

CSAG INFORMATION PAPER:

“Unvarnished Perspective of the Joint Concept for Competing (JCC)”

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1. **Subject.** Analysis of the JCC, May 6, 2022, released by the Joint Staff.
2. **Purpose.** To present the results of the CSAG’s analysis of the JCC and its implications for USCENTCOM.
3. **Significant Statements/ Assessment**
 - a. **BLUF.**
 - 1) The JCC contains a thesis that US adversaries intend to “win without fighting.” In addition, the JCC notes the different perceptions of rivalry and approaches to strategic competition (SC) by the US and its adversaries¹ which automatically makes traditional Joint Force (JF) deterrence less effective. The JCC also highlights that, if the JF does not change its approach to SC, there is a significant risk that the US will “lose without fighting.”
 - 2) The primary target group of the JCC are JF members, Combatant Commands (CCMDs), those involved in policy and strategy development, military capability development and design, and operational campaign planning.
 - 3) The central idea of the JCC is to shift the JF focus of SC from reactive operational responses to proactive strategic actions that favor the US long-term interests or undermine an adversary’s efforts to pursue their conflicting interests.
 - 4) The objective of the JCC is successful implementation of an integrated competitive strategy(s). This include deterrence, preparedness, counteract, and support (i.e., application of military power contributing to the efforts of the US Government) – “NEVER BE OFF THE CLOCK”. The CSAG already sees an analogy with the USCENTCOM Commander’s priorities.

The JF role in SC and the USCENTCOM Commander’s priorities.

1. Deter aggression ↔ the USCENTCOM CDR’s **LoE #1** – “Deter Iran”,
2. Prepare for armed conflict ↔ **LoE #3** – “Compete Strategically”, also the **Functional Priority** – “IAMD”/“Counter-UAS”, contingency plans (a core function of any military HQ),
3. Counter adversaries’ competitive strategies that threaten US national interests ↔ **LoE #2** – “Counter-VEOs”,
4. Support the efforts of interorganizational partners ↔ **LoE #3** and **Functional Priority** – “Regional Constructs”.

b. Key points of the JCC.

- 1) There is emphasis that the JF must expand its mindset to understand the nature of the SC, focus on national interests and US strategic objectives rather than just denying those of its adversaries.

¹ “They (US adversaries) are in a long-term “conflict without combat” (...)” (The JCC, p. 6).

- 2) The JCC also recognizes that the military instrument cannot do this on its own to compete and win in SC.² Also, as noted, competition does not necessarily have to imitate adversaries' proceedings, but rather to do things in a different way – looking for a niche, changing mindset, or opting for innovation, especially since an adversary is already more advanced in certain realms e.g., hypersonic missiles of adversaries, the Chinese economic expansion including strategic strongpoints, unmanned systems.
- 3) The JCC notes that SC is persistent and enduring,³ and therefore calls on the JF (incl. USCENTCOM) to continuously analyze, assess, and improve its competitive position.

C. **Assessment.**

- 1) The CSAG tried to understand the meaning of the term “lose without fighting”: China was able to develop capabilities that would give it an advantage over the US in line with the China 2019 NDS document. Therefore, it is non-negotiable for the US to develop such capabilities that give an edge on the contemporary battlefield. If the US does not compete with its competitors, they will “lose without fighting”.

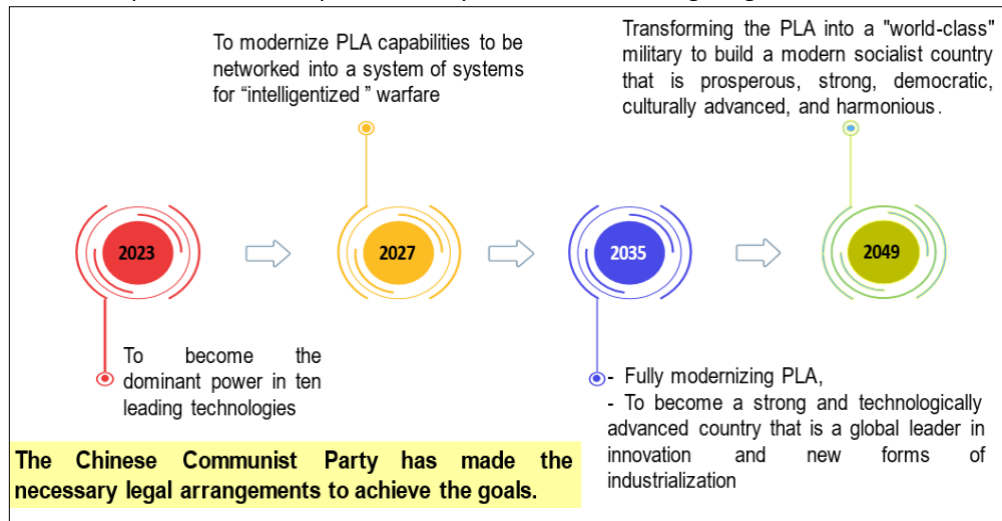


Figure 1. CSAG model of China's expansion timeline.

- 2) The JCC explains the meaning of SC in a quite uncomprehensive view.⁴ For a better understanding, a definition proposed by the CSAG can be implemented at CCMDs' level. The definition also covers the USCENTCOM Commander's Priorities and supports the importance of ABO.

The SC definition

For the purposes of this concept, strategic competition is a persistent and long-term struggle that occurs between two or more adversaries seeking to pursue incompatible interests without necessarily engaging in armed conflict with each other.

Compare with the CSAG's proposal:

Strategic competition is the contested pursuit of influence in the AOR with allies and regional partners for relative military advantage over competitors.

² “(...) nuclear and conventional deterrence is not enough. The United States can and should develop a more holistic approach to strategic competition that recognizes and seizes upon the irregular, non-lethal, and non-military aspects of competing as fundamental to success, (...)” (The JCC, p. 7).

³ “SC is an enduring condition to be managed, not a problem to be solved” (The JCC, p. 7).

⁴ “SC is a persistent and long-term struggle that occurs between two or more adversaries seeking to pursue incompatible interests without necessarily engaging in armed conflict with each other” (The JCC, p. 73).

It is building allies' and regional partners' capacities and maintaining consistent support that allows the Joint Force to advance and secure U.S. national interests and enables allies and partners to secure their interests without resorting to China and Russia as well as other competitors.

NOTE: This definition is covering CMDR's Priorities and ABO.

Figure 2. The SC definitions (JCC vs. CSAG).

- 3) The JCC defines some of the strategic effects adversaries.⁵ Therefore, it is up to the USCENTCOM planners (incl. a "Red Team") to determine whether USCENTCOM has counter-options against them.
- 4) Referring to potential adversaries of the US, there is a pronounced China-centricity of the Concept. However, while in a process dictated by the JCC structured approach, USCENTCOM needs to consider all potential adversarial actors to understand the competitive environment.⁶
- 5) While noting that allies and cooperation with partners are crucial to the success of the JF in SC, the document leaves the topic of partnerships unexhausted, without giving clear guidance on the principles and mechanisms of cooperation. Automatically, the presented Structured Approach is highly US-centric. Also, a figure used in the JCC – "The competitive space and competitive sub-areas", does not provide any clarity as for the allies and partners' role.
- 6) In pursuit of potential allies or strategic partners, the document defines a set of criteria (*see section "Friendly International Actors"*) which the Joint Staff should use to determine interdependencies between the JF and potential partners. These criteria are written in a manner that is confusing at best, and offensive at worst, for current and potential allies and partners.⁷ This could be used by adversaries through their STRATCOM against the US.
- 7) While analyzing a role of the JF in SC and application of military power, the roles defined in the JCC can be linked to the priorities of the USCENTCOM Commander, thus aligning USCENTCOM with the central idea of the JCC and its structured approach.
- 8) The Concept Required Capabilities (CRC) defines a set of near- and mid-term force development and design actions that the JF will **implement by 2030** to mitigate shortfalls in its ability to compete strategically across the spectrum of conflict. Ultimately, the US being already late widens the gap against its advanced adversaries, as a 2030 implementation deadline indicates a backward-looking process and "patching holes" approach rather than mid- and long-term development strategy aimed at taking explicit the lead.
- 9) US officials need to understand that the US interests in the Gulf region can be best served by promoting stronger economic, commercial, cultural, and political relations with the countries of the region.⁸

4. **Recommendations for the USCENTCOM HQ.**

- a. Utilize a "digestible version" of the JCC to address it to the regional partners. Also, invite them to participate in campaign planning to reassure them of the importance of their own interests.
- b. Organize military-level undertakings e.g., TTX, CPX, workshops, SC working groups etc.
- c. Ensure threat assessment are realistic and the right military expertise is at the higher echelons of the JF to maintain vigilance against indicators and warnings of a potential kinetic crisis.
- d. Consider the definition of SC proposed by the CSAG and propose it to the Joint Staff and other CCMDs.
- e. Assure optimal presence in the AOR. To fill the lack of hard assets, innovative solutions and partnerships are of paramount importance.

⁵ Adversaries aim to achieve their strategic objectives through a myriad of ways and means, including statecraft and economic power as well as subversion, coercion, disinformation, and deception (The JCC, p. 5).

⁶ "Complementary classified concepts will address (...) specific adversaries" (The JCC, p. 3).

⁷ "Do they experience endemic corruption that will limit the results of a large investment in their capabilities? (...) Are their contributions to a US-led coalition worth the cost in time and other resources to make them effective partners?" (The JCC, p. 48).

⁸ Mr. Joseph J. Sisco's Statement: "*The Gulf region has a need for technological expertise and has an excess balance for investments in other countries, including the United States. Thus, the Gulf States, the United States and its allies can participate in an exchange of goods, services, and capital with a mutual advantage for all.*"