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Anticipating and Understanding the Rebalance

Exercise Nine Innings, USMC Command and Staff College

Lieutenant Colonel Micheal Russ and Eric Y. Shibuya

Abstract: Marine Corps University's Exercise Nine Innings prepares students and faculty for challenges faced during times of peace and war. Nine Innings partners a combatant command with military and civilian faculty, subject-matter experts, and advisors to conduct campaign planning. The exercise provides U.S. and international field-grade officers and civilian students the opportunity to think critically about complex regional security challenges and to create solutions aligned with regional trends and norms in an environment where forward thinking and campaign planning coincide. Nine Innings equips future leaders and commanders to exercise discernment in decision making in an uncertain and ambiguous future.

Keywords: USMC, theater campaign planning, Asia-Pacific, U.S. Pacific Command, USPACOM, professional military education, PME, Command and Staff College, training, education, Exercise Nine Innings, regional security challenges

The Marine Corps University (MCU) prepares military officers and civilians for the many challenges they will face when leading the nation during times of peace and war. Exercise Nine Innings is the capstone

LtCol Micheal Russ is an active duty member of the U.S. Marine Corps and serves as the associate dean and head of the Warfighting Department at the Marine Corps Command and Staff College, Marine Corps University, Quantico, VA. Eric Y. Shibuya, PhD, is a professor of strategic studies and current head of the Security Studies Department at the Marine Corps Command and Staff College, Marine Corps University.

event at MCU's Command and Staff College (CSC), an extraordinarily challenging event involving military and civilian faculty, subject-matter experts, and advisors in campaign planning. Together, they set the conditions for students to develop a forward-thinking, regionally based security campaign plan, culminating 10 months of instruction in security, warfighting, leadership, and the history of war.¹

Nine Innings, since its inception, has provided annually more than 200 U.S. and international field-grade military officers and civilian students with the opportunity to think critically about complex regional security challenges and to produce solutions aligned with regional trends and norms. In recent years, campaign planning has focused on the U.S. Pacific Command (USPACOM) area of operations, which has allowed students to discuss, debate, and understand the environment and challenges surrounding the region and its countries, such as China, Japan, and North Korea, among others. Nine Innings enhances students' ability to incorporate joint, interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational (JIIM) capabilities when seeking whole-of-government and multinational approaches to mitigating conflict, and it enhances their ability to prevail should conflict occur. Accordingly, as the culminating academic event, Nine Innings is the premier venue for arming students with the know-how for

- understanding security environments and the contributions of all instruments of national power;
- anticipating, recognizing, and responding to surprise, uncertainty, and change while thinking critically and strategically;
- operating on commanders' intent through trust, empowerment, and understanding; and
- making ethical decisions while leading our servicemembers in combat and training.²

Developing leaders ready to address the complexities posed by twenty-first century challenges is critical for today's and tomorrow's force employment (figure 1).

Instituted in academic year 2004–5 by Marine Corps Lieutenant General John A. Toolan Jr., then-director of CSC, Nine Innings anticipated and addressed a combination of factors influencing the study of future military operations. The term *nine innings* is regularly associated with the American sport of baseball and defines the standard length of one game. In 2003, General Anthony C. Zinni noted that, when fighting a war, one had to be ready to fight all “nine innings. And at the end of the game, somebody's going to declare victory . . . whatever blood is poured onto the battlefield could be wasted if we don't follow it up with understanding what victory is.”³ This seemed especially appropriate for

Figure 1. Nine Innings concept

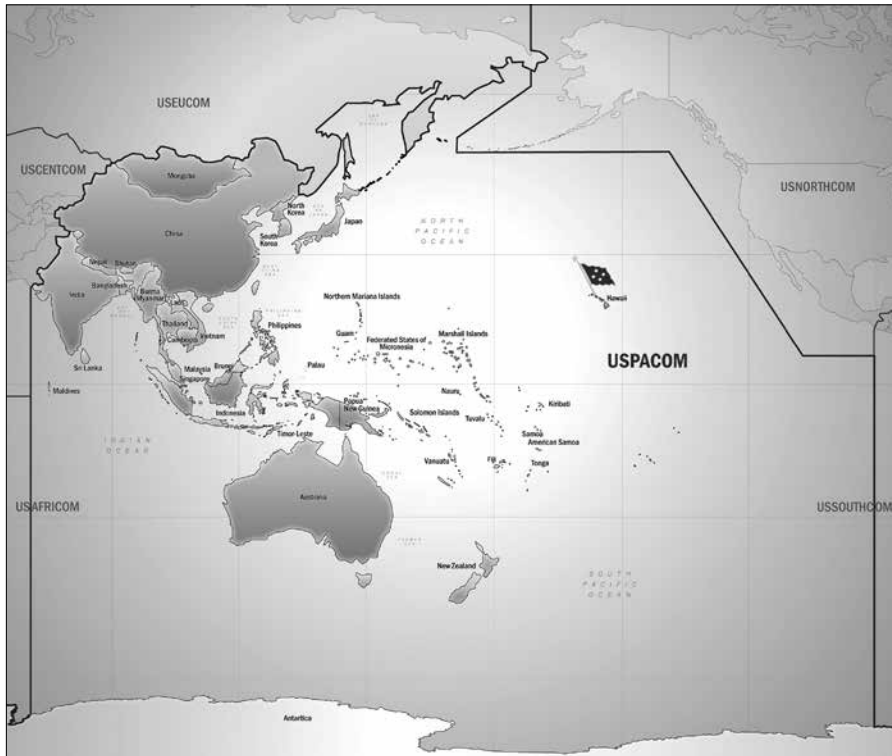
Courtesy of the authors, adapted by MCUP.

the name of the exercise, considering that war—with complicated strategies, operations, and outcomes—had become a reality for the United States. As a result of the wars fought in Iraq and Afghanistan, members of the MCU student body experienced combat that forecasted the potential character of future wars, indicating that planning for singular, kinetic operations was becoming less relevant in a modern sense. Moreover, the changing demographic of the CSC student body (becoming more joint, civilian, and international) foreshadowed the necessity for relationships and partnerships that mattered and for shared understanding, as these students would most likely be working in JIIM environments in the future. In essence, professional military education had to keep up with the tempo of the evolution of warfare in the twenty-first century.

Knowing and understanding how to plan for and incorporate a wide range of operations within multifaceted theaters of operation was required and increasingly considered fundamental for future military officers and civilians. *Steady-state* activities, in addition to understanding the effects of ongoing deliberate operations existing in differing phases of execution, gained greater interest among education commands, the Marine Corps, and joint leadership.⁴ Therefore, Nine Innings evolved to become the forum linking the study, thought, and reflection about various types of operations and activities for CSC students, especially in regard to geographic operating forces and their ongoing operations and activities.

Exercise Nine Innings Evolution

Initially focused on fighting a joint campaign in Iraq, Nine Innings grew in scope and evolved in academic year 2007 to incorporate the aspects of theater

Figure 2. U.S. Pacific Command

Official U.S. Navy map, adapted by MCUP.

campaigning, focused primarily on planning for operations in the Philippines. The Philippines, a theater treaty partner, was familiar to both faculty and students possessing considerable experiences working with the Philippines and having deployed to or lived in the USPACOM region on numerous occasions (figure 2). This switch was possible because two faculty members joined CSC from USPACOM's Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies (APCSS), bringing subject-matter expertise from USPACOM and facilitating contact with other experts still operating in Asia (i.e., leadership in the field) who could advise students in planning.⁵ The conjoining of these two phenomena not only increased the linkages between education and the operating forces (USPACOM in this case), but also opened connections that increased cooperation and engagement between CSC, USPACOM, and the Philippine government.

Starting in academic year 2009 and carried into 2010, Nine Innings shifted focus to Panama and U.S. Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM). Collaboration with the operating force (USSOUTHCOM in this case) afforded CSC the advantages of proximity, time, and communication with the geographic combatant commanders (GCCs); both Quantico, Virginia, and Miami, Florida, being in the eastern time zone made real-time communication significantly eas-

ier. While easier in some ways, a Nine Innings focused on the USSOUTHCOM area of operations and primarily the country of Panama lacked the quality required to elevate student understanding of theater-wide challenges. Indeed, there was a lack of robust resident knowledge in the CSC faculty regarding USSOUTHCOM and Panama; yet using Panama provided a challenge for a different reason.

Specifically, Panama did not confront significant security or other political problems that would necessitate broad shifts in current actions by the U.S. government writ large or by USSOUTHCOM in particular. Without strong resident knowledge to go deeper into the problem, the Panama exercises proved somewhat frustrating, as students (and many faculty) felt that any adjustments made were miniscule at best, which did not provide the best environment for learning the broad range of responses possible.

To improve the quality of the evolution, faculty inevitably incorporated USSOUTHCOM scenarios developed by the Marine Corps Warfighting Lab as fictional, real-time injects to test students' ability to respond to crisis and create solutions. Though the injects tested several potential scenarios that could happen in the region, they took away from the ability of the students to conduct real-world/real-time research, as information regarding fictitious scenarios did not exist in open sources. Therefore, in anticipation that students would be required to command and plan for operations at the highest levels of the nation, CSC leadership expanded Nine Innings' scope of study.

While most GCCs expressed interest in having CSC students research, explore, understand, and outline the problems of their areas, most were challenged by the inability to spare members from their staffs to temporarily assist CSC for the two-week exercise. Therefore, the reformation that occurred centered on changing the focus of planning for military operations in a single country to a rendition in one geographic command. Thus, students could then develop a whole-of-government, theater-wide campaign plan and explore potential scenarios and responses backed by legitimate research (see sidebar). Both U.S. Africa Command (USAFRICOM) and USPACOM expressed interest, but USPACOM emerged as the region of choice. The prior contact among the faculty with USPACOM and the ability of that command to provide support during the exercise were the most im-

Theater Campaign Plan

- Develop attributes describing USPACOM theater campaign plan
- Develop theater campaign plan for security cooperation and engagement
- Contingency planning:
 - Develop level 2 base plan shells
 - Weave into security cooperation and engagement plan

portant logistical reasons for the choice, but there also was a philosophical driver that emerged because of conversations between one of the current authors and then-CSC Deputy Director Colonel Michael Carter. Dr. Eric Y. Shibuya, professor of strategic studies at CSC, and Carter, both with significant experience in the Asia-Pacific, recognized and agreed that Marines would most likely be returning to the Pacific theater, under some capacity, over all other options.

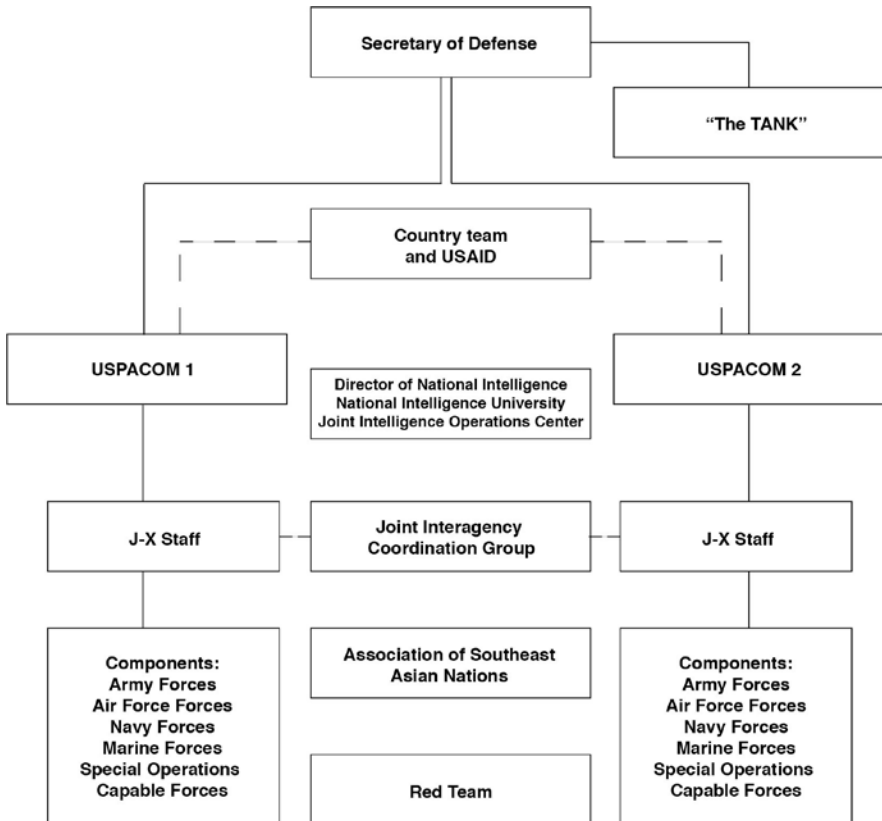
Exercise Nine Innings Today and Beyond

Focusing on the Pacific region and partnered with USPACOM, Nine Innings is contextually set in the real world. Its execution takes the better part of 11–12 days and is unbounded in a completely unclassified, open-source environment where senior mentors, resident faculty, and various subject-matter experts mentor student-led staffs and planning teams. In Nine Innings, students develop comprehensive approaches to steady-state engagement and contingency mitigation when creating the shell for USPACOM's theater campaign plan. This planning exercise literally draws in and connects the instruction from CSC's four courses of curriculum (Warfighting, Leadership, Security Studies, and War Studies).⁶ By this, CSC students discern regional challenges and develop a five-year theater campaign plan aligned with trends in security and contingency response and evolving U.S., regional, and international interests (figure 3).

Exercise Nine Innings facilitates students' understanding by encouraging them to translate policy, strategy, and objectives at the combatant command level into operational plans that support a whole-of-government approach to campaign planning. Students apply joint planning processes to develop operational-level plans that weave military, cultural, and historical factors into operational plans that are joint, interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational in character and address ill-structured problems. In Nine Innings, there are no "Road to Crisis/Road to War" briefs, no "Master Event Scenario Lists," and no fictional injects. The Nine Innings environment is centered on understanding the real world and forecasted changes in the Pacific region. Therefore, Nine Innings—the synthesis and incorporation of 10 months of education—challenges students' abilities to reason critically, generate solutions, and act decisively as if they were planning for operations in the Pacific region.

When creating the theater campaign plans, students assume roles to simulate the conditions under which military and civilian officers develop plans for approval by senior leaders. By the end of the planning exercise, students—who have been separated into two different planning staffs—develop shells for their teams' versions of the five-year theater campaign plan. Since Nine Innings deliverables are created for the USPACOM commander, his or her staff, and component commanders, some students are detailed to operate in positions that, today, are occupied by general/flag officers, such as three- and four-star gener-

Figure 3. Nine Innings planning exercise organization



Courtesy of the authors, adapted by MCUP.

als from all of the Services, and senior executive service (SES) members, such as the secretary of defense. This simulates the real-world environment in which students lead their peers in creating campaign plans and subsequently present their plans to student and faculty leadership, who then provide feedback from an operational- and Service-level perspective. It is both competitive and collaborative; the two commanders and their respective teams see the successes and failures of their plans and reorganize them for the next versions.

Other students are tasked to operate in the roles of directors and action officers to conceive courses of action and recommendations for informed decision making when campaign planning. Regardless of their positioning, students depart CSC with an appreciation for what it takes to form a campaign plan and with a functional understanding of the Service component's role in planning and operations.

In essence, the campaign plan is the students' perspective of the theater as it is and as it could be. Students use this perspective to shape the outline of a se-

curity cooperation and engagement (SC&E) plan that is whole-of-government, integrated with multinational capabilities and capacities, and respects and acknowledges the operations of other organizations in theater (table 1). The purpose of developing the SC&E plan is to suggest how USPACOM develops partner capacity, promotes mutual understanding, increases speed of response to contingency or crisis, and increases confidence-building measures to prevent conflict from occurring.

SC&E and contingency planning are linked further in a formative construct that forms the shell of a five-year, theater-level campaign plan for the Pacific region. Concurrently, students take the perspective and develop Level 2 base plans for USPACOM-suggested contingency scenarios.⁷ Contingency planning addresses potential conflict to understand the root cause of conflict and to craft a plan for preventing conflict from developing (particularly from a misunderstanding or accident), or to be best positioned to prevail should

Table 1. Supporting agencies for 2017

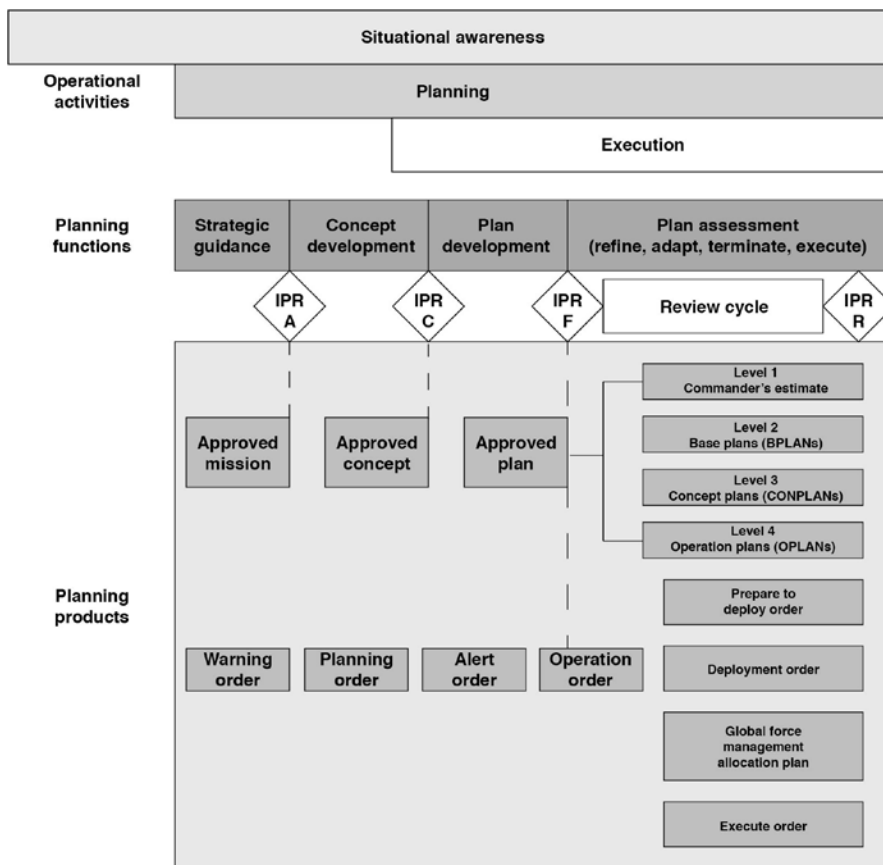
Agency	Subgroup
USPACOM	Marine Forces Pacific Pacific Air Forces Army Pacific Pacific Fleet (Navy) U.S. Special Operations Command Pacific
Center for Excellence in Disaster Management and Humanitarian Assistance	
Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies	
Marine Corps Civil-Military Operations School	
Marine Corps Intelligence Activity	
Marine Corps Security Cooperation Group	
Marine Corps University	Red Team Center for Advanced Operational Culture and Learning
Federal Bureau of Investigation	
Central Intelligence Agency	
Department of State	
Department of Homeland Security	
U.S. Institute of Peace	
U.S. Agency for International Development	
Defense Intelligence Agency	Joint Military Attaché School National Intelligence University
United Nations	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
International Committee of the Red Cross	
Islamic Relief USA	
Team Rubicon	

conflict occur. Finding ways to create options to prevent the vertical and horizontal escalation of a potential conflict is integral to understanding flexible deterrent options for preventing conflict while introducing confidence-building measures to understand how conflict could be mitigated or prevented.

Service component planning teams also generate Service-specific supporting plans for the USPACOM theater campaign plan, in addition to participating in planning that occurs at the USPACOM student-staff level. The development of Service component supporting campaign plans is critical to the process. It fosters the understanding of how operational mission tasking given to Service components is inextricably linked to Title 10 Service-level responsibilities of organizing, training, and equipping forward-deployed forces for military operations (figures 4 and 5).

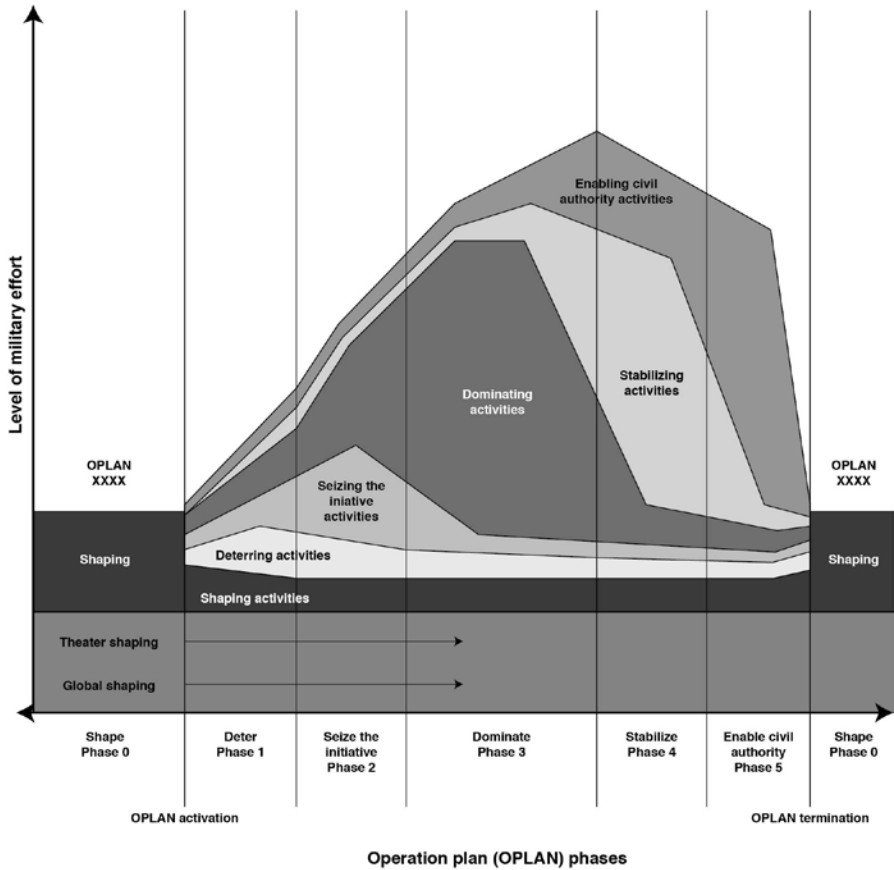
Nine Innings also is reliant upon expert advisors who provide adequate vectors for planning at this level, enriching the student experience. Nominally,

Figure 4. Joint operation planning activities, functions, and products



Note: IPR = in-progress review; IPR A = strategic guidance; IPR C = concept development; IPR F = plan approval; and IPR R = plan assessment.
 Courtesy of the authors, adapted by MCUP.

Figure 5. Notional operation plan phases and level of military effort



Courtesy of the authors, adapted by MCUP.

Nine Innings incorporates representation from the USPACOM and Service component staffs to guide the students in all things regarding the command. Moreover, students also are advised, assisted, and assessed in their performance by resident CSC military faculty and other subject-matter experts at MCU. Notably, Nine Innings incorporates the expertise of retired general and flag officers, ambassadors, and SES members who are physically present at the site of the exercise, mentoring the students throughout. It takes this level of expertise and advising to ensure that the students' perspectives on planning for operations at this level is enlivened and enriched.

Nine Innings, combined with USPACOM, also provides a broader opportunity for students to explore contentious issues facing Asia today; that is, Nine Innings incorporates the regional cooperation of a body such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) with military operations, balanced with diplomacy, economics, and third-party engagement. By replicating such entities as ASEAN within the exercise and using the skills and knowledge of the international students at CSC, Nine Innings, in all respects, is relevant, mod-

ern, and forward thinking. Moreover, this exposes students to the challenges experienced by a regional combatant command, which must balance agency, Service, and international differences into the decision-making process. The Asia-Pacific region is home to some of the most cooperative and contentious organizations and environments in the world; this is a place where consensus and noninterference are dominant (but not dogmatic) principles of behavior, but also where tension and mistrust are fueling potential conflict.

Ultimately, CSC graduates benefit when professional military education is paired with the operating forces to study and understand global (theater) challenges and when they are given the ability to generate and present potential solutions to a GCC commander. Nine Innings, in essence, offers the commander of USPACOM an alternative perspective of issues surrounding the region, and an annual affirming and anticipatory outlook on the value of the Pacific region to the United States and global environment.⁸ Beyond the evolution of the exercise, putting an entire combatant command's resources toward an academic exercise that provides a holistic look at theater campaign planning is ultimately value-added to the profession of arms in the near and long term. Currently, no other intermediate-level professional military education institution in the United States conducts an exercise of this type. Developing leaders who will be charged with addressing the complexities posed by evolving twenty-first century security environments is necessary; they need to be armed with the know-how to think, discern, and act—critical abilities for decision making today and tomorrow. Nine Innings, therefore, prepares future leaders and commanders by empowering them with the ability to discern and make decisions about real-world matters using a palette of techniques and abilities to lead in an uncertain and ambiguous future.

Figure 6. Command and Staff College class photo and Nine Innings participants, 2017



Official U.S. Marine Corps photo.

Notes

1. Exercise Nine Innings is a whole-of-faculty effort, and every member plays a role in development and execution. The authors acknowledge the contributions of those who had a significant role in the development of Exercise Nine Innings: Dr. Charles McKenna, Col Curt Ames (Ret), Dr. Christopher Jaspardo, Dr. Erin Simpson, Col Michael L. Carter, LtCol Patrick Simon, and LtCol Jeff Tlapa.
2. *Officer Professional Military Education Policy*, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Instruction (CJCSI) 1800.01E (Washington, DC: Office of the Joint Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2015), A-2–A-3.
3. Gen Anthony C. Zinni (Ret), “How Do We Overhaul the Nation’s Defense to Win the Next War?” (address at the Marine Corps Association and U.S. Naval Institute Forum, Arlington, VA, 4 September 2003), <http://www.dnipogo.org/fcs/comments/c496.htm>.
4. *Foreign Internal Defense*, Joint Publication 3-22 (Washington, DC: U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2010), xvii. “The GCC’s [geographic combatant commander] theater campaign plan is the primary document that focuses on the command’s steady-state activities, which include operations, SC [security cooperation], and other activities designed to achieve theater strategic end states.”
5. The Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies is a direct reporting branch of the Department of Defense that specializes in building relationships with military and government professionals from around the USPACOM/Pacific region.
6. The terms for Security Studies and War Studies were previously *Culture and Interagency Operations* and *Operational Art*, respectively. They were changed officially during academic year 2015.
7. *Joint Operation Planning*, Joint Publication 5-0 (Washington, DC: U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2011), xviii, II-14, II-24.
8. While justifiably proud of anticipating the Rebalance to Asia, the authors recognize that this was hardly a shocking policy move. Indeed, a great number of policies in the Rebalance were in fact initiated during the George W. Bush administration, and it is likely that without the 11 September 2001 attacks and the subsequent Global War on Terrorism, the shift toward Asia would have happened much earlier. See Benjamin M. Jensen and Eric Y. Shibuya, “The Military Rebalance as Retcon,” in *Origins and Evolution of the US Rebalance Toward Asia*, ed. Hugo Meijer (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 81–106.