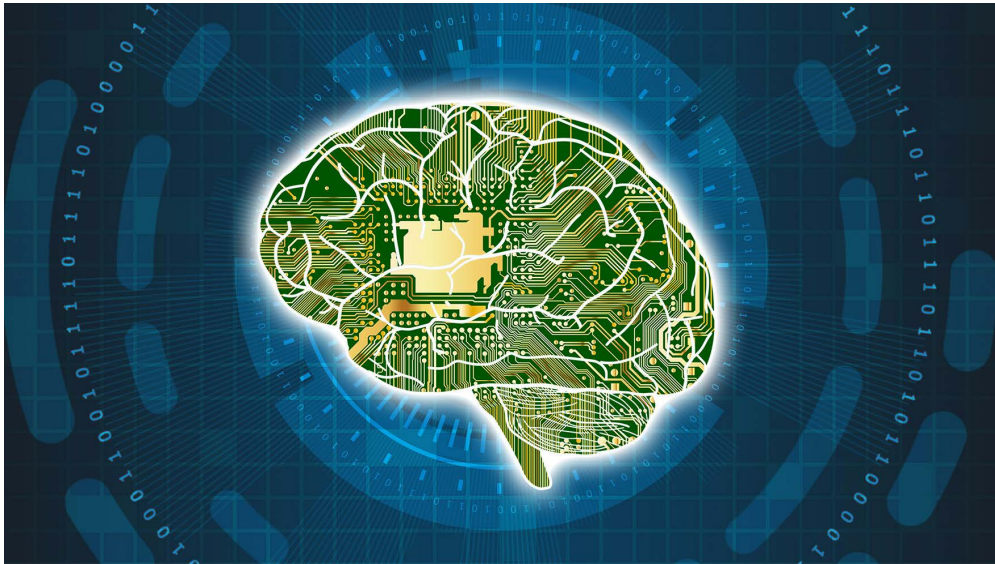


# Not All Wars Are Violent

## Identifying Faulty Assumptions for the Information War

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“Human cognition and behavior are powerfully influenced by sets of beliefs and assumptions about life and reality.”<sup>1</sup> When the beliefs and assumptions (inputs) are valid, the resulting actions (outputs) are also. However, when the beliefs and assumptions do not withstand scrutiny, the actions necessarily follow. The military is not immune to this phenomenon, thus, this article intends to shake the rational and emotional foundations of experientially-derived knowledge (*a posteriori*) and knowledge presumed to be self-evident (*a priori*) to remove intellectual roadblocks impeding the advancement of information warfare (IW) within the Department of Defense (DOD) and USAF. More specifically, this article analyzes the origin and implications of the following interdependent faulty assumptions that restrict the institutional thinking of Airmen: 1) All wars are violent; 2) deterrence is working if there is no violence; and 3) information warfare Airmen are *support* professionals because they do not engage in violence.

## Faulty Assumption No. 1: All Wars Are Violent

### *Origin*

Clausewitz argues war “is an act of violence to compel our opponent to fulfil our will,” thereby making a distinction between an immutable nature of war and the ever-evolving character of war where “violence arms itself with the inventions of Art and Science in order to contend against violence.”<sup>2</sup> The key premise being, even though war is “a continuation of policy by other means,” war is inherently violent and if there is no violence then a state of war does not exist. On the other hand, Sun Tzu’s Eastern viewpoint contends that those most skilled in the art of war are those who win without fighting (“hence to fight and conquer in all your battles is not supreme excellence; supreme excellence consists in breaking the enemy’s resistance without fighting”).<sup>3</sup> Of these two schools of thought, the Clausewitzian framework has underpinned much of the Western world’s thinking about war and peace for centuries.

### *Reality*

Albeit two mutually exclusive definitions of war, it is important to note that validating one over the other is unproductive because they are intrinsically subjective. Instead, it must be realized that in a battle of wills, it is possible for both understandings of war to simultaneously influence its respective subscriber to act in a certain manner—which means determining the existence of a state of war lies less in whether the US believes it is physically under attack and more in whether or not adversaries are deliberately assaulting America or its national interests.

For millennia, wars were fought over existential survival, resources or treasure, and territory (or as Thucydides referred to them: fear, honor, and interest)—physical motivators that had to be seized or retained by force. However, globalization, information technologies, digital currencies, and so forth, have ushered in the ability to fight for the aforementioned without using violence or even challenging another nation’s physical sovereignty. In other words, IW capabilities have blurred the lines between peace and war to the point of indistinction. In light of this, the defense community must account for the possibility that these advancements exceed anything Clausewitz could have fathomed and, as a result, the nature of war may need to include acts that are not violent. Consider the following through the perspective of existential survival, resources or treasure, and territory.

**Russia.** Ideas of “hybrid warfare” and “a new way of war” sprung to the forefront of the global stage after Moscow utilized the Sochi Olympics and “little green men” to obfuscate its annexation of eastern Ukraine and Crimea. However, many analysts fail to realize that most of these “publicized notions—the blurring

of war and peace, that Russia is in an information war, that information can be a weapon, that nonmilitary means can be as effective as nuclear weapons—have been a part of the Russian military-theoretical debate long before the invasion.”<sup>4</sup> Even now, and unbeknownst to many, Russia has reached beyond its *near abroad* to the point of fielding military forces worldwide that are not subject to the Geneva Convention. The 2018 firefight between US and pro-Regime forces at Deir al-Zour, Syria (a.k.a. The Battle of the DAZ) brought this to light but today it extends beyond areas considered war zones. Secretly overseen by the GRU (the armed forces main intelligence directorate),<sup>5</sup> the Vagner (alternate: Wagner) Paramilitary Corporation (PMC) controlled by Russian oligarch and Putin-associate Yevgeny Prigozhin not only props up Moscow-friendly regimes in locales such as Syria, Libya, and Venezuela,<sup>6</sup> it also interferes in the sovereign affairs of nations rich in natural resources (e.g., gold, uranium, diamonds) to facilitate beneficial conditions for Russian companies (e.g., Sudan, Central African Republic).<sup>7</sup> Vagner functions as an undeclared branch of Russia’s armed forces (e.g., transported on Russian military aircraft, treated in Russian military hospitals, operate jointly with Russian military forces, and receive Russian medals signed by Putin),<sup>8</sup> thereby providing plausible deniability. This plausible deniability is subsequently “leveraged by the Kremlin in its military strategy to stall adversaries’ responses and make short-term strategic gains.”<sup>9</sup>

**China.** While by no means defending their atrocious human rights record, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is a perfect case study for the use of information (at home and abroad) to advance its own survival, resources or treasure, and territory. Despite the governmental failings of the Great Leap Forward and, more recently, the oppression that produced Tiananmen Square, the CCP engineered a population willing to fight against the US and its allies by conducting an “ideological reeducation of the public which relentlessly portrays China as the victim of foreign imperialist bullying during ‘one hundred years of humiliation.’”<sup>10</sup> Resolving to never be humiliated again, in 2003 the CCP announced *san zhong zhanfa* (Three Warfares): 1) Strategic Psychological Operations (i.e., pre-conflict posturing of all instruments of power to intimidate and steer adversaries towards desired outcomes); 2) Overt and Covert Media Manipulations; and 3) Exploitation of National and International Legal Systems.<sup>11</sup> Over the next 17 years, the CCP successfully annexed the South China Sea; utilized its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI; a.k.a New Silk Road) as a potential worldwide Trojan horse to preposition assets, access, and resources;<sup>12</sup> and became the worldwide leader in intellectual property theft with estimates projecting losses up to \$600 billion annually<sup>13</sup>—all without firing a shot.

**North Korea.** DPRK's cult of personality and brainwashed population is inextricably tied to the regime's pursuit of existential survival. When one examines DPRK propaganda, there is a notable aversion to intellectual discipline; "North Koreans are so much more inclined than South Koreans to settle differences of opinions with fisticuffs . . . where Stalinism put the intellect over the instincts, North Korean culture does the opposite."<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, Pyongyang allowed its understanding of violence ("fisticuffs") to evolve and presently wields robust IW capabilities despite the sanction-induced resource constraints plaguing the state. Regarding the 2014 James Franco and Seth Rogan movie *The Interview* as an attack on the regime, North Korea unleashed an attack on Sony Pictures (and by extension, free speech) that cost the company millions and terrorized executives into cancelling the theatrical release. Although the Sony attack was quickly attributed to DPRK, garnering substantially less attention were the 2016 theft of \$81M from Bangladesh Bank; the 2017 WannaCry 2.0 global ransomware attack; and, as reported by criminal charges unsealed in 2018, "numerous other attacks or intrusions on the entertainment, financial services, defense, technology, and virtual currency industries, academia, and electric utilities."<sup>15</sup> This deliberate onboarding of IW-related capabilities "is an attempt to explore the idea of asymmetric negation, probing any vulnerabilities of the US-ROK alliance."<sup>16</sup>

**Iran.** After the *Holy Defense* or the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988), the Iranian regime believed itself to be under the residual and existential threat of Western influence. Dubbing it *jang-e narm* (soft war) in the late 2000s, the Ayatollah and Iranian conservatives view it as a strategic imperative to defend against Western culture and ideals—an obstacle to exporting the revolution and "anathema for a regime founded on Islamic values and anti-Americanism."<sup>17</sup> While some suggest the language is adapted from Joseph Nye's notion of "soft power" (i.e., getting another actor to acquiesce through attraction as opposed to coercion),<sup>18</sup> Tehran takes this a step further by not only relying on its revolutionary ideology and Persian imperial legacy (attraction) but also seeking "to influence populations and governments through manipulation and even disinformation"<sup>19</sup> (coercion). These initiatives are symbiotically aligned with their exploitation of plausible deniability via proxies (e.g., Hezbollah, Houthis rebels, etc.) and repeated cyber assaults on global industrial and oil manufacturers.<sup>20</sup>

**VEO.** The low-cost of admission to the information environment even provides VEOs an alternative means to compete for global legitimacy—and no organization has taken this opportunity farther than the Islamic State (ISIS). Analysis of ISIS's *Twitter* and *YouTube* data revealed "linguistically diverse narratives" that spread throughout the world and remained "on message" (i.e., synchronization or what tacticians refer to as command and control).<sup>21</sup> ISIS also produced the online

magazine *Dabiq*, combining its radical ideals with print-style media in multiple languages (Note: While *Dabiq* attained more notoriety, Islamist magazines can be dated back to 2003 with al-Qaeda's *Sawt al-Jihad* or Voice of Jihad).<sup>22</sup> Known as the "Digital Caliphate," ISIS's internet presence (e.g., propaganda, recruitment, battlefield videos) led some to assert the group's "vision of a global caliphate has less to do with their desire to create a Westphalian style socio-political organization and more to do with creating a community of like-minded individuals."<sup>23</sup>

Clausewitz's distinction between political and military objectives is blurred when dealing with authoritarian regimes that unilaterally control all facets of governmental activities at home and abroad. Thus, when America's institutional inertia places it on a reactive footing relative to its adversaries in the information environment, strategists need to ask the right questions. For instance, asking *Was that an act of war?* would be an overgeneralization that does not account for a possible change in the nature of war (or account for whether or not adversaries believe they are waging war against the US). If Russian operatives physically stormed polling stations in 2016 or North Korean soldiers physically attacked the Sony Pictures' headquarters, the existence of a state of war would be axiomatic. But the 2+3's use of the information environment to attain the spoils of war without violence means the better question is *What is an appropriate response and how can safeguards be established to avoid such a disadvantageous situation in the future?*

### ***Consequence of the Assumption***

Despite actively holding them at risk through strategic and nuclear weaponry, post-Soviet adversaries are nevertheless deliberately countering US interests below the threshold of armed conflict. The pragmatic reality of these ever-evolving circumstances demand that war fighters re-evaluate their presuppositions about warfare and its defining traits as they seek to answer the *National Defense Strategy's* call to great-power competition. Fixating upon violence and maintaining a bias toward conflict jeopardizes resource allocation and fosters unfounded confidence that America is the unchallenged superpower—nowhere does this manifest itself more clearly than deterrence forums.

## **Faulty Assumption No. 2: Deterrence is Working If There is No Violence**

### ***Origin***

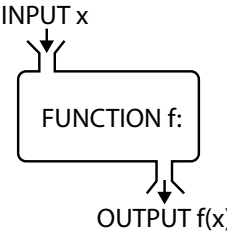
This assumption is deeply ingrained in military psyches and its origin is two-fold: there is the conceptual understanding of deterrence as an extension of

Clausewitz and there is the historical record that is interpreted as supporting evidence. These are most effectively dissected sequentially.

In terms of a Joint definition, deterrence is “the prevention of action by the existence of a credible threat of unacceptable counteraction and/or belief that the cost of action outweighs the perceived benefits.”<sup>24</sup> However, the military’s cultural bias toward conflict often reduces deterrence to holding hard targets at risk (e.g., nuclear weapons, bomber task force deployments) for the purpose of preempting war as defined by armed violence (Faulty Assumption No. 1). Such a context in its simplest form causes deterrence operations (i.e., “to decisively influence the adversary’s decision-making calculus in order to prevent hostile actions against US vital interests”<sup>25</sup>) to be assessed via syllogism (if A then B; not B, therefore not A). In other words: If deterrence fails, then war will occur; war is not occurring, therefore, deterrence is not failing.

Consequently, the traditional understanding of deterrence can be conceptually explained as a mathematical function (see table 1).

**Table 1. Deterrence formula**

$f(x) = y$ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <math>f</math> = Deterrence Methods</li> <li>• <math>x</math> = No War Desired</li> <li>• <math>y</math> = No War Occurring</li> </ul> $f(\text{No War Desired}) = \text{No War Occurring}$	
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But what must be acknowledged regarding this equation is the different cognitive understanding between *Red* and *Blue* actors as to what constitutes a war (Faulty Assumption No. 1). . . to the point those evaluating the effectiveness of deterrence can theoretically mistake the following for a valid solution to the equation:

$$f(\text{No War Desired}) = \text{No “War” Occurring}$$

Nevertheless, this linear understanding of deterrence is reinforced by experientially derived knowledge from history.

America’s most influential deterrence methodologies have consistently been built relative to the global context and the character of war (i.e., technological advancements) rather than an immutable nature of war. More specifically, these approaches have been rooted almost exclusively in military power and a bipolar global context. The Monroe Doctrine and Manifest Destiny was America versus European interference in the Western Hemisphere,<sup>26</sup> leveraging hemispheric

neutrality as enabled by the Pacific and Atlantic oceans and the French and British empires underwriting international security in the global commons.

In 1945, the global context changed when the world transitioned to a nation-state bipolar construct with the US leading the free world against the USSR and the character of war changed with nuclear technology. Based on this new paradigm, deterrence was quantified in terms of preventing war between the US and the Soviets through the concept of mutually assured destruction (or in the words of Winston Churchill, it was a time when “safety will be the sturdy child of terror, and survival the twin brother of annihilation”).<sup>27</sup> Seeking to maintain its strategic advantage, American deterrence took the form of offset strategies—the First Offset pursued a nuclear buildup as a force-multiplier against the Soviet’s numerically superior conventional forces; the Second Offset sought to use emerging technologies (e.g., stealth, precision-guided munitions) as a force multiplier against the numerical superiority of the Warsaw Pact after Moscow achieved nuclear parity. In either case, the bedrock of Cold War deterrence theory was military superiority and atomic weaponry.

In 1991, the global context changed overnight when the USSR vanished from the geopolitical stage, leaving in its place a unipolar world that would eventually become multipolar. However, the character of war slowly evolved to asymmetric (rather than an instantaneous shift as it did with Hiroshima and Nagasaki) while adversaries sought alternatives to combat the US as the remaining superpower. In the absence of one specific adversary or one specific characteristic of war to emphasize, the Cold War deterrence apparatus struggled to assimilate with a reemergent balance-of-power environment. Amidst the Kuwait invasion, President George H. W. Bush proposed multilateral cooperation as an alternative to deterrence in his 1991 State of the Union:

What is at stake is more than one small country, it is a big idea – a new world order where diverse nations are drawn together in common cause to achieve the universal aspirations of mankind: peace and security, freedom and the rule of law. Such is a world worthy of our struggle, and worthy of our children’s future.<sup>28</sup>

But such a collective security environment never materialized. Further complicating attempts to facilitate peace were the quantum leaps in the global context during the first two decades of the post-Soviet era—namely globalization, telecommunications technology, the opening of space as both a global commons and war-fighting domain, and the validation of nonstate actors as wartime adversaries following 9/11. As America directed its whole-of-government efforts to counterterrorism and US Central Command, the world became increasingly multipolar as nations expanded their activities in the shadows of America’s gaze.

## **Reality**

Understanding deterrence in the syllogistic form outlined above requires accepting logical fallacies. The assertion is incapable of withstanding scrutiny once the multi-faceted nature of deterrence is acknowledged—particularly because it either succumbs to circular reasoning and begging the question (How do you know deterrence is working? Because it is obviously not failing!) or ineffectually assimilates with the burden of proof methodology in Aristotle's Principle of Non-Contradiction on the basis that the examiner must deduce that every antecedent policy was the root cause in preventing war, which would yield an infinite regression.<sup>29</sup> A more nuanced understanding of deterrence across all four instruments of national power (DIME) yields a more accurate picture of the geopolitical landscape, particularly in a time defined by great-power competition where actors can attain the spoils of war without armed violence.

After all, if deterrence is “the prevention of action by the existence of a credible threat of unacceptable counteraction and/or belief that the cost of action outweighs the perceived benefits,”<sup>30</sup> and adversary actions are occurring, then by definition deterrence is not only failing but has failed in the past-tense. While it is true there has not been a world war since 1945, unilaterally attributing it to deterrence would be an oversimplification. Nevertheless, there are those who argue deterrence singlehandedly prevented World War III while those on the other side contend deterrence is discredited in its entirety<sup>31</sup>—both are wrong, and the truth lies in the middle (e.g., deterrence did not prevent the Korean or Vietnam Wars; however, the brinkmanship during the Cuban Missile Crisis may have saved the world as it is known today). Assessing the effectiveness of deterrence operations is contingent upon one critical assumption: That deterrence is in fact working. At the risk of being anticlimactic, one cannot actually know deterrence is failing until after deterrence has failed which means the DOD must shift its understanding of deterrence away from preventing acts of violence and toward holistically preventing actions that run contrary to US interests—regardless of the mechanism an adversary employs.

As the US synchronizes its instruments of national power, the weights of effort should be allocated based on their pragmatic potential until the overarching great power competition overhaul is scoped and scaled across the whole of government. Consider the following quantified potential energies against the 2+3 (see Table 2):



**Table 2. DIME potential energies against the 2+3**

	<i>Diplomatic</i>	<i>Informational</i>	<i>Military</i>	<i>Economic</i>
Russia	Viable	Viable	Viable	Mixed Results
				Sanctions have demonstrated mixed results across conflict continuum
China	Viable	Viable	Viable	Mixed Results
				Sanctions and tariffs ongoing while US economy dependent on PRC labor/loans
North Korea	Unviable	Viable	Mixed Results	Unviable
	No diplomatic relations		Military superiority has prevented some but not all belligerency	Sanctions have crippled economy but not prevented belligerency
Iran	Unviable	Viable	Mixed Results	Unviable
	No diplomatic relations		Military superiority has prevented some but not all belligerency	Sanctions have crippled economy but not prevented belligerency
Violent Extremist Organizations	Unviable	Viable	Unviable	Unviable
	No diplomatic relations		Overwhelming military supremacy has not prevented belligerency	Informal economy; ops against revenue (oil, opioids, etc.) is military power

Information is the only instrument of national power the US currently possesses that bears potential to universally influence the behavior of the 2+3. To be clear, this is not to be misconstrued as advocating for a complete abandonment of military-led deterrence—quite the opposite, the essence of informational power relative to the character and nature of war is a foundation that requires shaking. Diplomatic power is shepherded by the Department of State, military power by the Department of Defense, and economic power by the Department of the Treasury, but informational power is not monolithic or attributable to any one agency. Since the 2017 update to Joint Publication 1: *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States* established Information as the seventh joint function,<sup>32</sup> it is officially accepted that the DOD must lead in the information environment, but with that comes a cultural overhaul that must reconcile nonviolent power with its understanding of war’s nature.

***Consequence of the Assumption***

Effective great-power competition is contingent upon understanding adversary intentions rather than fixating on their use of violence. For instance, when adversaries such as Russia leverage the information environment to shift their focus to

the “political goal of war rather than its means (the armed violence),” there emerges both a cognitive dissonance and a risk of unconscious/unintentional escalation when the West takes actions it perceives as being short of war (e.g., demarches, sanctions) but are understood by adversaries as being tantamount to war.<sup>33</sup> Competition without context is a fool’s errand that inevitably devolves into jousting with windmills or self-destructive pursuits of white whales (i.e., judgment-impairing infatuations)—case in point, the misinterpretation of historical and current circumstances on the part of those still clinging to Cold War mindsets:

And that’s why we’re exploring the third offset strategy. It is combinations of technology, operational concepts, and organizational constructs – different ways of organizing our forces, to maintain our ability to project combat power into any area at the time and place of our own choosing. And I want to again emphasize that the third offset is about preserving the peace, not fighting wars. And the best we believe to preserve the peace is to have a very strong conventional deterrent to convince any nation that turning to the force of arms to achieve their objectives is folly.<sup>34</sup>

Any attempt to deter all adversaries simultaneously would be a monumental point of departure from the Offset Strategy system. The semantic inference of the term *offset* is inherently binary—one force counteracting another. Whereas the First and Second Offsets deliberately targeted the calculus of the USSR, the so-called “Third” Offset (despite its numerical designation) would actually be a first-of-its-kind, multinodal deterrence paradigm that transcends worldview, culture, ideology, and so forth, to pierce the cognitive space of Moscow, Beijing, Pyongyang, Tehran, and terrorists concurrently.

Although deterrence is a timeless concept in both Western and Eastern theories of war, the DOD’s deterrence worldview is fundamentally derived from the Cold War experience. The global context, the character of war, and perhaps even the nature of war today demand a shift in perspective. A deterrence strategy a la the proposed Third Offset proves elusive and enigmatic for two key reasons: 1) influencing the way an adversary behaves requires tailoring to how the adversary thinks (i.e., the offset strategy construct is a Cold War legacy irreconcilable with the 2+3 global context); 2) China and Russia took copious notes during the 1991 Gulf War and have spent three decades of research and development ensuring they are never rapidly dismantled in the same manner.<sup>35</sup> Ultimately, today’s circumstances yield an environment where unilateral military advantage is not synonymous with unilateral strategic advantage—as such, because the 2+3 are severely outpacing the US in the information environment America must acknowledge that it cannot deter until it relearns to compete. For each of the individual services, relearning how to compete requires broadening the aperture of what they consider operational career fields.

### **Faulty Assumption No. 3: Information Warfare Airmen Are Support Professionals Because They Do Not Engage in Violence**

#### ***Origin***

George H. W. Bush's "new world order" never materialized and efforts toward that end were eclipsed by (to name a few) the Iraq Wars, the Balkans, Libya, and, above all, the Global War on Terror. Yet what must be realized is that all of these conflicts had a common denominator—militarily inferior opponents. In the Cold War era the military training standard was the Soviets, the deterrence target was the Soviets, and the cultural pariahs were those expressing sympathy toward the Soviets or Communism—the Cold War stance against the Soviets was not only whole-of-government but was whole-of-society; the very embodiment of Huntington's assertion "we know who we are only when we know who we are not and often only when we know whom we are against."<sup>36</sup> Almost 30 years of combat in the desert, predominantly against enemies declared hostile by their tactics (i.e., terrorism) rather than national affiliation, caused war-fighting skillsets to atrophy as the notion of a peer adversary fell out of vogue amidst toppling dictators and facilitating a day of reckoning for 9/11 conspirators. Thus, the *National Defense Strategy* mandate that "Inter-state strategic competition, not terrorism, is now the primary concern in U.S. national security"<sup>37</sup> is battling the generational entropy stemming from a constituency trying to compete despite having no experience from which to know how.

For the USAF, the widespread misunderstanding of competition manifests itself in Faulty Assumption No. 3 due to its bias toward aircraft. To put this in perspective, one needs to recognize the unique approach to manpower the USAF employs vis-à-vis its sister services—the USAF is the only service that (generally speaking) sends its officers into combat while its enlisted stay behind. The Air Force's principal line-of-effort regarding manpower is its rated officer corps of pilots, navigators, and air battle managers (and by extension, its career enlisted aviators). Culturally, this line-of-effort fosters and normalizes the USAF's bias toward conflict by creating a false dichotomy between those onboard an aircraft (operations) and everyone else (support).

#### ***Reality***

Although this anachronistic way of thinking made sense with regards to an air component's doctrinal role, the aperture for airpower in conflict and competition must be broadened if multidomain lethality is to be achieved. "Air dominance is not an American birthright. Without the U.S. Air Force's unprecedented control

of the air and enabling domains, no other U.S. military mission enjoys full freedom of maneuver.”<sup>38</sup> As Sixteenth Air Force (AF) seeks to generate IW outcomes by expanding the weapons engagement zone of air, space, and cyber power, there is a requisite paradigm shift that needs to take place within the service—specifically reconciling the reality that professionals within the USAF’s core IW capabilities (cyberspace operations; electromagnetic warfare; information operations; weather; and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance [ISR]) do not provide support to war fighters but rather are themselves war fighters in the purest sense.

Moreover, IW professionals are the primary mechanism by which the USAF engages in strategic competition—far more time is spent in the competition phase than the conflict phase, thus, resources and organizational structures need to take this reality into account:

The continuum of conflict must be understood in the current and future context. There is and always will be strategic competition. You are either winning or losing, present tense. Seldom will conflict result in a permanent win or loss. The linear depiction of peace to war and back again must be revised to reflect the cyclical nature of war where there are only positions of relative advantage (see the figure).<sup>39</sup>

**Figure. The continuum of conflict**



This is precisely why the Sixteenth AF was established.

Lt Gen Tim Haugh, Sixteenth AF commander, stated at the Sixteenth AF activation ceremony: “Our adversaries will no longer have plausible deniability. We will expose their actions that undermine international norms and take the conflict in the information environment back to them.”<sup>40</sup> Whether its defending the USAF’s vari-

ous networks; conducting cyberspace operations for US Cyber Command, US European Command, US Transportation Command, US Strategic Command, and US Space Command; executing ISR missions for every geographic combatant command; operating the signals intelligence portfolio as the service cryptologic component to the National Security Agency; or generating insights and data to produce public disclosures of adversary activities (e.g., US Africa Command's disclosure of Vagner activities in Libya),<sup>41</sup> Sixteenth AF is deployed in place and engaging the enemy on the front lines of the information environment daily.

### ***Consequence of the Assumption***

What must be realized is the whole-of-government is retroactively trying to establish strategy and mitigate damage from previous shortsightedness (e.g., as of 2013 the Joint Staff had banished information warfare “from its official lexicon and largely relegated information operations to a combat support role that exploits cyber tools to influence enemy cognition and decision-making processes,”<sup>42</sup> yet now information is a joint function and Sixteenth AF is an entire numbered air force dedicated to IW). Holding targets at risk at a time and place of its choosing has underpinned Air Force culture since 1947 (e.g., air interdiction, rapid global mobility, space and missile operations). Nevertheless, despite the ability to hit any target, any place, at any time—adversaries are still countering US interests and as such the Secretary of the Air Force directed the stand-up of a component numbered air force to bring multidomain solutions to bear on the nation's hardest problems. Unfortunately, when the stand-up of Sixteenth AF is misrepresented as an administrative “merger”<sup>43</sup> of Twenty-Fourth AF and Twenty-Fifth AF, rather than the construction of a brand-new war-fighting organization specifically tailored to generate IW outcomes across the continuum of conflict, then the bias towards IW as a supporting function unnecessarily restricts options available to the Joint Force—solely due to a lack of imagination and the continued acceptance of faulty assumptions.

### **The Way Forward**

Simply put, information's efficacy as an instrument of power is understood by the 2+3 and as such they are circumventing military power by attaining the spoils of war (existential survival, resources or treasure, and territory) without engaging in a violent conflict (i.e., Clausewitz's “nature of war”). In short, their activities in the information environment is what enables the seemingly valid solution to the equation:

$$f(\text{No War Desired}) = \text{No “War” Occurring}$$

As a result, regardless of whether military strategists explicitly recognize a change in the nature of war or merely expand what they consider *violent* (Faulty Assumption No. 1), it is paramount that deterrence not be deemed *successful* solely based on the absence of force-on-force (Faulty Assumption No. 2). It is also paramount that IW professionals embrace their role as war fighters and culturally rebrand away from the false dichotomy of aviators and support (Faulty Assumption No. 3).

Within the DIME model, the only instrument with universal potential to compel global actors and encourage responsible statesmanship through accountability is information. A shift in operational plan and strategy development mindsets must account for this reality. Competition based on current methodologies and conceptual thinking possess elements of logical fallacies on the basis that the absence of *war* as Western audiences define it is not the absence of *war* as 2+3 adversaries define it—they are making gains in fear, honor, and interest without engaging in armed violence. Until the strategic initiative is regained (which it will be), IW professionals must embrace their responsibilities as members of the greater war-fighting apparatus and endeavor to eliminate plausible deniability by taking the fight back to the enemy. In the same way Winston Churchill declared “we shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender,”<sup>44</sup> the US must resiliently bounce back from the loss of terrain in the information environment, adapt new ways of thinking and employing the instruments of national power, and hold the line—physical or otherwise. ✪

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