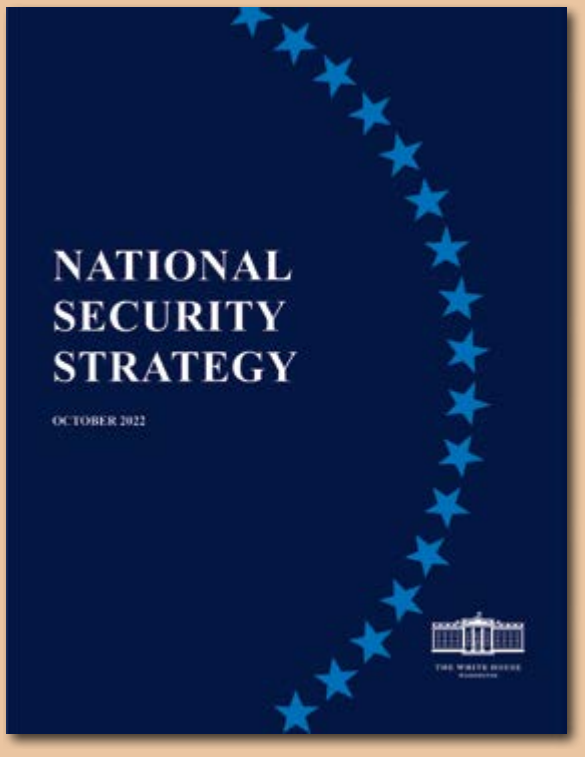
76. White House, *National Security Strategy*, 7–10.
77. Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, 55–58.
78. McConville, *Army Multi-Domain Transformation*, 1–2.



The *National Security Strategy* (*NSS*) is a report mandated by Section 603 of the Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986 (Pub. L. 99-433). The *NSS* has been transmitted annually since 1987, but frequently, reports come in late or not at all. The *NSS* is to be sent from the president to Congress in order to communicate the executive branch's national security vision to the legislative branch. The *NSS* provides discussion on proposed uses of all facets of U.S. power needed to achieve the Nation's security goals. The report is obligated to include a discussion of the United States' international interests, commitments, objectives, and policies, along with defense capabilities necessary to deter threats and implement U.S. security plans.

To read the report, visit https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Biden-Harris-Administrations-National-Security-Strategy-10.2022.pdf.