Blunt Challenges: The Blunt Layer in Future Large-Scale Combat Operations

A Monograph

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2021

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

Form Approved
OMB No. 0704-0188

1. REPORT DATE *(DD-MM-YYYY)*	**2. REPORT TYPE**	**3. DATES COVERED** *(From - To)*
27 05 2021	MASTER'S MONOGRAPH	JUNE 20-MAY 21

4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE
Blunt Challenges: The Blunt Layer in Future Large-Scale Combat Operations

5a. CONTRACT NUMBER

5b. GRANT NUMBER

5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER

6. AUTHOR(S)
LTC Thomas C. Dunaway, USA

5d. PROJECT NUMBER

5e. TASK NUMBER

5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER

7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)
U.S. Army Command and General Staff College
ATTN: ATZL-SWD-GD
Fort Leavenworth, KS 66027-2301

8. PERFORMING ORG REPORT NUMBER

9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)
ADVANCED MILITARY STUDIES PROGRAM

10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)

11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)

12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT
Approved for Public Release; Distribution is Unlimited

13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES

14. ABSTRACT
Chinese and Russian investments in anti-access / area denial and other capabilities raise the possibility they may rapidly invade a US ally or partner. The 2018 *National Defense Strategy* introduced a new warfighting approach that includes a blunt layer of forces resisting the invasion from the start, until sufficient strength surges to transition to the offense. As the United States prepares for the future fight, it must identify the challenges associated with the blunt layer as a necessary first step to deter or defeat, an adversary *fait accompli.*

Conducting the blunt layer in large-scale combat operations would prove very challenging. Review of the operational requirements to deny, or degrade and delay enemy gains, provides clarity on the specific demands of blunting aggression. The opening days of the Korean War offer a useful, but imperfect, case study to illuminate these challenges in action. Reflection on subsequent changes in the US Army and relevant technological advances, as well as possible future scenarios, tests the analogy. From this reflection, blunt layer challenges are framed into eight categories: political, competitive, positional, manning, training, equipping, organization, and leadership. In most categories, conducting the blunt layer to oppose a future Chinese invasion of Taiwan or Russian invasion of Estonia would prove even more challenging than blunting the North Korean invasion of South Korea in 1950.

15. SUBJECT TERMS
National Defense Strategy, Blunt Layer, Fait Accompli, Korean War, Taiwan, Estonia

16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			**17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT**	**18. NUMBER OF PAGES**	**19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON**
a. REPORT	**b. ABSTRACT**	**c. THIS PAGE**			Thomas C. Dunaway
(U)	(U)	(U)	(U)	70	**19b. PHONE NUMBER** *(include area code)* (770) 298-0666

Standard Form 298 (Rev. 8-98)
Prescribed by ANSI Std. Z39.18

Monograph Approval Page

Name of Candidate: LTC Thomas C. Dunaway

Monograph Title: Blunt Challenges: The Blunt Layer in Future Large-Scale Combat Operations

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The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of the student author and do not necessarily represent the views of the US Army Command and General Staff College or any other government agency. (References to this study should include the foregoing statement.)

Abstract

Blunt Challenges: The Blunt Layer in Future Large-Scale Combat Operations, by LTC Thomas C. Dunaway, 11,221 words.

Chinese and Russian investments in anti-access / area denial and other capabilities raise the possibility they may rapidly invade a US ally or partner. The 2018 *National Defense Strategy* introduced a new warfighting approach to counter this *fait accompli* adversary theory of victory. The four-layer model differs from the slow build-up of force previously favored by the United States. It includes a blunt layer of forces resisting the invasion from the start, until sufficient strength surges to transition to the offense. As the United States prepares for the future fight, it must identify the challenges associated with the blunt layer as a necessary first step to deter or defeat, an adversary *fait accompli.*

Conducting the blunt layer in large-scale combat operations would prove very challenging. Review of the operational requirements to deny, or degrade and delay enemy gains, provides clarity on the specific demands of blunting aggression. The opening days of the Korean War offer a useful, but imperfect, case study to illuminate these challenges in action. Reflection on subsequent changes in the US Army and relevant technological advances, as well as possible future scenarios, tests the analogy. From this reflection blunt layer challenges are framed into eight categories: political, competitive, positional, manning, training, equipping, organization, and leadership. In most categories, conducting the blunt layer to oppose a future Chinese invasion of Taiwan or Russian invasion of Estonia would prove even more challenging than blunting the North Korean invasion of South Korea in 1950.

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Acknowledgements

My deepest love and appreciation to my wife, Amy, for her support throughout the, sometimes painful, writing process. My heartfelt thanks to my monograph director, Professor Eric Price. I knew from the first interview that he was exactly who I needed to ensure I stayed on track. My seminar leader, Colonel Matthew Yandura, provided helpful comments and inspired the push to produce an early draft. His personal mentorship was essential in maintaining a balance between class, monograph, and family. The faculty and students of the AMSP program provided continuous motivation to strive toward excellence. I would not trade this experience for any other assignment in the Army.

This monograph was inspired by, and is dedicated to, the memory of Captain William Russell "Buddy" Harris, my great uncle. Uncle Buddy, assigned to Company H, 2nd Battalion, 24th Infantry Regiment, 25th Infantry Division, was captured by Chinese communist forces on or about November 26, 1950 as his unit engaged the enemy near Anju. He was imprisoned at Camp 5 in Pyoktong, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, where he was reported to have died in May 1951. His remains were never returned and he is still unaccounted for. He is commemorated among the missing at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific.

Abbreviations

A2/AD	Anti-Access / Area Denial
ADP	Army Doctrine Publication
AI	Artificial Intelligence
CJCS	Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff
DPRK	Democratic People's Republic of Korea – North Korea
FM	Field Manual
ID	Infantry Division
JCS	Joint Chiefs of Staff
JDN	Joint Doctrine Note
JP	Joint Publication
KMAG	Korean Military Assistance Group
KPA	Korean People's Army – North Korean Army
LSCO	Large-Scale Combat Operations
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NDS	National Defense Strategy
PRC	People's Republic of China
RCT	Regimental Combat Team
ROK	Republic of Korea – South Korea
ROKA	Republic of Korea Army – South Korean Army
TRADOC	Training and Doctrine Command
UN	United Nations
UNC	United Nations Command

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1. Introduction

> We are fighting a battle against time. There will be no more retreating, withdrawal, or readjustment of the lines... There is no line behind us to which we can retreat. Every unit must counterattack to keep the enemy in a state of confusion and off balance. There will be no Dunkirk, there will be no Bataan. A retreat to Pusan would be one of the greatest butcheries in history. We must fight to the end.
>
> —General Walker, Eighth Army Commander, from Appleman, *South to the Naktong*

On June 25, 1950, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), intent on rapidly reunifying the peninsula under communist rule, launched an attack on the Republic of Korea (ROK).[1] Seven infantry divisions and an armor brigade of the DPRK's Korean People's Army (KPA) quickly pushed back the four ROK Army (ROKA) divisions and one regiment blocking their way. The South Korean capital fell in only 3 days.[2] Acting under United Nations (UN) authority, the United States rushed to stop the invasion, feeding the US 24th Infantry Division into the fight piecemeal, followed promptly by three more divisions. Despite this rapid response, combined US and ROK forces fell back in disarray throughout the month of July. By August, North Korea had hemmed the defenders into the southeastern tip of the peninsula.[3] Heavy fighting continued as US-led forces struggled to hold on in Korea until amphibious landings at Inchon on September 15 enabled the breakout from Pusan.[4]

The DPRK, a small country with half the population of its southern neighbor and an inconsequential air force and navy, nearly expelled American forces from the peninsula and presented the world with the *fait accompli* of a Korea united under communism.[5] This

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[1] The DPRK and ROK are also referred to as North Korea and South Korea, respectively.

[2] Roy E. Appleman, CMH Pub 20-2-1, *South to the Naktong, North to the Yalu, June-November 1950* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, United States Army, 1992), 19-20, 34.

[3] Center of Military History, CMH Pub 21-1, *Korea – 1950* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, United States Army, 1997), 14-15, 20.

[4] Max Hastings, *The Korean War* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1998). 97-98.

[5] Appleman, 2, 18; "*Fait Accompli*," Merriam-Webster, accessed 09 October 2020, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/fait accompli?src=search-dict-box.

humiliatingly close-run race took place fewer than five years after the end of World War II, when the United States stood as a military colossus, challengeable only by another super power. The KPA's near-success lay in rapidly grabbing and consolidating gains, exploiting the time normally required for US and UN-partner forces to mobilize and deploy. Only at enormous cost were US-led forces able to blunt the aggressor until sufficient combat power was available to transition to the offensive.[6] Today, China and Russia enjoy much greater advantages in relative military capability compared to the United States than did the DPRK in 1950.[7] They may seriously entertain seizing the territory of a US partner and extending an anti-access / area denial (A2/AD) umbrella as a viable *fait accompli* strategy to undermine the alliance structure so vital to US security and prosperity.[8]

The 2018 *National Defense Strategy* (NDS) introduced the Global Operating Model to inform a new warfighting approach to counter the *fait accompli* theory of victory. The model includes four layers: *contact*, for gray zone competition below the level of armed conflict; *homeland* to protect US sovereign territory; and *blunt* to deny, degrade, or delay the adversary until the deployment of a *surge* of war winning forces.[9] Although significant attention has been given to the contact, homeland, and surge layers there has been little discussion of the challenges of conducting the blunt layer.

Though the least studied, the blunt layer is arguably the most crucial and challenging layer of the model. US Army doctrine emphasizes that large-scale combat operations (LSCO) are

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[6] US combat casualties totaled 19,165 by September 15, including 4,280 killed in action (KIA), 2,107 missing in action (MIA) and 401 reported captured; Appleman, 547.

[7] Unless otherwise specified, in this monograph China refers to the People's Republic of China (PRC) and Taiwan to the Republic of China.

[8] US Congress, Senate, *Implementation of the National Defense Strategy: Hearing before the Senate Armed Services Committee.* 112th Cong., 2nd sess., January 29, 2019, 3-4, accessed 10 August 2020, https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Colby_01-29-19.pdf.

[9] US Department of Defense, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America: Sustaining the American Military's Competitive Edge* (Washington, DC: US Government Publishing Office. 2018), 7, accessed 10 July 2020, https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf.

"intense, lethal, and brutal," and will, "present the greatest challenge for Army forces."[10] In a *fait accompli* by China or Russia, blunt layer forces will include the first US units to experience LSCO in the 21st century. The United States has a poor track record in first battles, especially defensive ones.[11] US forces will be overmatched and at greatest risk prior to the arrival of the surge layer. Failure will, at best, result in China or Russia seizing partner territory and consolidating gains such that the cost of ejection may not be supportable. At worst, the United States suffers a serious defeat, loss of global influence, and casualty rates unseen in generations. As the US military orients for great power conflict, it must not succumb to over confidence, and neglect preparing for the essential blunt layer. A credible capability and capacity to blunt Chinese and Russian *fait accompli* theories of victory may be the most effective means of deterring the attempt.[12]

As a necessary first step in preparing for future conflict, the US military must develop a better understanding of both the requirements and challenges of conducting the blunt layer. Those challenges are framed into three national-strategic categories: political, competitive, and positional; and five from the Army Vision: manning, training, equipping, organization, and leadership (see table 1).[13] Political challenges include those related to diplomatic relations and limitations on the conduct of conflict. Competitive challenges derive from the NDS' acknowledgement that the US military advantage relative to China and Russia is eroding.[14] Positional challenges combine those related to posture and the ability to maneuver across

[10] US Department of the Army, Field Manual (FM) 3-0, *Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Publishing Office, 2017), 1-2.

[11] Charles E. Heller and William A. Stofft, *America's First Battles, 1776-1965* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1986), 342.

[12] US Congress, Senate, *Implementation of the NDS*, 6.

[13] US Department of the Army, *The Army Vision*, 1-2, accessed 04 October 2020, https://www.army.mil/e2/downloads/rv7/vision/the_army_vision.pdf.

[14] US Department of Defense, *Summary of the NDS,* 1.

strategic distances.[15] Manning includes challenges related to maintaining blunt layer unit strength. Training challenges comprise individual and unit preparation for blunt layer tasks on a highly contested battlefield. Equipping challenges touch on both necessary materiel solutions and sustainment. Organization challenges encompass unit design, task organization, and cohesion. Finally, leadership challenges include those related to the preparation, capability, and resilience of decision-makers faced with the trying conditions of LSCO in the blunt layer.

Table 1. Blunt Layer Challenge Categories

• Political • Competitive • Positional	• Manning • Training • Equipping	• Organization • Leadership

Source: Created by author.

Methodology and Structure

Through the lenses of history and doctrine, this monograph relies on archival material, historiography, and potential adversary scenarios to identify challenges US forces will face when blunting an adversary's aggression in future LSCO as envisioned in the NDS. Strategic guidance and doctrine provide the basis to better define the purpose and requirements for forces in the blunt layer. Subsequently, a case study examining the opening months of the Korean War will provide an example of the challenges associated with the blunt layer and the practical impact of those challenges on the forces operating there. With this foundation established, a survey of current US strength and posture, as well as technology changes since 1950, illuminates how blunt layer challenges have evolved. An examination of Chinese and Russian *fait accompli* scenarios facing the US reveals the implications of geography; alliances; and threat capability, capacity, and doctrine for these potential threats going forward. Thus, finally, collective analysis of this

[15] US Department of the Army, TRADOC Pamphlet 525-3-1 *The US Army in Multi-Domain Operations, 2028* (Washington, DC: Government Publishing Office, 2018), 17-18.

information derives a list of blunt layer challenges by category and a qualitative assessment of the difficulty of each challenge in the future scenarios relative to the historical case study.

Scope and Limitations

This monograph seeks to broadly describe the challenges of conducting the blunt layer in accordance with the NDS in future peer-conflict. It draws on lessons from the opening months of the Korean War that, by comparison, may remain relevant to future conflict. It then pursues further understanding by contrasting the case study with subsequent changes and likely future conflict scenarios. It is not intended to be a detailed study of the challenges of the Korean War in general and examines only the period up to September 15, 1950. Detailed analysis of specific events is less important to the research question than the extraction of broad types of challenges related to the concept of blunting an adversary *fait accompli*. The focus area for the case study is within the contested land domain. Notable exceptions include the role of political decisions in shaping the conduct of the war and that of air and naval power in establishing and maintaining supremacy within their domains.

2. Defining the Blunt Layer

The 2018 *National Defense Strategy* (NDS) shifts the focus of the Joint Force from terrorism to the threat posed by great power competition, particularly with China and Russia. US security and prosperity is reliant on maintaining the current rules-based international order and the favorable balances of power which support it. China and Russia both seek to subvert this order by undermining the US alliance and partnership network. Each seeks regional hegemony. China aspires to displace the United States as the global superpower in the future, and has long sought reunification with Taiwan, never having renounced the use of force to do so.[16] Russia wants to shatter the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in order to gain greater freedom of action on its periphery, a goal which would be advanced by successfully seizing the territory of a NATO ally, such as one of the Baltic States.[17]

The overwhelming success of the US-led coalition in the 1991 Gulf War provided lessons for China and Russia. Following a slow build-up of massive military might, the coalition rapidly dismantled Saddam Hussein's air defenses, liberated Kuwait, and destroyed the Iraqi armed forces. The US military appeared to hold an unchallengeable, all-domain, military superiority. For decades, they could deploy forces globally and operate uncontested. Chinese and Russian planners took this as a compelling illustration of how not to fight the United States and set about developing alternative strategies.[18]

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[16] US Department of Defense, *Summary of the NDS,* 2*;* US Department of Defense, *Indo-Pacific Strategy Report: Preparedness, Partnerships, and Promoting a Networked Region* (Washington, DC: Government Publishing Office, June 1, 2019), 8, accessed 12 September 2020, https://media.defense.gov/2019/Jul/01/2002152311/-1/-1/1/DEPARTMENT-OF-DEFENSE-INDO-PACIFIC-STRATEGY-REPORT-2019.PDF.

[17] The Baltic States include Estonia, the target of the scenario presented here, as well as Latvia and Lithuania; US Congress, Senate, *Implementation of the NDS*, 11.

[18] Michael, Puttre, "Winning on the Battlefield Is Not Enough," *Mercatus Center*, May 13, 2020, accessed 12 September 2020, https://www.mercatus.org/bridge/commentary/winning-battlefield-not-enough.

One of the most challenging adversary theories of victory, the one which the NDS is designed to counter, is the *fait accompli*. In this strategy, China or Russia counter a slow military build-up, à la Desert Storm, with quick action and leveraging their advantages in geography and technology. In such a scenario, an adversary rapidly seizes the territory of a US ally or partner, extends its A2/AD network, and quickly consolidates gains in hopes of creating a situation too politically or militarily onerous for the United States to reverse – a *fait accompli*.[19]

How? The Global Operating Model

The NDS introduced the global operating model to inform a new warfighting approach to defeat the *fait accompli* theory of victory. The 2017 *National Security Strategy* requires the military to convince adversaries that such attacks can be defeated, not just punished after the fact.[20] Rather than deterring through the threat of punishment, potentially requiring nuclear escalation, deterrence by denial is achieved by undermining the adversary's confidence in his ability to achieve his objective. This can be accomplished by demonstrating the capability and will to block or reverse the action to be deterred, or by raising the perceived cost of success higher than the adversary is willing to pay.[21] The model contains four layers which, together, enhance the ability to compete, deter, and if necessary, defeat aggression while creating more and better options for decision-makers.[22]

The four layers of the global operating model are *contact*, *blunt*, *surge*, and *homeland defense*. They describe functions, rather than attributes or locations of forces, and units can transition between different layers during a conflict. The contact layer focuses on competition

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[19] US Congress, Senate, *Implementation of the NDS*, 4.

[20] Donald J. Trump, *National Security Strategy of the United States* (Washington, DC: The White House, 2017), 28.

[21] Glenn H. Snyder, "Deterrence and Power," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 4, no. 2 (June 1960): 163, accessed 11 December 2020, https://www.jstor.org/stable/172650.

[22] US Department of Defense, *Summary of the NDS*, 7; US Congress, Senate, *Implementation of the NDS*, 6.

below the level of armed conflict, in cooperation with allies and partners, to challenge Chinese and Russian malign activities, increase intelligence sharing, and to bolster the defenses of key security partners. The blunt layer acts to either deny adversary goals or degrade and delay the consolidation of gains while the United States marshals additional strength. It is followed by the surge layer of war-winning decisive force, delayed by mobilization, preparation, and shipment from other parts of the world. In recognition that US adversaries have global reach, the homeland layer serves to deter and defend against attacks at home before, during, and in the aftermath of armed conflict. A blunted or reversed invasion would leave the adversary with the choice of settling on terms acceptable to the United States or expanding the war in ways that play to American advantages or risk escalation to nuclear war.[23]

The blunt layer is the most critical, but least considered part of the model. The *fait accompli* is promising for adversaries specifically because of the perceived US preference for slowly building overwhelming force before beginning armed conflict. The blunt layer is crucial as it is driven by the need to fight through a contested operational environment from the very start of armed conflict. Because of the immediacy of requirements, the blunt layer demands combat credible forces that are forward deployed, rapidly deployable, or have capabilities that can quickly project effects into the area of operations. Despite this criticality, little attention has been given to the blunt layer. Using the subject terms "competition, mobilization, and homeland," for the contact, surge, and homeland layers, respectively, a search of all Ike Skelton Combined Army Research Library collections yielded 22, 214, and 106 returns, respectively. There were no publications in the collections with "blunt" included in the subject or title and, as of this date, only one that included the term "blunt layer" anywhere in the document.[24]

[23] US Department of Defense, *Summary of the NDS*, 7; US Congress, Senate, *Implementation of the NDS*, 6.

[24] Search conducted on September 12, 2020.

What? Blunt Layer Tasks of Deny, Degrade, and Delay

To conduct a successful *fait accompli*, the adversary must seize territory rapidly and then consolidate gains by extending an A2/AD cover and seeking a political resolution that leaves them in control of the new territory. Forces in the blunt layer must act quickly to frustrate these objectives. Preferably, blunt layer forces deny the initial seizure. Failing that, they work to degrade the adversary and delay him from locking in gains until decisive surge layer forces can be readied, deployed, and brought to bear.[25] Examination of the terms deny, degrade, and delay in doctrine and theory provides deeper insight into these requirements.

Deny, along with delay and degrade, it is a key term proposed in the joint doctrinal note on the competition continuum, where to deny is to "frustrate the strategic objectives of the adversary."[26] In US Army doctrine, denial operations are, "actions to hinder or deny the enemy the use of space, personnel, supplies, or facilities." The joint doctrinal term for denial measure uses similar language. Denial operations may include the destruction of supplies, equipment, and facilities to prevent their use by the enemy. The commander must balance the value gained from denying assets to the enemy against the cost to future friendly operations, as well as political, economic, and moral considerations.[27]

Degrade is defined in a joint doctrine note as to, "reduce the adversary's ability and will to the greatest extent possible within resource constraints and acceptable risk."[28] Consistent with this term, Clausewitz observed that the enemy's power of resistance is the product of all the

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[25] US Congress, Senate, *Implementation of the NDS*, 5-6.

[26] US Department of Defense, Joint Staff, Joint Doctrine Note (JDN) 1-19, *Competition Continuum* (Washington, DC: Government Publishing Office, 2019), 5.

[27] US Department of the Army, Field Manual (FM) 3-90-1, *Offense and Defense*, Vol. 1 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2013), 9-19 to 9-20; US Department of Defense, Joint Staff, Joint Publication (JP) 3-15, *Barriers, Obstacles, and Mine Warfare for Joint Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Publishing Office, 2018), II-7.

[28] US Joint Staff, JDN 1-19, 5.

means at his disposal and his will.[29] Blunt layer forces should attempt to degrade not only the adversary's military capabilities, but his willingness to continue the fight. Boyd's observe, orient, decide, act loop provides insight into degrading the enemy's cognitive cohesion and will, through the rapid or simultaneous presentation of multiple dilemmas, one of the principles of unified land operations. Simultaneous operations across domains, in depth, and supported by military deception create multiple dilemmas that place critical enemy functions at risk.[30]

US Army doctrine defines delay as a type of retrograde movement, "when a force under pressure trades space for time by slowing down the enemy's momentum and inflicting maximum damage on enemy forces without becoming decisively engaged." The joint doctrine note defines delay as to, "achieve the best possible strategic objective within given resources or policy constraints, recognizing that this lesser objective entails risk that the competitor will achieve further gains." Both definitions acknowledge that the adversary makes gains, but that friendly forces act to increase the time required by the enemy to achieve them.[31] The joint key term best applies to delaying the consolidation of gains within the target territory. The army definition is most appropriate to delaying the actual seizure of territory and preserving a bridgehead for later surge layer forces. Time is crucial for adversary and friendly forces, as the former race to consolidate gains before the later can mobilize, deploy, and employ the decisive surge layer. The tyranny of time and distance determines which forces can make up the blunt layer and how long they must delay the enemy.

Who, When, and How Long? Blunt Layer Composition and Duration

[29] Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 177.

[30] John Boyd and Grant Tedrick Hammond, *A Discourse on Winning and Losing* (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air University Press, 2018), 22; US Department of the Army, Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 3-0, *Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Publishing Office, 2019), 3-7 to 3-10.

[31] US Department of the Army, Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 3-90, *Offense and Defense* (Washington, DC: Government Publishing Office, 2019), 4-3 to 4-4; US Department of Defense, JDN 1-19, 5.

The NDS-informed warfighting approach to defeat a *fait accompli* requires the United States and its partners to fight back against attacks from the first. Forces making up the blunt layer must be those that can act against adversary aggression quickly.[32] Blunt layer forces will include those of the targeted nation, US and partner forward deployed forces, ready forces that can be rapidly deployed from elsewhere, those who can fall in on locally pre-positioned equipment, and those who can rapidly project effects against the adversary. Potential rapidly deployable units include the US Immediate Response Force and the NATO Response Force's Very High Readiness Joint Task Force.[33] Army prepositioned stocks include forward located unit sets of equipment. Ready personnel from other parts of the world can be quickly airlifted, draw the equipment, and join the blunt layer, saving time required for sealift.[34] Maritime, air, cyber, and space forces all have the potential to project effects without larger forward deployments.

If deterrence fails, blunt layer activity begins with the first resistance by the targeted partner. It continues until sufficient surge layer forces are available to transition to the offense. How long this requires depends on the force needed to counter the adversary, the size and nature of the blunt forces, and delays in mobilization and deployment. A 2019 RAND study based on a large-scale deployment derived from an approved concept plan, estimated an additional 10,000 soldiers could be surged in three weeks, rising to 30,000 by week six and, 50,000 by week eight. In the RAND model, which assumes no adversary interference with mobilization or deployment, it requires eighteen weeks for the surge to reach 100,000 soldiers (see figure 1). Reserve

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[32] US Congress, Senate, *Implementation of the NDS*, 6.

[33] Matthew Cox, "Emergency Paratrooper Deployment is First for New Army Response Force," military news at Military.com, January 2, 2020, accessed 12 October 2020, https://www.military.com/daily-news/2020/01/02/emergency-army-deployment-first-new-paratrooper-response-force.html; "NATO Response Force," North Atlantic Treaty Organization, last modified March 17, 2020, accessed 24 November 2020, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_49755.htm?selectedLocale=en.

[34] US Department of Defense, Joint Staff, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Instruction (CJCSI) 4310.01E, "Logistics Planning Guidance for Pre-Positioned War Reserve Materiel," (Washington, DC: Government Publishing Office, 2020), GL-4.

component brigade combat teams are unlikely to arrive earlier than week twelve.[35] Although there are many variables that could impact the estimate, a viable blunt layer must continue for no fewer than eight weeks to allow for a minimally sufficient surge layer to arrive.

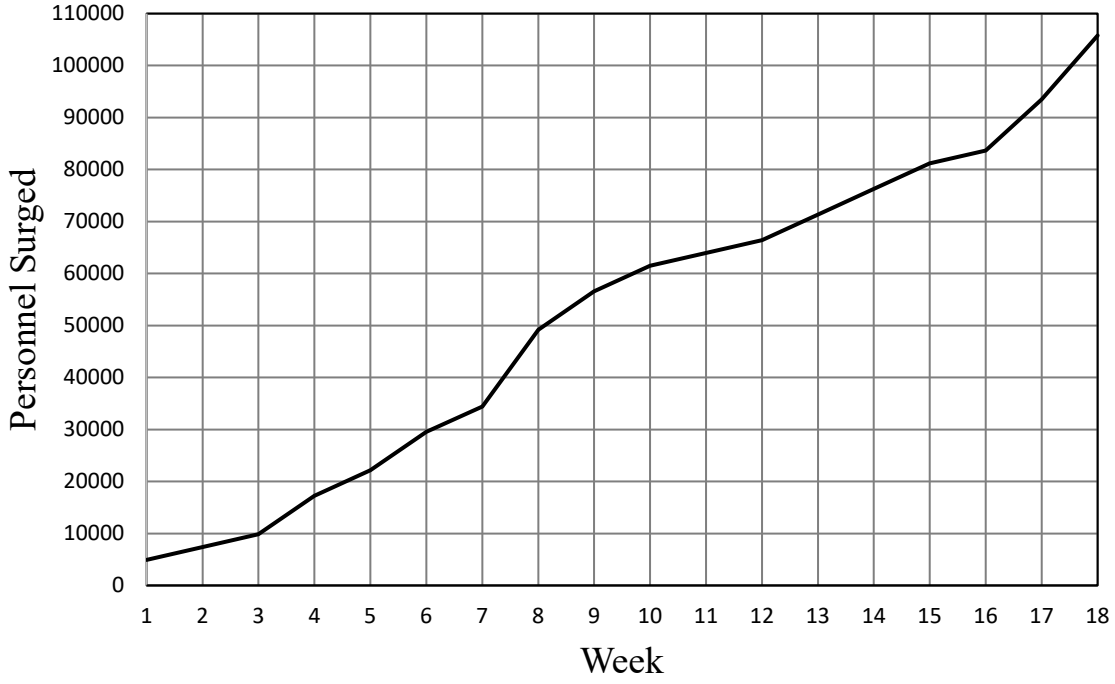

Figure 1. Size of surge layer force over time. Created by author using data derived from Michael E. Linick et al., *A Throughput-Based Analysis of Army Active Component/Reserve Component Mix for Major Contingency Surge Operations* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2019), 36 and 42, accessed 14 September 2020, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1516.html.

[35] Michael E. Linick et al., *A Throughput-Based Analysis of Army Active Component/Reserve Component Mix for Major Contingency Surge Operations* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2019), 36 and 42, accessed 14 September 2020, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1516.html.

3. The Blunt Layer in the Korean War

The opening days of the Korean War provide a useful case study of the challenges of conducting the blunt layer in LSCO. Similar to the adversary theory of victory the global operating model is intended to counter, North Korea sought the *fait accompli* seizure of South Korea before the United States could intervene.[36] To foil this strategy, the US forces that could be most quickly shifted to the peninsula combined with the South Korean Army to delay, degrade, and ultimately, deny DPRK success while a surge of offensive capability was assembled.

Other examples of LSCO involving the United States are less effective as analogies. The Gulf War and Iraq War were the anti-thesis of the conditions proposed in the blunt layer. In each case, the United States was able to slowly build offensive force and choose when to begin ground combat.[37] America entered the Vietnam War incrementally, never facing the rushed conditions of the blunt layer.[38] The 1941-1942 defense of the Philippines included the conduct of the blunt layer in LSCO, but lacked the risk of nuclear escalation, and is a failed case, in that the United States did not reinforce the defenders, most of whom were captured or killed.[39]

First Days of the Korean War, June 25 – September 15, 1950

The DPRK's KPA launched a four-pronged attack into the ROK, intent on reunifying Korea under communist rule on June 25, 1950 (see figure 2). The ROKA, without armor, anti-tank weapons, or heavy artillery where unable to mount a significant defense, and Seoul fell in

[36] Allan Reed Millett, *The War for Korea* (Lawrence, KS: Univ. Press of Kansas, 2010), 12.

[37] Allan R. Millett and Peter Maslowski, *For the Common Defense: a Military History of the United States of America* (New York, NY: Free Press, 2012), 593-601, 655-656.

[38] Russell F. Weigley, *The American Way of War: a History of United States Military Strategy and Policy* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana Univ. Press, 1991), 457-465.

[39] General MacArthur, who was the American commander during the blunt and initial surge in Korea was also the commander in the Philippines, prior to his evacuation; Millett and Maslowski, 593-601, 375-376.

the first week of fighting.[40] General MacArthur, who would lead the United Nations (UN) military response, questioned South Korea's ability to continue the fight, saying "our best estimate is that complete collapse is imminent."[41] Absent a rapid and substantial military intervention, the DPRK was poised to present the world with a successful *fait accompli* in Korea.

Figure 2. Routes of KPA Advance: Korean War, June-August 1950.
Allan R. Millett, "Korean War, 1950-53," Britannica, accessed 12 November 2020, https://www.britannica.com/event/Korean-War.

[40] Millett, *War for Korea*, 53; William J. Webb, CMH Pub 19-6, *The Korean War: The Outbreak, 27 June – 15 September, 1950* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, United States Army, 2000), 9.

[41] Hastings, 73.

Over the next two months, South Korean troops and a rapidly dispatched US Task Force, repeatedly defeated by the advancing KPA, were pushed south to a 140-mile toehold around the port of Pusan. For six weeks, the UNC held out in bloody fighting along the Pusan Perimeter where ground forces Commander, Lieutenant General Walker issued a "stand or die order" (see figure 3).[42] Despite steep costs, the blunt layer had fulfilled its requirement by holding on to the port of Pusan until the amphibious assault at Inchon on September 15. With the recapture of Seoul, KPA resistance in the south came to an end and the UNC shifted, at long last, to the offense.

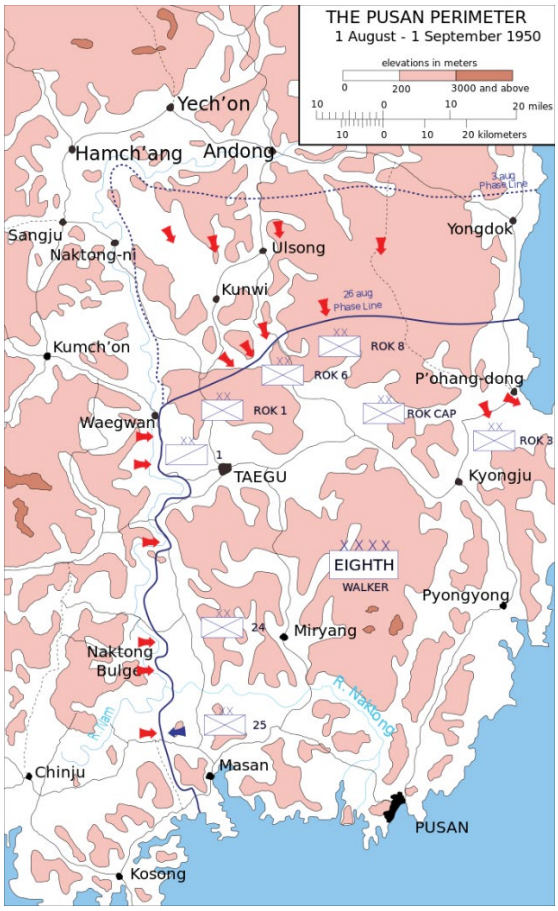

Figure 3. The Pusan Perimeter. William J. Webb, CMH Pub 19-6, *The Korean War: The Outbreak, 27 June – 15 September, 1950* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, United States Army, 2000), 18.

[42] See opening epigraph; Appleman, 207-208.

Case Study Analysis

Political

War is political in nature, so it is no surprise that there are political challenges to the conduct of the blunt layer.[43] Centered on the defense of a partner, operations in the blunt layer are inherently multi-national. Pre-conflict, security cooperation investments shape the capability and capacity of the targeted nation as well as US access and local posture.[44] Once combat begins, the aggressor seeks recognition of his claims, while the defender petitions for support from the international community. Although the aggressor has the unlimited aim of conquest, he seeks to limit the scope of the war by concluding it quickly before outside participants can intervene. US support to a partner in the blunt layer will also be limited to avoid potential nuclear escalation, and to preserve combat force to deter opportunistic aggression elsewhere.[45]

South Korea was poorly equipped to defend itself as a result of American security cooperation decisions. MacArthur wanted the ROKA strong enough to provide internal security, but too weak to threaten North Korea. In 1949, the United States transferred light infantry equipment for 50,000 troops to the South Korean army, but no heavy weapons.[46] Some 500 Korean Military Assistance Group (KMAG) advisors maintained the only US military presence on the peninsula. In 1950, they described their ROKA counterparts as, "not adequately equipped…to secure the Republic against invasion," and requested additional funding for air,

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[43] Clausewitz, 87.

[44] US Department of Defense, Joint Staff, Joint Publication (JP) 3-20, *Security Cooperation* (Washington, DC: Government Publishing Office, 2017), GL-5.

[45] Andrew Krepinevich, "Protracted Great-Power War: A Preliminary Assessment," American Competes 2020. Center for a New American Security, February 5, 2020, accessed 10 December 2020, https://www.cnas.org/publications/reports/protracted-great-power-war; US Department of Defense, *Summary of the NDS*, 6.

[46] James Schnabel, *The United States Army and the Korean War Policy and Direction: The First Year* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, United States Army, 1992), 20-21, 34-35, accessed 12 September 2020, https://history.army.mil/books/p&d.htm.

artillery, and naval equipment, none of which would arrive before the invasion.[47] The request neglected armor or anti-tank weapons as the commander of the advisory group remained convinced tank warfare was impossible among the rice paddies and narrow roads of Korea.[48] As a result, the South Korean military, confronting invasion from the north, lacked armor, air power, heavy artillery, or enough serviceable vehicles to provide sustained logistics.[49]

The United States immediately sought UN support in response to the invasion. North Korea's strongest potential backers were the communist People's Republic of China (PRC), not yet recognized by the UN, and the Soviet Union, whose delegate boycotted United Nations Security Council meetings.[50] This cleared the way to pass a series of US-sponsored resolutions calling on the DPRK to withdraw and soon authorizing a unified military command. US President Truman authorized air and naval support to the ROK and appointed MacArthur as commanding general of the United Nations Military Command.[51].

Truman intended to fight a limited engagement in Korea, referring to it as a "police action" rather than a war.[52] He was concerned the invasion might be the first step in a wider fight.[53] Despite the critical need for immediate combat strength to stem the invasion, the readiest division, the 82nd Airborne, was kept in the general reserve.[54] The Joint Staff remained worried that the Soviets might seize the opportunity to take aggressive action elsewhere, especially

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[47] Millett, *War for Korea*, 30-32.

[48] Bill Sloan, *The Darkest Summer: Pusan and Inchon 1950: the Battles That Saved South Korea--and the Marines--from Extinction* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2009), 2.

[49] Millett, *War for Korea*, 24.

[50] Dean Acheson, *The Korean War* (New York, NY: Norton, 1971), 18-19.

[51] Appleman, 61, 112.

[52] Acheson, 34-35; "The United Nations in Korea," Harry S. Truman Library, accessed 21 November 2020, https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/education/presidential-inquiries/united-nations-korea.

[53] James Schnabel and Robert Watson, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy, Volume III 1950-1951: The Korean War, Part One* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1998), 73, accessed 12 September 2020, https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a350171.pdf.

[54] Edwin P. Hoyt, *The Pusan Perimeter: Korea, 1950* (New York, NY: Stein and Day Publishers, 1984), 54.

Western Europe.[55] To avoid escalation with China, Truman declined Taiwan's offer of 33,000 soldiers, instructed the Nationalists not to attack the mainland, and ordered the navy to the island to deter invasion by the PRC. Additionally, the Soviet Union had detonated its first nuclear weapon only the year before, and this capability further raised the stakes of escalation on the peninsula.[56]

Competitive

An attempted *fait accompli* is a war of choice by the aggressor. Initial force ratios in the blunt layer will favor the attacker. The United States has long applied "offset strategies" to counter numerical strength with technological superiority.[57] The central theme of the 2018 NDS is the erosion of this competitive edge.[58] The United States is unlikely to enjoy uncontested all-domain superiority and may even be overmatched in the blunt layer.[59] First battles are often testing grounds for new capabilities and doctrines that the United States may be poorly prepared to counter.

The first US troops to attempt to blunt the North Korean invasion operated without air support or weapons capable of countering communist armor. General Dean's 24th Infantry Division (24ID), was led by a 500-man delaying force, Task Force Smith, now synonymous with unpreparedness at the start of armed conflict. Outnumbered and without armor, effective anti-tank weapons, or air support, they were overrun near Osan by two tank-led KPA regiments led on July 5, 1950.[60]

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[55] Schnabel and Watson, 45.

[56] Schnabel, 41.

[57] Nuclear weapons shaped the first offset while stealth and precision guided munitions formed the second. The current third offset seeks to leverage robotics, artificial intelligence, and miniaturization; Peter Grier, "The First Offset," *Airforce Magazine* (June 2016): 56, accessed 12 December 2020, https://www.airforcemag.com/PDF/MagazineArchive/Magazine%20Documents/2016/June%202016/0616offset.pdf.

[58] US Department of Defense, *Summary of the NDS*, cover pages, 1, 3.

[59] US Department of the Army, FM 3-0, 1-5 to 1-6.

[60] Webb, 11-13.

The United States soon established a strong competitive edge over North Korea, who could only seriously contest American might in the land domain. US forces enjoyed supremacy in the maritime and air domains throughout the opening months of the Korean War.[61] Together, they ensured unimpeded movement of reinforcements and supplies to Korean ports and seriously degraded KPA logistics.[62] American air power limited North Korean supply convoys to night movement. Naval supremacy allowed direct bombardment of most of the combat zone by shipboard guns and naval aviation, both of which played a critical role in the defense of the Pusan Perimeter.[63] Air and naval power were essential to the amphibious landing at Inchon, which signaled the transition from the blunt layer to the offense.[64]

Even with this superior competitive edge in multi-domain superiority, 24ID paid a heavy price to delay the KPA while additional divisions arrived on the peninsula.[65] Committed piecemeal on the ROKA left flank, the tragic experience of Task Force Smith was repeated time-and-again on the withdrawal southward. In the failed defense of Taejon, the division lost most of their equipment, and suffered the capture of their commander.[66] Two newly arrived US divisions did not perform much better than 24ID and continued to withdraw through the rest of July.[67] Absent air and naval superiority, the blunt layer would certainly have failed in Korea.

Positional

Countering a *fait accompli* requires blunt layer forces to resist the adversary from the start.[68] Flowing units, especially with heavy equipment, is time consuming. General MacArthur

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[61] Webb, 3.

[62] Schnabel and Watson, 90.

[63] Appleman, 377, 408.

[64] Webb, 12.

[65] 25th Infantry Division arrived on July 15th and the 1st Cavalry Division (an infantry division despite the name) arrived on the 18th; Webb, 15-16.

[66] Sloan, 79.

[67] Webb, 15-16.

[68] US Congress, Senate, *Implementation of the NDS*, 6.

summarized failure in war with two words, "too late."[69] Forward stationed and rapidly deployable units, as well as prepositioned equipment, access agreements, and systems capable of projecting effects from the homeland reduce positional challenges.

The United States was well positioned to conduct the blunt layer in Korea. Approximately 500 American advisors were serving alongside the South Korean Army at the time of the invasion.[70] 108,500 of the US Army's 591,000 soldiers were stationed in the Far East, including four divisions in Japan.[71] The close proximity of these forces enabled the rapid reinforcement of South Korea.[72] 2ID's arrival at Pusan from the continental United States on July 31 demonstrated the capacity for rapid movement across strategic distances. It was the fastest overseas transport of a combat division in US history.[73]

Manning

Pentagon leaders believe the US Army is too small to meet current worldwide requirements.[74] Wartime demand would be much greater. The critical manning challenge lies in the tension between initial fill and replacements for blunt layer units and the buildup of the surge force. The blunt may be overrun if undermanned, yet choking off flow to the surge layer delays the transition to the offense.

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[69] Robert R. Leonhard and James R. McDonagh, *Fighting by Minutes: Time and the Art of War* (New York, NY: Pronoun, 2017), 137.

[70] Sloan, 2.

[71] Schnabel, 43.

[72] Schnabel and Watson, 20.

[73] Terrence Gough, CMH Pub 70-19, *US Army Mobilization and Logistics in the Korean War: A Research Approach* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, United States Army, 1987), 46-47.

[74] Mark Milley, "Speech to the National Press Club," National Press Club, Washington, DC, July 27, 2017, 10, accessed 14 September 2020, http://www.press.org/sites/default/files/20170727_milley.pdf.

Reduced eighty-nine to only ten active divisions, US Army of 1950 was not the force it had been at the end of World War II.[75] Most divisions were manned at only 70% of wartime strength.[76] MacArthur had cannibalized the 7ID, which remained in Japan, in order to man his other divisions headed to Korea. Individual and unit levees of forces in the United States followed. Eighth Army processed 38,000 replacements by September 30.[77] Concerned with war needs in Korea and the depletion of reserve capacity for a larger war, Congress voted to extend enlistments, authorize the mobilization of reservists, and induct draftees. Mobilization plans never anticipated providing combat replacements in the first year of war. National Guard units and draftees required months before they could be deployed – too late to support the blunt layer.[78] Thus, by August 1950, MacArthur was augmenting divisions with Korean volunteers.[79]

Training

British military theorist, J.F.C. Fuller, observed that, all else being equal in war, the largest army prevails, but that "things are never equal."[80] Outnumbered blunt layer forces require an edge in training to overcome their initial disadvantage against a larger adversary. Preparation must focus on defensive tasks, toughening soldiers for the rigors of intense combat, and development of units that can fight and win as cohesive teams.[81] Competing requirements, limited

[75] Mark Olinger, Land Warfare Paper No. 70: "US Army Mobilization During the Korean War and Its Aftermath" (Arlington, VA: Association of the United States Army, 2008) 1-2, accessed 12 September 2020, https://www.ausa.org/publications/us-army-mobilization-during-korean-war-and-its-aftermath.

[76] Schnabel and Watson, 20.

[77] Gough, 25, 40.

[78] Gough, 28-29, 33, 41.

[79] Appleman, 386.

[80] Charles M. Westenhoff, *Military Airpower: a Revised Digest of Airpower Opinions and Thoughts* (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, 2007), 65.

[81] US Department of the Army, Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 7-0, *Training* (Washington, DC: Government Publishing Office, 2018), 1-1.

time and resources, and the *ad hoc* task organizations likely in the rush to counter an invasion, are particular challenges to training for the blunt layer.[82]

Eighth Army was poorly trained for combat in Korea. Until recently, their primary duty had been occupation.[83] Although General Walker renewed combat training in 1949, it had not progressed above battalion level. Crowded Japan offered few suitable training areas.[84] The 21st RCT, which would provide the core of Task Force Smith, had never trained with artillery or tanks.[85] Budget cuts had reduced available training periods army-wide.[86] Replacement units rushed to Korea later, fared little better. The 29th RCT was told they would complete six weeks of training before going to Korea, but received movement orders the next day. They were then assured they would have ten training days near Pusan, but this was cut to three on arrival. Two battalions were then shipped immediately to the front, without even this paltry time. Rather than six weeks of training, they entered combat fresh off the ship with un-zeroed rifles.[87]

Equipping

It is in the nature of the *fait accompli* that blunt layer operations take place with little or no time for preparation. Initial forces must fight with the equipment and supplies they have on hand, a particular challenge if they are mismatched to the enemy's capabilities. Industrial mobilization is too slow to supply the blunt layer, which must rely on existing stocks. Sustainment operations to ensure the flow of the right materiel to the soldiers who need it most, depends on the organization of the system, available service personnel, and the local infrastructure.

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[82] US Army ADP 7-0, 4-2.

[83] Schnabel, 54.

[84] Appleman, 113.

[85] Heller and Stofft, 273.

[86] Schnabel and Watson, 21.

[87] Appleman, 214-215.

American soldiers in Korea at the start of the war lacked the types and quantity of equipment needed to stop the North Korean advance. This point is illustrated by the case of Task Force Smith, the first US unit to face the KPA. The combined armor and infantry attack of the KPA routed the ROK and US forces on the peninsula because they lacked any effective anti-armor capability. Neither had tanks or anti-tank mines, and US rocket launchers and recoilless rifles were unable to penetrate North Korean armor.[88] Due to equipment shortages, Eighth Army infantry regiments had no tank companies and division tank battalions included only one light tank company. Artillery battalions were reduced to only two of three authorized batteries.[89]

The products of industrial mobilization would not be available until 1951.[90] Surplus stocks from World War II supplied US blunt layer forces in the first months of the Korean War.[91] In 1945, large stocks of supplies and equipment were left scattered across the far east. MacArthur began Operation Roll-up in 1947 to recover and rehabilitate useful war surplus that later proved critical to supplying UNC forces in Korea.[92] In just July and August 1950, Roll-up provided 8,000 reserviced vehicles to the war effort.[93] However, there were critical shortages of newer equipment such as radios, tanks, and self-propelled artillery, and serious imbalances in the stockpile of ammunition.[94]

Infrastructure and air supremacy strongly impacted sustainment operations. Pusan, the key terrain for the blunt layer, had the best deep-water port in Korea and was connected to an

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[88] Heller and Stofft, 298.

[89] Millett, *War for Korea*, 78-79.

[90] Gough, 115.

[91] James A. Huston, "Korea and Logistics," in *The Long Haul: Historical Case Studies of Sustainment in Large-Scale Combat Operations*, ed. Keith R. Beurskens (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Army University Press, 2018), 79.

[92] Schnabel, 58.

[93] Appleman, 115.

[94] Schnabel, 45-46.

excellent rail system, but the country's road network was very poor.[95] Supplies unloaded from ships, moved by train to forward depots where truck convoys would drive them as far as possible before transferring to Korean hand carriers as the final link to front line units. Without air supremacy, the port, rail system, and forward depots would all have been vulnerable to disruption. Given infrastructure differences, each conflict location offers a unique sustainment challenge.

Organization

Units must be properly organized in order to survive in the blunt layer. Peacetime unit design and task organization are often better suited to preserve structure in a resource constrained environment than to prepare for the challenges of the blunt layer.[96] Additionally, piecemeal deployment, *ad hoc* task organization, dispersion, and combat overmatch, including the possible need to withdraw under fire, undermine cohesion.[97]

Eighth Army was structured for occupation duty, not for the fight they would face in Korea. Due to personnel shortages, corps headquarters had been eliminated and infantry regiments reduced from three to two battalions.[98] Lacking a subordinate corps, the Eighth Army staff had to assume even greater responsibilities as the war in Korea expanded. The reduction to two battalions per regiment tactically impeded commanders.[99] The absence of one battalion led to

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[95] Schnabel, 116.

[96] Security Force Assistance Brigades, in addition to conducting advise and assist missions, were designed to preserve cadre to rapidly create a new brigade combat team in war time; Todd C. Lopez, "Security Force Assistance Brigades to Free Brigade Combat Teams From Advise, Assist Mission," *US Army,* September 19, 2017, accessed 11 December 2020, https://www.army.mil/article/188004/security_force_assistance_brigades_to_free_brigade_combat_teams_from_advise_assist_mission.

[97] Heller and Stofft, 329.

[98] Schnabel, 53-54; Millett, *War for Korea*, 14.

[99] Joseph F. Dunford, "The Strategic Implications of Defensive Operations at the Pusan Perimeter, July-September 1950" (Strategy Research Project, US Army War College, 1999), 12, accessed 09 October 2020, https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a364614.pdf

regiments operating without a reserve, and contributed to the continual outflanking and retreat that characterized July and August.

One example that demonstrates the cumulative effects of training, equipping, and organization, is that of tactical logistics in the early weeks of the war. There were insufficient trained service troops to support combat units in Korea. During the post-war draw down, combat soldiers (teeth) were preserved over support troops (tail). The wartime tooth-to-tail ratio of 1:3 had been reversed to 3:1, providing a false economy that critically hampered the ability to meet supply and maintenance needs.[100] MacArthur requested 200 company-sized service units to meet demand, but the Army provided only 80.[101] These limited and under-trained service troops organized and reorganized in non-doctrinal, *ad hoc* units, from crisis-to-crisis in the opening days of the war.[102]

During the first weeks of the war, American units were often employed piece-meal, in isolation from one another, to slow the North Korean advance.[103] The KPA tactic of infiltration to cut off retreat, frontal holding action, and flank assault, often with armor, repeatedly broke the cohesion of US units.[104] This cycle of fight and flee did not come to an end until the establishment of a continual defense line on the Pusan Perimeter prevented further flanking by the enemy.[105]

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[100] Millett, *War for Korea*, 79.

[101] Schnabel, 58, 97-98.

[102] Gough, 61.

[103] Schnabel and Watson, 76; Organization challenges include challenges to cohesion. The decision to deploy American units piece-meal failed to create effective combined arms *ad hoc* task forces and resulted in a loss of cohesion – disorganization. This decision also represents a leadership failure and highlights the interconnectedness of the categories of challenge to conducting the blunt layer.

[104] CMH Pub 21-1, 19.

[105] Webb, 22.

Leadership

Confidence and courage are foundation stones of leader presence. Both will be tested in the blunt layer in ways that cannot be truly assessed in peace. Confidence, not tempered with the humility of experience, can result in disaster. If senior leaders, focus on the offensive surge that they want, while underestimating the challenge of the defensive blunt they must fight, soldiers will pay in blood. In the intensely trying conditions of first combat, junior leaders must not only stand and fight, but accept responsibility for leading soldiers in harm's way, knowing they may not survive.[106]

Senior leaders underestimated the challenge of the blunt layer. On arriving in Korea, Task Force Smith's commander was assured that, "all we need is some men up there who won't run when they see tanks." With half of TF Smith's men soon unaccounted for and the KPA making steady progress southward, it was clear North Korea would not be stopped easily.[107] Shaped by his World War II experiences, MacArthur's strategy from the start was to clear the North Koreans from the south with an amphibious strike toward Seoul.[108] His initial estimates were that he could defeat the KPA with two divisions – one in the south to hold Pusan and one for the landings planned in late July. North Korean success soon caused him to push back his timeline and revise his estimate of forces needed to four and half infantry divisions, an airborne RCT, and an armored group. 24ID commander, General Dean, wrote in early July that he was convinced the North Korean army had been underestimated.[109] This proved a prescient thought, as Dean was captured soon after the fall of Taejon.[110]

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[106] US Department of the Army, Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 6-22, *Army Leadership and the Profession* (Washington, DC: Government Publishing Office, 2019), 3-2, 8-1 to 8-2.

[107] Appleman, 61.

[108] Appleman, 488.

[109] Schnabel, 83-84.

[110] CMH Pub 21-1, 17.

About one in six US soldiers serving at the start of the war had combat experience.[111] Unfortunately, this included few of the officers in command of combat units. Headquarters staffs, constantly short of experienced officers, levied many of the most experienced. New personnel policies drove regular rotation of officers through command to ensure equity in promotion. Many leaders were untested, inexperienced, and new to their commands just as they entered combat.[112] The early days of fighting are replete with cases of units who fled, sometimes with their "leaders," but without their weapons, and counter pointed with cases where calm and experienced leadership averted panic.[113]

[111] Appleman, 61.

[112] Millett, *War for Korea*, 79.

[113] Sloan 116, 134; Appleman, 71, 93, 194.

4. Interim Changes

Although the Korean War offers insight into the challenges the US might face in conducting operations in the blunt layer in the future, the analogy is imperfect. The end of the Cold War and decades of counter-insurgency operations have changed the US Army. Its current global posture bears only a passing resemblance to that in the case study. Furthermore, seventy years of technological advancement have altered the tools and conduct of armed conflict.

United States Army of 2020 and the Future

Budget constraints and difficulty recruiting impact the size and readiness of the Army to meet the requirements of the blunt layer in a fight with China or Russia.[114] New exercises, modernization priorities, and unit designs demonstrate that the Army is taking the LSCO challenge seriously. Given strength and financial limits, it remains to be seen how many new concepts will become reality. Equipment shortages and a preponderance of logistics capabilities resident in the reserve component present challenges to sustaining the blunt layer.

Today's active Army of 480,000 soldiers is 20% smaller than in June 1950.[115] Rather than the four divisions MacArthur had on hand, today there are only two assigned permanently in the Indo-Pacific and none in Europe.[116] Eighth Army and one division are stationed in Korea and likely need to remain there to deter aggression by the DPRK.[117] The two corps dedicated to the

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[114] Todd Harrison and Seamus P. Daniels, *Analysis of the FY2021 Defense Budget* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2020), 17, accessed 12 February 2021, http://defense360.csis.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Analysis-of-the-FY-2021-Defense-Budget.pdf; Mark F. Cancian, "US Military Forces in FY2020," Center for Strategic and International Studies, October 15, 2019, 5, accessed 02 December 2020, https://www.csis.org/analysis/us-military-forces-fy-2020-army.

[115] Cancian, 1; Schnabel 43.

[116] Schnabel and Watson, 20.

[117] "MSC Organization," Eighth Army, accessed 27 November 2020, https://8tharmy.korea.army.mil/site/about/organization.asp.

Pacific and Europe, are headquartered in the United States.[118] There are no American forces in Taiwan and those in the Baltic states are too small to prevent a Russian *fait accompli*.[119]

The Army's Immediate Response Force is an airborne infantry battalion, too small and light to survive alone in the blunt layer.[120] There is an armor brigade equipment set in Germany, but it is within range of Russian missiles.[121] Prepositioned equipment in the Indo-Pacific is configured for a Korea contingency, but the Army wants to expand stocks there to better meet the challenge of a Pacific fight.[122]

After years focused on counter insurgency, the Army must retrain for LSCO. The new "Defender" series of exercises practice deployment of a division from the United States for combat in Europe and simulate a South China Sea contingency.[123] Although the ability to

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[118] "I Corps, America's Corps," I Corps, accessed 27 November 2020, https://www.army.mil/icorps, #.;"Army Reactivates V Corps at Fort Knox," Association of the United States Army, October 16, 2020, accessed 11 October 2020, https://www.ausa.org/news/army-reactivates-v-corps-fort-knox.

[119] Terrence K. Kelly, David C. Gompert, and Duncan Long, *Smarter Power, Stronger Partners*, vol. 1 (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2016), 195, accessed 23 November 2020, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1359.html; David A. Shlapak and Michael W. Johnson, *Reinforcing Deterrence on NATO's Eastern Flank: Wargaming the Defense of the Baltics* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2016), 1, accessed 07 September 2020, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1253.html.

[120] Cox; Kelly, et al. *Smarter Power*, vol. 1, 200.

[121] Elliot Page, "Coleman Barracks Army Prepositioned Stock Stie Defender-Europe 20 Movement," US Army, February 4, 2020, accessed 10 December 2020, https://www.army.mil/article/232303/coleman_barracks_army_prepositioned_stock_site_defender_europe_20_movement.

[122] Michel M. Russell and William L. Ellis, "Battlefield Sustainment on the Korean Peninsula," Defense Logistics Agency, July 22, 2019, accessed 26 November 220, https://www.dla.mil/AboutDLA/News/NewsArticleView/Article/1914696/battlefield-sustainment-on-the-korean-peninsula/; Kelly, et al. *Smarter Power*, vol. 1, 107; Nichols Martin, "GEN. Gus Perna: Army Seeks Prepositioned Stock Growth in Pacific," ExecutiveGov, February 5, 2020, accessed 13 September 2020, https://www.executivegov.com/2020/02/gen-gus-perna-army-seeks-prepositioned-stock-growth-in-pacific/.

[123] Jen Judson, "Reforger Redux? Defender 2020 to be 3rd Largest Exercise in Europe Since Cold War," *Defense News*, October 7, 2019, accessed 03 December 2020, https://www.defensenews.com/land/2019/10/07/reforger-redux-defender-2020-exercise-to-be-3rd-largest-exercise-in-europe-since-cold-war/; Jen Judson, "US Army's 'Defender Pacific' Drill to Focus on South China Sea Scenario," *Defense News*, March 27, 2019, accessed 03 December 2020, https://www.defensenews.com/digital-show-dailies/global-force-symposium/2019/03/27/defender-pacific-to-focus-on-south-china-sea-scenario/.

conduct multi-domain operations is at the core of future strategy, the idea will remain mostly conceptual until at least 2025.[124] At the individual level, diminishing commitments in the Middle East mean that fewer soldiers have experience in war, and virtually none have endured prolonged, high intensity combat.[125]

Sustaining and arming the blunt layer will be challenging. Senior leaders are concerned about shrinking stock piles, particularly of key munitions such as missiles and artillery rounds.[126] Although brigade combat teams have been reorganized to add a third maneuver battalion, audits show chronic shortages in spare parts and other equipment key to readiness.[127] At echelons above brigade, about three quarters of all sustainment units are in the reserve components and will not be available in the early days of a no-notice contingency.[128] Encouragingly, the Army modernization strategy prioritizes development of long-range precision fires, armor, network resilience, and more lethal infantry arms, all capabilities important in the blunt layer.[129]

A2/AD Versus Force Projection

Anti-access and area denial are key to any adversary *fait accompli* strategy. Anti-access is intended to prevent or attrit the deployment of friendly forces, while area denial impedes

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[124] US Department of the Army, *Army Modernization Strategy: Investing in the Future* (Washington, DC: Government Publishing Office, 2019), 10-11.

[125] Jim Garamone, "US Will Draw Down Forces in Afghanistan, Iraq, Acting Secretary Says," *DOD News*, November 17, 2020, accessed 10 February 2021, https://www.defense.gov/Explore/News/Article/Article/2418416/us-will-draw-down-forces-in-afghanistan-iraq-acting-secretary-says/; US Department of the Army, FM 3-0, 1-2).

[126] Jen Judson, "Army Concerned Over Shrinking Munitions Stockpile," *Defense News*, March 8, 2017, accessed 23 November 2020, https://www.defensenews.com/digital-show-dailies/global-force-symposium/2017/03/08/army-concerned-over-shrinking-munitions-stockpile/.

[127] Cancian, 3; Todd South, "More Equipment, Spare Parts Needed for All Army Brigades to Hit Highest Readiness Levels," *Army Times*, December 10, 2019, accessed 23 November 2020, https://www.armytimes.com/news/your-army/2019/12/10/more-equipment-spare-parts-needed-for-all-army-brigades-to-hit-highest-readiness-levels/.

[128] James L. Hodge, "Vital Partners in Sustainment: CASCOM's Support of the Reserve Component," *Army Sustainment*, 43, no. 5 (September/October 2011), accessed 12 October 2020, https://alu.army.mil/alog/issues/sepoct11/Vital_Partners_Sustainment_Support%20.html.

[129] US Army, *Modernization Strategy*, 6.

operations where the enemy was unable to stop entry. Effective A2/AD involves multiple, layered systems in all domains.[130] It requires the ability to sense, target, and strike opposing forces.[131] At heart, the challenge is an asymmetric arms race between Chinese and Russian A2/AD and American force projection.[132] Advancements in the space and cyber domain, as well as new technologies such as hypersonic and autonomous weapons, will disproportionately advantage A2/AD even if the United States retains the technological edge. For example, it is easier and less expensive for an adversary to improve the effectiveness of an anti-ship ballistic missile than for the United States to replace carriers with more dispersed sea-based strike.[133]

Space capabilities are important to both A2/AD and force projection. Satellites provide extended range intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance; communications; position, navigation, and timing; and missile warning.[134] China is second only to the United States in number of satellites.[135] The PRC has fielded ground and space-based anti-satellite, directed-energy, and electronic warfare systems capable of seriously degrading US satellites.[136] Russia may choose to revitalize established Soviet-era anti-satellite systems.[137]

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[130] Sameer Joshi, "Demystifying the Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2/AD) Threat," *The Medium*, April 10, 2019, accessed 11 December 2020, https://medium.com/@sameerjoshi73/demystifying-the-anti-access-area-denial-a2-ad-threat-d0ed26ae8b9e.

[131] Kelly, et al. *Smarter Power*, vol. 1, xii.

[132] US Department of State. Policy Planning Staff, *Elements of the China Challenge* (Washington, DC: Government Publishing Office, 2020), 15, accessed 23 November 2020, https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/20-02832-Elements-of-China-Challenge-508.pdf.

[133] Kelly, et al. *Smarter Power*, vol. 1, 200, 79-81.

[134] US Department of the Army, TRADOC Pamphlet 525-3-6 *The US Army Functional Concept for Movement and Maneuver: 2020-2040* (Washington, DC: Government Publishing Office, 2017), 29.

[135] US Department of State, *Elements,*15.

[136] Liane Zivitski, "China Wants to Dominate Space, and the US Must Take Countermeasures," *Defense News*, June 23, 2020, accessed 09 December 2020, https://www.defensenews.com/opinion/commentary/2020/06/23/china-wants-to-dominate-space-and-the-us-must-take-countermeasures/.

[137] Jeffrey L. Caton and James G. Pierce, *Impacts of Anti-Access/Area Denial Measures on Space Systems: Issues and Implications for Army and Joint Forces* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: United States Army War College Press, 2018), xi.

US operations are especially vulnerable to disruption of command, control, communications, computing, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (C4ISR) by cyber and anti-satellite warfare.[138] The Chinese integrated network electronic warfare strategy targets US battlefield information systems that support both warfighting and power projection.[139] Russian cyber forces can shut down or manipulate power grids, financial networks, and other critical infrastructure.[140]

In a mutually degraded space and cyber environment, the geographic home team has a marked advantage. Adversaries can rely to a greater extent on land-based communications and unmanned aerial vehicles to fill capability gaps.[141] They enjoy interior lines for logistics and movement of forces while the United States operates at the end of a planet-spanning tether.[142] An effective network to share information and integrate joint and combined arms, is the hallmark of how the Army fights, so US forces are especially vulnerable when that network fails.[143]

The United States, China, and Russia are all developing hypersonic weapons, but for different ends. Maneuverable hypersonics, traveling Mach 5 or greater, compress the timeline for response and, because of their non-ballistic trajectory, are better able to defeat air and missile

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[138] David C. Gompert, Astrid Stuth Cevallos, and Cristina L. Garafola, *War with China: Thinking Through the Unthinkable* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2016), 11, accessed 13 October 2020, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1140.html.

[139] US Army, TRADOC Pam 525-3-6, 11.

[140] Ben Connable, Stephanie Young, Stephanie Pezard, Andrew Radin, Raphael S. Cohen, Katya Migacheva, and James Sladden, *Russia's Hostile Measures: Combating Russian Gray Zone Aggression Against NATO in the Contact, Blunt, and Surge Layers of Competition* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2020), 55, accessed 11 December 2020, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2539.html..

[141] Duncan Long, Terrence K. Kelly, and David C. Gompert, *Smarter Power, Stronger Partners*, vol. 2 (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 2017), 39, accessed 23 November 2020, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1359z1.html.

[142] Kelly, et al. *Smarter Power*, vol. 1, 200, 74.

[143] US Army, TRADOC Pam 525-3-6, 12.

defenses.[144] The United States sees these weapons as part of global strike, providing stand-off capabilities that reduce the need to expose vulnerable platforms.[145] China and Russia view hypersonic weapons as a strategic deterrent to American missile defense systems, and as a supplement to A2/AD.[146] Due to the accuracy, speed, and survivability or hypersonic weapons, US forces would have to be hardened or dispersed, further complicating force projection. The threat of surprise and inability to distinguish between conventional and nuclear strikes increases the risk of escalation and encourages preemption.[147]

Artificial intelligence (AI) is central to the US Department of Defense's "Third Offset Strategy" to retain a competitive edge.[148] Adversaries are pursuing the same advantage. Russian President Putin said the nation that leads in AI will be the, "ruler of the world," and China aims take the lead in the field by 2030.[149] The enormous potential for AI to aid in the sorting of data will benefit sensing and targeting in A2/AD more than it will force projection.[150] In a contested cyber environment neither side may be able to operate robots and drones remotely. Only fully

[144] Kelley M. Sayler, *Hypersonic Weapons: Background and Issues for Congress*, CRS Report No. 45811 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2020), 18, accessed 04 February 2021, https://fas.org/sgp/crs/weapons/R45811.pdf..

[145] John T. Watts, Christian Trotti, and Mark J. Massa. *PRIMER ON Hypersonic Weapons in the Indo-Pacific Region* (Washington, DC: Atlantic Council, 2020), 1-2, accessed 14 December 2020, doi:10.2307/resrep26035.3.; Kelly, et al. *Smarter Power*, vol. 1, 200, 122.

[146] Watts, 1-2; Sayler 10-11, 13.

[147] Watts, 1-2.

[148] Zachary Davis, "Artificial Intelligence on the Battlefield," *Prism*, 8, no. 2 (2019), 117-118, accessed 13 February 2021, https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26803234.

[149] Jim Garamone, ""Esper says Artificial Intelligence Will Change the Battlefield," *DOD News*, September 9, 2020, accessed 10 February 2021, https://www.defense.gov/Explore/News/Article/Article/2340972/esper-says-artificial-intelligence-will-change-the-battlefield/; Paul Mozur, "Beijing Wants A.I. to Be Made in China by 2030," *New York Times*. July 20, 2017, accessed 02 February 2021, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/20/business/china-artificial-intelligence.html.

[150] Davis, 118.

autonomous systems will be reliable.[151] Differences in ethical standards may leave the greatest advantages to China and Russia.

The US AI strategy emphasizes commitment to ethics and humanitarian considerations.[152] America remains reluctant to allow machines to make the decision to kill. For example, the Predator drone is only semi-autonomous, with a human in the control loop.[153] On a battlefield where remote operation is impossible, China and Russia may be more willing to unleash "killer robots." Never-the-less, even non-lethal AI systems would benefit the United States in the blunt layer. For example, autonomous supply vehicles could distribute sustainment to dispersed defenders with reduced risk to human lives, and relatively low-cost drone swarms could trigger an adversary's air defenses to expend expensive munitions.[154]

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[151] Paul Scharre, *Army of None: Autonomous Weapons and the Future of War* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 2019), 15.

[152] US Department of Defense, Summary of the 2018 Department of Defense Artificial Intelligence Strategy: Harnessing AI to Advance or Security and Prosperity (Washington, DC: US Government Publishing Office. 2018), 15, accessed 03 December 2020, https://media.defense.gov/2019/Feb/12/2002088963/-1/-1/1/SUMMARY-OF-DOD-AI-STRATEGY.PDF.

[153] Scharre, 5.

[154] "Autonomous Resupply for US Military is Flying Into Reality." Intelligent Aerospace, April 9, 2020, accessed 11 February 2021, https://www.intelligent-aerospace.com/military/article/14173799/autonomous-resupply-for-us-military; Sebastian Sprenger, "Europeans Propose Siccing Self-Learning Drone Swarms on Air Defenses," *Defense News*, October 22, 2019, accessed 06 December 2020, https://www.defensenews.com/global/europe/2019/10/22/europeans-propose-siccing-self-learning-drone-swarms-on-air-defenses/.

5. The Future Fight

Possible *fait accompli* seizures of Taiwan and Estonia have been the subject of multiple studies.[155] Although these are not the only possible targets for seizure, China and Russia have both the capability and motivation to challenge the United States and its partners in these locations. Taiwan and Estonia lie within the respective A2/AD bubbles of China and Russia and a distance from the homeland which presents a significant force projection challenge to the United States. The PRC considers Taiwan to be an integral part of its territory and Estonia, a former Soviet Republic and target of past hybrid attacks by Russia, contains a significant Russian minority.[156] Although China might choose other contested islands and Russia might target another neighbor, the Taiwan and Estonia scenarios illustrate broad categories of challenge to the blunt that may be extended more generally to other attempted *fait accompli.*

Chinese Invasion of Taiwan

China seeks regional hegemony in the Indo-Pacific and is applying a whole of government approach, including military modernization, to meet its ends.[157] The PRC insists Taiwan is part of China and that full reunification, by force if necessary, is a fundamental

[155] The RAND studies, Kelly, et al. *Smarter Power*, vol. 1 and Long, et al., *Smarter Power*, vol. 2 provide detailed looks at different versions of possible Taiwan and Estonia scenarios. Additionally, for motivations and wargaming of a PRC seizure of Taiwan, see US Department of Defense, Office of the Secretary of Defense, Annual Report to Congress: *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2020* (Washington, DC: Government Publishing Office, 2020), accessed 04 February 2021, https://media.defense.gov/2020/Sep/01/2002488689/-1/-1/1/2020-DOD-CHINA-MILITARY-POWER-REPORT-FINAL.PDF.; US Department of State, *Elements* ; and David C. Gompert, Astrid Stuth Cevallos, and Cristina L. Garafola, *War with China: Thinking Through the Unthinkable* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2016. For motivations and wargaming of a Russian seizure of Estonia, see: Shlapak and Johnson; Flanagan, Jan Osburg, Anika Binnendijk, Marta Kepe, and Andrew Radin, *Deterring Russian Aggression in the Baltic States Through Resilience and Resistance* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2019), accessed 03 December 2020, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2779.html.; and Connable et al., *Russia's Hostile Measures*.

[156] Krepinevich, 7.

[157] US Department of Defense, *Summary of the NDS, 2.*

condition of national rejuvenation.[158] The United States considers Taiwan a partner and is committed to preserving peace and protecting Taiwan's democracy, as well as the 79,000 American citizens there.[159] China considers Taiwan to be part of its homeland, lost in a historic injustice, and the PRC may be willing to pay a high cost to regain it.[160]

China's military modernization efforts are increasing its capability to conduct an invasion of Taiwan.[161] They made development of A2/AD a top priority after failing to contest US intervention in the 1995-96 Taiwan Strait crisis.[162] The PRC has the largest army and navy in the world, the second largest number of satellites, and seriously outclasses the United States and Taiwan in ground-launched ballistic missiles.[163] They reorganized their military to include an Eastern Theater Command focused on Taiwan, a Joint Logistics Support Force capable of coordinating force projection to the island, and a Joint Strategic Support Force responsible for cyber, space, electronic and psychological warfare.[164] The PRC has multiple combined arms brigades equipped with amphibious fighting vehicles and assault guns, and it fielded its first helicopter dock amphibious assault ship in 2019.[165] They conduct regular military exercises near Taiwan.[166]

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[158] US Department of Defense, Office of the Secretary of Defense, Annual Report to Congress: *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2020* (Washington, DC: Government Publishing Office, 2020), 3, 112, accessed 04 February 2021, https://media.defense.gov/2020/Sep/01/2002488689/-1/-1/1/2020-DOD-CHINA-MILITARY-POWER-REPORT-FINAL.PDF.

[159] US Department of State, *American Institute in Taiwan: Integrated Country Strategy* (Washington, DC: Government Publishing Office, 2018), 2, accessed 23 November 2020, https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/ICS-Taiwan_UNCLASS_508.pdf.

[160] Gompert, et al., 8, 24.

[161] US Department of Defense, *Indo-Pacific Strategy*, 31.

[162] Kelly, et al. *Smarter Power*, vol. 1, 44.

[163] US Department of Defense, *PRC Military*, ii, vii; US Department of State, *Elements*, 15.

[164] US Department of State, *Elements*, 14; US Department of Defense, *PRC Military*, 95.

[165] US Department of Defense, *PRC Military*, 116-117.

[166] US Department of Defense, *Indo-Pacific Strategy*, 31.

The United States is committed to provide Taiwan with defensive arms to resist China and has conducted over $22 billion in foreign military sales since 2008.[167] Taiwan's historic military advantage relative to China has eroded as PRC defense spending is fifteen times that of its neighbor. Taiwan's active military of 169,000 is finding it harder than ever to draw new recruits. In the face of the PRC challenge, they are shifting to more asymmetric concepts, focusing on littoral and coastal defense, stealth vessels, mine layers, and unmanned systems.[168] Placing US forces or prepositioned equipment on the island pre-conflict is unlikely, as it may trigger war.[169]

Taiwan's proximity to the mainland means an invasion would take place under a robust Chinese A2/AD shield (see figure 4). The war would likely be fought mostly in the sea, air, space, and cyberspace domains with limited land combat.[170] Chinese success would depend on local air and naval superiority, and the ability to project force and sustainment across the 100-mile Taiwan Strait.[171] Initial PRC strikes might be expected to target Taiwanese air defenses, air bases, surface ships, and leadership.[172] Chinese information operations might characterize the action was an internal matter, on Chinese territory, in which outside interference would not be tolerated.[173] Amphibious and airborne assault forces might cross the strait under the A2/AD shield, establish west coast lodgments, and move to seize key targets.[174] If China established a beachhead, the Taiwanese military likely lacks the capability to counter a breakout.[175]

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[167] *Taiwan Relations Act of 1979*, Public Law 96-8, U.S. Statutes at Large 93 (1979): 14; US Department of Defense, *Indo-Pacific Strategy*, 31.

[168] US Department of Defense, *PRC Military* 119.

[169] Kelly, et al. *Smarter Power*, vol. 1, 183, 195.

[170] Gombert, et al., *War with China*, 11.

[171] US Department of Defense, *PRC Military* 114.

[172] Kelly, et al. *Smarter Power*, vol. 1, 193.

[173] Kelly, et al. *Smarter Power*, vol. 1, 17.

[174] Kelly, et al. *Smarter Power*, vol. 1, 183; US Department of Defense, *PRC Military*, 114.

[175] Kelly, et al. *Smarter Power*, vol. 1, 191.

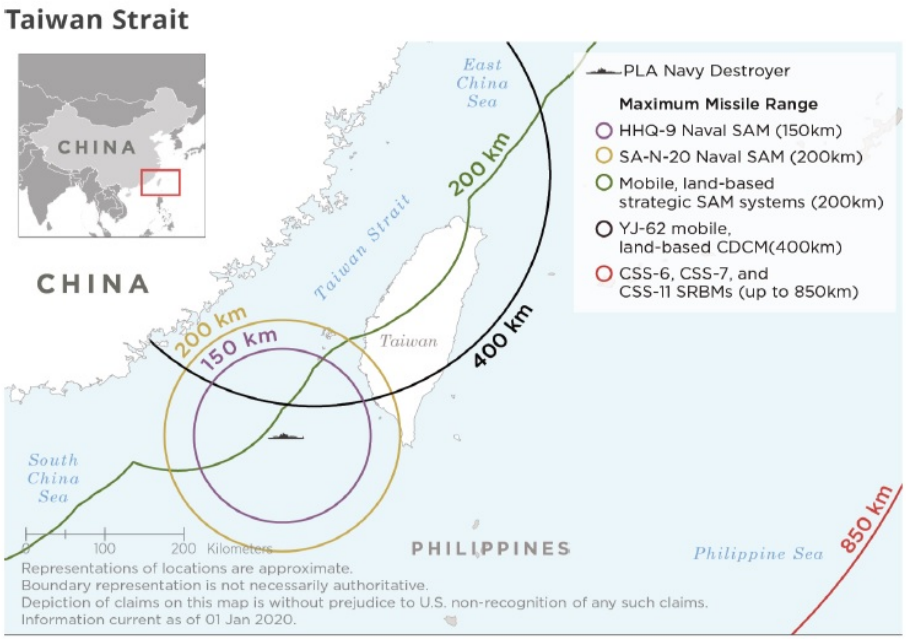

Figure 4. PRC A2/AD in the Taiwan Strait. US Department of Defense, Office of the Secretary of Defense, Annual Report to Congress: *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2020* (Washington, DC: Government Publishing Office, 2020), 116.

Once it is clear the United States plans to intervene, China might launch cyberattacks against US logistics systems and counter-space operations to interfere with navigation, targeting, and communications.[176] The United States would likely join Taiwan in targeting Chinese command and control networks, surveillance assets, air defenses, air bases, and ships. The PRC might then conduct missile strikes on US ships at sea and bases in Japan and Guam.[177] The cyberwar could expand to include attacks on civilian logistics, air traffic control, and energy distribution, in addition to government networks.[178]

China may find little international backing for their action, but it is possible most will not overtly oppose them. They have worked assiduously to politically isolate Taiwan from the rest of the world, and they provide higher levels of assistance to countries that vote with them in

[176] Long, et al., Smarter Power, vol. 2, 18, 41.

[177] Kelly, et al. *Smarter Power*, vol. 1, 104-105.

[178] Gombert, et al., *War with China*, 49.

international organizations like the UN.[179] Most east Asian states will likely call for peace, and some may side with the United States, but few will provide military support. Likely exceptions are Australia, New Zealand, and Japan, especially if China strikes American bases in the latter's territory. NATO would probably back the United States politically and deter opportunistic aggression by Russia. India might use the conflict as an opportunity to press their own border disputes with China, and North Korea would remain a wild card.[180]

Russian Invasion of Estonia

Russia seeks to shatter the NATO alliance and exercise power over its neighbors.[181] Estonia is among the most vulnerable NATO members. It is a former Soviet republic, bordering Russia, with a sizeable ethnic Russian minority, and a small military.[182] Russia conducted a denial of service cyberattack on Estonia in 2007, promotes a false narrative of oppression of ethnic Russians and of NATO as an occupation force, and holds large exercises near the shared border.[183] As members of its former sphere of influence increasingly turn to the West, Russia has resorted to force against non-NATO neighbors Georgia (2008) and Ukraine (2014), despite international condemnation. If Russia invaded Estonia, NATO would be obliged to join the war or face dissolution of the alliance.[184] Although Estonia is the targeted country in this scenario, Russia has the military capacity to extend its attack to any, or all, of the Baltic states.

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[179] US Department of State, *Taiwan ICS*, 3; US Department of State, *Elements*, 26; US Department of Defense, *PRC Military*, 96.

[180] Gombert, et al., *War with China*, 56-58.

[181] US Department of Defense, *Summary of the NDS, 2.*

[182] Shlapak and Johnson, 3; Flanagan, et al., 8.

[183] US Department of State, *Estonia: Integrated Country Strategy* (Washington, DC: Government Publishing Office, 2019), 2-3, accessed 23 November 2020, https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/ICS-Estonia_UNCLASS-508.pdf.

[184] Long, et al., Smarter Power, vol. 2, 135.

Russian capabilities in the area are extensive. Their air defenses provide a complete shield over the Baltics.[185] Kaliningrad guards the southern approaches with a dense net of defense against, air, naval, and surface attack. It is the headquarters of the Baltic fleet and home to two mechanized and one naval brigade, a surface-to-surface missile brigade, and extensive surface-to-air missiles.[186] Russian units are better armored than their NATO counterparts and outmatch them in organic fires and air defenses.[187] Up to twenty-two battalion tactical groups, all motorized, mechanized, or armored, can be moved into Estonia with little notice.[188]

NATO is not well-positioned to defend the Baltic states.[189] Estonia has only 6,500 active duty soldiers organized in two light infantry brigades.[190] Unable to field a large force, they focus security efforts on cyber defense and media resilience.[191] Their total defense concept assumes they will be overrun and incorporates state-sponsored resistance cells capable of conducting an insurgency against an occupying force.[192] 4,500 troops of the NATO Enhanced Forward Presence are spread across the Baltic states and Poland, but function mostly as a tripwire, to demonstrate resolve. (see figure 5).[193] Although NATO can eventually bring superior capability and capacity to the fight, only heavy forces can counter a Russian invasion. Light units would be fixed, by-passed, and destroyed at leisure.[194] American forces in Europe include an airborne brigade and a

[185] Kelly, et al. *Smarter Power*, vol. 1, 106-107.

[186] Long, et al., Smarter Power, vol. 2, 140.

[187] Long, et al., Smarter Power, vol. 2, 150.

[188] Shlapak and Johnson, 4-5.

[189] Shlapak and Johnson, 1.

[190] Flanagan, et al., *Deterring Russian Aggression*, 8-11.

[191] US Department of State, *Estonia ICS*, 4-5.

[192] Flanagan, et al., *Deterring Russian Aggression*, 2.

[193] "Enhanced Forward Presence," NATO, accessed 24 November 2020, https://shape.nato.int/efp; Connable et al., *Russia's Hostile Measures*, 64.

[194] Kelly, et al. *Smarter Power*, vol. 1, 200.

Stryker brigade.[195] The corps headquarters for US Army forces in Europe, activated in 2020, is in Kentucky.[196]

Distinct from the Taiwan scenario, an invasion of Estonia would be fought with overlapping enemy and friendly A2/AD bubbles and include a major land component.[197] RAND wargames project no more than sixty hours for Russia to reach the capital. A minimum of seven

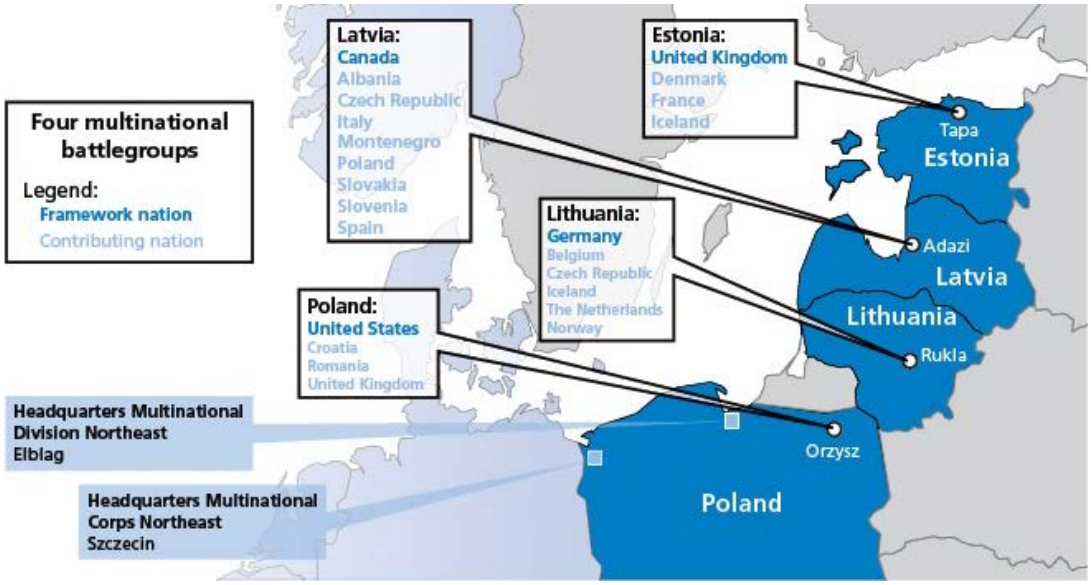

Figure 5. NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence. "Enhanced Forward Presence," NATO, accessed November 24, 2020, https://shape.nato.int/efp.

brigades, at least three of them armored, with supporting enablers, would be required to deter the attack.[198]

The Russian invasion could take place by surprise, masked as a border exercise. Spetsnaz forces advance first to seize key road junctions, followed by brigade mechanized infantry battle groups. Cyberattacks of ambiguous origin target NATO systems.[199] On racing to the coastline,

[195] Long, et al., *Smarter Power*, vol. 2, 157.

[196] "Army Reactivates V Corps at Fort Knox," Association of the United States Army, October 16, 2020, accessed 11 October 2020, https://www.ausa.org/news/army-reactivates-v-corps-fort-knox.

[197] Kelly, et al. *Smarter Power*, vol. 1, 196.

[198] Shlapak and Johnson, 1.

[199] Long, et al., *Smarter Power*, vol. 2, 135-136.

Russian forces will solidify their defenses and attempt to consolidate gains politically. Estonian leaders may be convinced to decline NATO assistance to avoid loss of life in a counterattack or even to renounce membership in the alliance. Alternately, Russia may copy their script from Crimea and annex part or all of Estonia, extending their nuclear umbrella and declaring any counterattack to be an invasion of their homeland.[200] Initially, only Estonian resistance cells would be able to directly contest Russia on the ground and NATO's blunt layer would be limited to effects generated from outside of the occupied territory.[201]

Geography contributes to Russia's A2/AD capability. NATO is unlikely to attempt an amphibious invasion thorough the tight spaces of the Baltic, and air superiority will require extensive and time-consuming reduction of Russian air defenses.[202] Ground forces must pass through the sixty-mile wide Suwalki Gap under the defenses of Kaliningrad on one side and Russia's ally, Belarus, on the other.[203] Russia would be able to reinforce across the border with as many soldiers as it cares to place at risk.[204]

Lacking sufficient heavy forces in Europe to drive Russia out of Estonia, and facing extensive A2/AD based in Kaliningrad and Russia proper, NATO would first need to conduct a suppression of enemy air defense campaign. Air forces would be at higher risk than any time in the last seventy years, and suppression may rely more on army long-range fires than on aircraft.[205] Russia may respond with missile strikes against US prepositioned equipment and bases in Germany and Poland. The light forces immediately available could demonstrate near Kaliningrad to show resolve, while heavier forces deploy from the United States.[206]

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[200] Kelly, et al. *Smarter Power*, vol. 1, 203.

[201] Long, et al., *Smarter Power*, vol. 2, 136.

[202] Long, et al., *Smarter Power*, vol. 2, 144.

[203] Flanagan, et al., *Deterring Russian Aggression*, 6.

[204] Kelly, et al. *Smarter Power*, vol. 1, 108.

[205] Kelly, et al. *Smarter Power*, vol. 1, 106, 202.

[206] Long, et al., *Smarter Power*, vol. 2, 157.

Once Russian air defenses have been suppressed, air power could begin attritting ground units.[207] In the face of heavy forces deployed from the United States, Russia might conduct missile strikes on ports of debarkation, bridges, and railroads to slow their advance and may pressure Belarus to join the fight.[208] It is possible Russia will test a nuclear weapon in an "escalate to deescalate" strategy.[209] If this fails and Russia faces the possibility of losing Kaliningrad, they are likely to withdraw from Estonia, and declare "victory" in having punished injustices against ethnic minorities.[210]

[207] Kelly, et al. *Smarter Power*, vol. 1, 106.

[208] Long, et al., *Smarter Power*, vol. 2, 159-160.

[209] Mark B. Schneider, "Escalate to De-escalate," *US Naval Institute Proceedings* 143, no. 2 (February 2017): 1,368, accessed 02 December 2020, https://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/2017/february/escalate-de-escalate.

[210] Long, et al., *Smarter Power*, vol. 2, 160.

6. Analysis

Large-scale combat operations are characterized by chaos, fear, violence, fatigue, and uncertainty.[211] Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Milley, expects, "a perfect harmony of intense violence.[212] This promises to be especially true for soldiers conducting the blunt layer, outnumbered and likely outmatched in multiple domains. It has been seventy years since the US military faced a similar situation, and it is difficult, if not impossible, to quantify just how challenging such a situation would be. In war, everything is uncertain, and the history of predicting the next war is replete with failure.[213]

During the opening weeks of the Korean War, the US Army faced challenges analogous to conducting the blunt layer, as they delayed, degraded, and ultimately, denied, the North Korean attempt to quickly conquer their southern neighbor. Despite a vast difference in size and apparent power, the DPRK was nearly victorious.[214] Taking into consideration key changes in the US Army and in related technology, the experience of 1950 provides a basis to conduct a qualitative analysis of the challenges of blunting an attempted *fait accompli* invasion of Taiwan by China and Estonia by Russia. The future scenarios are assessed for each challenge subcategory as less challenging, similarly challenging, or more challenging than the case study. Where there is a compelling argument to do so, the future scenarios are also ranked against one another. Cases in which the assessment is indeterminate, suggest areas for further research (see table 2).

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[211] US Army, FM 3-0, 1-2.

[212] Sydney J. Freedberg, "A Perfect Harmony of Intense Violence: Army Chief Milley On Future War," *Breaking Defense*, October 8, 2018, accessed 10 December 2020, https://breakingdefense.com/2018/10/a-perfect-harmony-of-intense-violence-army-chief-milley-on-future-war/.

[213] Clausewitz, 136; Lawrence Freedman, *The Future of War: A History* (New York, NY: Public Affairs, 2019), 277-280, 287.

[214] Appleman 18, 234.

Table 2. Qualitative assessment of relative difficulty of conducting the blunt layer to oppose a Chinese invasion of Taiwan or a Russian invasion of Estonia compared to opposing the North Korean invasion of South Korea in 1950.

Category	Sub-Category	China	Russia
Political			
	International Support	**X**	**o**
	Security Cooperation Investment	**o**	**o**
	Opportunistic Aggression	**o**	**o**
	Nuclear Escalation	**X**	**XX***
Competitive			
	Contested Domains	**X**	**X**
	Capability Advantage	**X**	**X**
Positional			
	Forces in Theater	**X**	**XX***
	Rapidly Deployable Forces	**o**	+
Manning			
	Pre-conflict Strength	**X**	**X**
	Replacement Flow	**o**	**o**
	Tension with Surge	**o**	**o**
Training			
	Individual - Resilience	**?**	**?**
	Unit - Defense Focus	**o**	**o**
Equipping			
	Materiel Solutions	**?**	**?**
	Stockpiles	**X**	**X**
	Sustainment	**o**	**o**
Organization			
	Unit Design	+	+
	Task Organization	**o**	**X**
	Cohesion	**o**	**o**
Leadership			
	Senior Leaders - Overconfidence	**o**	**o**
	Junior Leaders - Courage	**o**	**o**

Key	
Comparison to Case Study	**Code**
Less Challenging	+
Similar Challenge	**o**
More Challenging	**X**
Indeterminate	**?**

* A double code indicates a magnitude of distinction between the challenge of the future scenarios. Example: "XX" for Russia indicates the challenge is both greater than in the case study and than in the China scenario.

Source: Created by author.

Future political challenges are similar or greater than those the United States faced in 1950. Just as the US enjoyed United Nations support in Korea, NATO will likely oppose Russia. However, Chinese efforts to isolate Taiwan may limit overt military support there.[215] The United States invested in security cooperation and hundreds of advisors with the ROKA, but provided only light weapons.[216] Taiwan is wisely shifting toward better arming for an asymmetric strategy, but no US forces will be stationed on the island.[217] NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence is an important contribution to Estonia's defense, but the tiny Baltic state is too small to sustain the military force needed to halt a Russian invasion.[218] Importantly, while both potential adversaries are nuclear powers, Russia poses a greater escalation threat, with a larger stockpile and possible first use policy.[219]

The competitive challenge of combating the erosion of conventional overmatch the United States has enjoyed since the end of the Cold War is the central theme of the NDS.[220] In Korea, only the land domain was seriously contested.[221] China and Russia can contest every domain and attain local dominance in one or more at a time as each have capabilities that increasingly rival those of the United States, both in quantity and quality.[222] Advancements in technology will mostly benefit adversary A2/AD capabilities over US force projection.[223]

Positional challenges in a future fight vary but are generally greater than those faced by the United States in 1950. There are far fewer forces and division headquarters in either theater

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[215] US Department of State, *Taiwan ICS,* 10.

[216] Schnabel, 20-21, 34-35.

[217] US Department of Defense, *PRC Military* 119; Kelly, et al. *Smarter Power*, vol. 1, 183, 195.

[218] US Department of State, *Estonia ICS*, 4-5.

[219] Schneider.

[220] US Department of Defense, *Summary of the NDS*, cover pages, 1, 3.

[221] Webb, 3.

[222] Milley, 5.

[223] Kelly, et al. *Smarter Power*, vol. 1, 200, 79-81.

now than were in MacArthur's Far East Command. 2ID's deployment from the United States to Pusan was the fastest overseas movement of a combat division in US history.[224] The current immediate response force is faster, and available to either theater, but is only a light battalion, almost certainly insufficient to blunt layer needs and not survivable alone in LSCO.[225] A prepositioned armor brigade equipment set and NATO's Very High Readiness Task Force and Enhanced Forward Presence offer more rapidly deployable capacity in Europe.[226]

The modern US Army, with 111,000 fewer soldiers and difficulties in recruiting, faces similar challenges in manning the blunt layer.[227] Army leadership believes the size of the current active force is insufficient.[228] Modeling of replacement through-put for a modern continency suggests that it is approximately the same as what was achieved in 1950.[229] Just as in Korea, there will be tension between providing replacements and reinforcements for the defensive blunt, and building capacity for the offensive surge.[230]

It is unclear whether individual soldiers will be better trained for conducting the blunt layer in LSCO than their predecessors. While today's servicemembers receive more realistic training, about one in six soldiers in 1950 were World War II veterans.[231] Peacetime training is a necessary, but feeble substitute for combat experience and it is difficult to predict performance under fire from the safety of the range.[232] Unit training has improved but may be ill-focused for

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[224] Gough, 46-47.

[225] Cox; Kelly, et al. *Smarter Power*, vol. 1, 213.

[226] Page; "NATO Response Force"; "Enhanced Forward Presence"

[227] Schnabel, 43; Cancian, 2; Meghann Myers, "After 2018's Recruiting Shortfall, It Will Take a Lot Longer to Build the Army to 500k," *Army Times*, March 14, 2019, accessed 23 November 2020, https://www.armytimes.com/news/your-army/2019/03/14/after-2018s-recruiting-shortfall-it-will-take-a-lot-longer-to-build-the-army-to-500k/.

[228] Milley, 10.

[229] Linick, 36, 42; Gough, 40.

[230] Webb, 22-24.

[231] Freedberg, "Perfect Harmony;" Appleman, 61.

[232] Clausewitz, 122.

the blunt layer. MacArthur's troops mostly trained at the battalion or lower level.[233] New exercises in Europe and the Pacific are at a larger scale and focus on peer conflict.[234] However, this training is designed on the concept that wars are won on the offense – appropriate for the surge layer.[235] But, blunting an invasion calls on defensive skills for which modern soldiers and units may be no better prepared than those of 1950. Adversary A2/AD may shift the advantage so far back to the defense that American forces, overly biased toward the offense, suffer the same sort of catastrophic surprise as European powers did in 1914.[236]

If a future conflict follows the contours of the scenarios outlined previously, they will pose similar challenges to equipping the blunt layer, but without the vast surplus stocks that supplied the start of the Korean conflict.[237] The most glaring equipment challenge in 1950 was the lack of effective anti-tank weapons. Such weapons were in the military's inventory, but were not in theater because leaders failed to anticipate the enemy armor threat.[238] This type of miscalculation, whether in armor, artillery, air defense, cyber, or some other unforeseen capability, is typical of America's "first battles" and thus is likely to recur. The Army's modernization priorities seek to provide the materiel solutions needed in the blunt layer, but a new generation of systems remains years away.[239] Korean war sustainment suffered from a shortage of trained logisticians. This will be repeated in the early days of future conflict, so long as the majority of sustainment units reside in the reserve components.[240]

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[233] Appleman, 113.

[234] Judson, "Reforger Redux;" Judson, "Defender Pacific."

[235] Freedberg, "Perfect Harmony."

[236] Sydney J. Freedberg, "The Next War? Trench Warfare with Smart Bombs," *Breaking Defense*, October 19, 2016, accessed 10 December 2020, https://breakingdefense.com/2016/10/the-next-war-trench-warfare-with-smart-bombs/.

[237] Huston, 79.

[238] Webb, 12; Sloan, 2.

[239] Cancian, 7.

[240] Millett, *War for Korea*, 79; Hodge; The potential shortage of logisticians in the blunt layer provides another example of the interplay of different blunt layer challenges. The reserve component /

Organization for the fight is mostly superior to seventy years ago. The brigade combat team redesign, which resulted in the addition of a third maneuver battalion, avoids repeating the challenge of maneuver formations unable to maintain a reserve.[241] A field army, corps, and two divisions assigned to the Indo-Pacific provide ample structure to task organize for a large war. However, there are no divisions assigned in Europe, even though a contingency there would probably demand a larger ground force.[242] American units that deployed piecemeal in Korea were often outflanked, isolated, and lost cohesion.[243] In the heavily contested blunt layer, dispersion will be key to survivability, but will reduce cohesion.[244]

Leadership challenges derive from inherent human characteristics, the enduring nature of war, and the specific characteristics of the blunt layer. They will recur. Some senior leaders, are prone to overconfidence which may inspire daring, as in the case of MacArthur's Inchon landing, or create catastrophes, such as the decision to employ Task Force Smith alone.[245] Small unit leaders face the daunting task of inspiring courage in their subordinates under intense fire, some successfully, others less so.[246] Before the test of combat it is difficult to predict who will live up to the challenge of battle and who will lead a route.

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active component mix is an organizational challenge with the potential to require untrained supplementary logisticians to man sustainment units, with the ultimate result of challenges to equipping.

[241] South; Millett, *War for Korea*, 78-79.

[242] Kelly, et al. *Smarter Power*, vol. 1, 196.

[243] CMH Pub 21-1, 19.

[244] US Army, FM 3-0, 2-51.

[245] Appleman 488, 61.

[246] Sloan 134; Appleman, 71, 93, 194.

7. Conclusion

Chinese and Russian investments in A2/AD and other capabilities raise the possibility they may rapidly invade a US ally or partner. They could then extend their defensive umbrella over the occupied territory such that any attempt to expel them by force might prove to be too militarily or politically onerous.[247] The 2018 *National Defense Strategy* (NDS) introduced the Global Operating Model to deter or defeat this adversary *fait accompli* theory of victory.[248] The four-layer model differs from the slow, Desert Storm-style, build-up of force before combat that the United States has grown accustomed to since the end of the Cold War. It includes a blunt layer of forces resisting the attempted *fait accompli* from the start, until enough strength arrives to transition to the offense.[249]

Deterrence by denial requires a demonstrably credible ability to deny the adversary realization of gains worth the costs of conflict.[250] The United States has practical experience and investment of thought in the contact, surge, and homeland layers of the model. However, it has not conducted the blunt layer in large-scale combat since the opening days of the Korean War. As the United States prepares for the future fight, it must identify the challenges associated with the blunt layer as a necessary first step to deter or defeat, a Chinese or Russian *fait accompli.*

Conducting the blunt layer in LSCO as envisioned in the NDS would prove very challenging given the current state of the force. A review of the operational requirements to deny, or degrade and delay enemy gains, provides clarity on the specific demands of blunting aggression. The opening days of the Korean War offer a useful, but imperfect, case study to illuminate these challenges in action. Reflection on subsequent changes in the US Army and

[247] US Congress, Senate, *Implementation of the NDS*, 3-4.

[248] US Department of Defense, *Summary of the NDS,* 7.

[249] US Congress, Senate, *Implementation of the NDS*, 6.

[250] Snyder, 163.

relevant technological advances, as well as possible future *fait accompli* scenarios, provides a useful test of the analogy. Through this reflection, broad categories and subcategories of blunt layer challenges become apparent.

Blunt layer challenges are framed into eight categories: political, competitive, positional, manning, training, equipping, organization, and leadership. Political challenges include gaining international support, pre-conflict security cooperation with partners, and limitations on the conduct of the conflict to deter opportunistic aggression by others and nuclear escalation. Competitive challenges speak to the core concern of the NDS: fighting with all domains contested and the erosion of US military advantage relative to adversaries. Positional challenges determine which forces are available for the blunt layer – those in theater and those rapidly deployable. Manning deals with pre-conflict strength, replacement flow, and the tension between adequately supporting the blunt while assembling the surge layer. Training for the blunt layer requires individuals hardened to the demanding environment of LSCO and units prepared to operate defensively. Equipping demands the right materiel solutions to blunt the adversary, sufficient stockpiles accessible to the conflict zone, and logistics personnel capable of continuing adequate sustainment. Organization challenges include appropriate unit design and task organization, as well as maintaining cohesion when overmatched. Over confidence by senior leaders and courage when withdrawing under fire are among the leadership challenges.

In 1950, North Korea nearly executed a successful *fait accompli* conquest of South Korea.[251] This near success, despite being much less powerful than the United States, demonstrates just how demanding the blunt layer is. Today, China and Russia have comparatively more military capability relative to the United States.[252] Technological advances tend to favor adversary A2/AD over US force projection.[253] Using the case study as a baseline and reflecting

[251] Appleman, 34-35, 247; Hastings, 73.

[252] US Department of Defense, *Summary of the NDS,* 1, 3.

[253] Kelly, et al. *Smarter Power*, vol. 1, 200, 79-81.

on subsequent changes allows for a broad qualitative assessment of the challenges of blunting a Chinese invasion of Taiwan or a Russian invasion of Estonia relative to the past demands of blunting North Korea.

With few exceptions, every blunt layer challenge faced in the Korean War will be at least as demanding in a future conflict. Applicable to both adversary scenarios presented here are greater challenges in risk of nuclear escalation, multiple contested domains, relative military capability, forces in theater, pre-conflict strength, and stockpiles. China's efforts to politically isolate Taiwan may make gaining international support to counter an invasion there more difficult. Although nuclear escalation and forces in theater are a greater challenge for both scenarios than in the case study, the demand is especially tasking for a Russian invasion of Estonia. Additionally, the lack of a dedicated division in Europe leaves insufficient headquarters in place for initial task organization. On a positive note, prepositioned equipment sets and capabilities from NATO partners offer more rapidly deployable forces in Europe. Modern US Army combat brigades, with three maneuver battalions, are better designed for the blunt layer than Korean War regimental combat teams.

Some challenges remain too indeterminate to assess and deserve future research. Few US soldiers have experienced the intense combat likely in the future blunt layer, which will be, not only large-scale, but under conditions in which US forces are in the minority, operating with few advantages, and uncertain how long they must endure. Under such conditions and in a dispersed battlefield, are modern US soldiers sufficiently resilient to meet the challenge? In the Korean War, the materiel solutions to defeat KPA armor existed, but were not present in theater because senior leaders dismissed the possibility of tank warfare on the peninsula. For the future fight, it is less clear that the necessary requirements are fully understood. US Army modernization efforts require time and must compete with current demands and constrained budgets. Which materiel solutions needed to blunt China and Russia are currently underestimated or overlooked?

Identification of challenges the United States will face in the blunt layer is a necessary, but insufficient, first step. The US military must also consider how to mitigate the risks they pose. Just as China and Russia's investments in A2/AD are intended to undermine the United States' ability to defend its alliance architecture, demonstrating the ability to blunt a *fait accompli* is essential to deterring the adversary's strategy. Failing to attempt to blunt such an invasion compromises the system of alliances that lie at the foundation of Western post-World War II prosperity. Blunting unsuccessfully may prove even worse, risking a humiliating defeat and the possible death or capture of thousands of American service members. In order to avoid such a disaster, the United States must recognize and overcome the significant challenges of conducting the blunt layer in large-scale combat operations.

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