

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



ASYMMETRIC THREAT SYMPOSIUM IX

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**OFFSET STRATEGIES TO PREVAIL  
AGAINST ASYMMETRIC THREATS**

On September 22, 2016, the Association of Old Crows, CACI International Inc, and the Center for Security Policy hosted “Offset Strategies to Prevail Against Asymmetric Threats,” the ninth in a series of symposia on asymmetric threats. The event featured a wide-ranging discussion on how to address the complex asymmetric threats to America’s national security and how offset strategies attempt to position the U.S. to prevail against resurging global power competition, multi-regional conflicts, and cross-domain challenges. The symposium was held under the Chatham House rule of non-attribution.

Threats against the United States have become increasingly complex and diverse, involving nation-states and non-state actors, conventional and unconventional tactics, and a wide variety of weapons. These asymmetric threats have proliferated against the backdrop of a leveling of the technological playing field, along with convoluted acquisitions processes that make it difficult for the U.S. to rapidly field new solutions. The U.S. operates in a highly volatile global environment, beset by regional conflicts, the global war on terrorism, political and economic disruptions, cyber attacks against the homeland, and disease pandemics. With U.S. strategic superiority being challenged, the Department of Defense is proposing a bold solution in the form of an offset strategy.

The first offset strategy was the early Cold War endeavor to counteract the Soviet Union’s quantitative superiority by developing a formidable nuclear arsenal. Even long after the Cold War, this strategy continues to sustain the safety of the U.S. and its allies. America’s conventional forces are able to operate because there is a nuclear umbrella over them composed of the “triad” of intercontinental ballistic missiles, submarine-launched ballistic

missiles, and bombers. And while Russia, China, and North Korea aggressively sustain and build their arsenal, Iran continues its pursuit of a nuclear weapon. In this environment, the U.S. can ill afford to lag in modernizing its nuclear arsenal as well as its command and control capabilities.

The second offset strategy was pursued in the 1980s to develop a new generation of stealth technologies, precision-guided weapons, and complex command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (C4ISR) capabilities.

The third offset strategy includes manned-unmanned teaming technologies to transform and prepare the military for multi-regional conflicts and cross-domain challenges. In pursuing a countervailing strategy, the U.S. must adopt an interagency approach in response to adversaries avoiding strictly military engagements to gain a strategic advantage. A successful strategy should also reach out to the private sector. However, laws and regulations have not kept pace with the advancement of technology. The legal authorities are not in place to facilitate multiple federal agencies acting in coordination with private entities, such as commercial power plants, telecommunications providers, and financial institutions, in the event of a catastrophic occurrence like a terrorist attack.

Investing in game-changing technologies to outpace increasingly dynamic globally fielded systems and anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) developments are core components of this strategy. At the forefront are autonomous systems, which enhance the capability of U.S. forces to deal with the scale, speed, and complexity of today’s advanced technologies and variety of threats.

**An offset strategy is necessary to preserve the security of the U.S. against increasingly diverse, complex, unprecedented threats.**

To what degree the U.S. gives fuller authority to weapons systems or decision aids is still dependent on the evolution of the technology, and the ethics and legality of allowing autonomous systems to make decisions without human intervention.

Morality demands maintaining a human in the loop for lethal effects, though U.S. adversaries may share no such scruples. Strategic thought is necessary to define where to apply human-machine teaming, and under what circumstances autonomous systems might be allowed to detect and defend without human intervention in order to prevent catastrophic attack on a level too large, fast, or complex to accommodate human response time, such as a cyber or electronic warfare attack.

Unmanned aerial and other robotic vehicles continue to play a large role in yielding a disproportional advantage across the full spectrum of today's battlespace, primarily as a result of their capability to provide 24/7 global coverage at significantly reduced costs. In 1996, the U.S. had a single continuous orbit of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). Today, we are approaching 100 around-the-clock orbits of UAVs. Of equal importance are information-processing systems that can digest and find patterns in vast amounts of data. These systems are critical to achieving the strategic edge through decision speed and superiority.

Technological advancement also requires new strategies for cooperating within the services themselves. The Air Force is advancing Enterprise Capability Collaboration Teams to bring together the major commands, science and technology (S&T), and acquisitions communities, enabling teams to close user-identified operational gaps by developing weapons systems that incorporate S&T innovation.

Investment in technologies and the legal authorities to facilitate private sector coordination must acknowledge that America's commanding technological edge is eroding. Unprecedented access to U.S. innovation has resulted in exploitation via espionage, cyberspace, and open

networks. China, already outpacing the U.S. in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) Ph.D. education by two to one, has surpassed the European Union in research and development investment and is closing in on the U.S.

In order to close the technology gap, the U.S. must pursue agile and adaptive acquisitions processes. Reducing time to market with solutions that are adaptable upon delivery to meet changing mission requirements is key. Furthermore, adversaries are developing countermeasures faster than we can field systems. To prevail, we must develop globally interoperable systems built on open architectures, which avoid the impediment of vendor lock or allied consensus to be compatible with their capabilities.

The nation's acquisitions process must also allow for developing systems to a point where they meet immediate mission requirements, while leaving flexibility to further optimize these systems based on the parameters of specific future missions. Finally, deferred fielding of solutions without commitment to a particular system or interrelationships gives the U.S. the flexibility to incorporate future updates as technology continues to evolve.

An effective strategy should consider all available resources and incorporate lessons learned across the interagency. For example, the success of the Drug Enforcement Agency in achieving a strategic relationship with the National Security Agency and other agencies to bridge intelligence gaps with law enforcement communities in combatting narcoterrorism may serve as an example for building cooperative relationships to counter asymmetric threats.

As nation states and terrorists become bolder in their actions, interagency collaboration with local law enforcement could further enhance U.S. strategic capabilities. The FBI estimated there were 1,000 open investigations into terrorism in the U.S. in June 2016. Improved lines of communication and collaboration



▲ **National security strategies seek to countervail increasingly diverse, multi-regional asymmetric threats.**

Photos by Vitaly V. Kuzmin and Uri Tours

with the nation's 800,000 state and local law enforcement officials would exponentially expand the ability to avert or respond to a terrorist incident at both of these levels of government.

In today's threat environment, the concept of an adversary has grown ambiguous. The fundamental goal of the countervailing strategy is to create long-term, sustainable advantages.

The offset is a response to many adversaries, some defined by geographic boundaries, others by ideological ones. It also makes the principle of never being constrained to a "fair fight" even more important. The pursuit of this strategy is necessary to preserving the security and prosperity of the U.S. against unprecedented threats.