



UNITED STATES SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND
OFFICE OF THE COMMANDER
7701 TAMPA POINT BLVD.
MACDILL AIR FORCE BASE, FLORIDA 33621-5323

21 January 2016

MEMORANDUM THRU

DIRECTOR, JOINT STAFF, 300 JOINT STAFF PENTAGON, WASHINGTON, DC
20318-0300

FOR DIRECTOR, OPERATIONS, 3000 JOINT STAFF PENTAGON, WASHINGTON,
DC 20318-3000

SUBJECT: Strategic Multilayer Assessment of the Gray Zone

1. United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) requests the Joint Staff (JS) J-39 Deputy Director for Global Operations (jointly with additional elements in the JS, Services, and U.S. government (USG) Agencies) initiate a Strategic Multilayer Assessment (SMA) effort to determine how the USG can identify, diagnose, and assess indirect strategies, and develop response options against associated types of Gray Zone conflicts. If the USG is to respond effectively to the threats and opportunities presented in the increasingly gray security environment, it requires a much more thorough and nuanced understanding of the space between peace and war than we currently possess. I request the SMA effort specifically:

- a. Assess the geopolitics and lifecycle of Gray Zone conflicts.
- b. Assess how to identify, diagnose, assess, and develop effective response options against these types of Gray Zone conflicts.
- c. Provide a rigorous and comprehensive articulation of the space between militarized conflict and peace.
- d. Conduct a quantitative analysis of historical antecedents of such occurrences and their contemporary manifestations and geopolitical drivers.
- e. Detail the specific U.S. experience with Gray Zone conflicts, and measure the efficacy of various tactics and strategies as instruments of U.S. policy.
- f. Explore the nature of the capabilities (conceptual, procedural, and physical) necessary for navigating the Gray Zone successfully.
- g. Identify how the disparate elements of power should be coordinated to respond effectively to Gray Zone conflicts. Highlight the most effective response options over time and model required level of adaptability as adversary actions morph and adjust.

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h. Examine interests, resources, and capabilities of Violent Extremist Organizations (VEO) and Transnational Criminal Organizations (TCO) in Gray Zone regions.

i. Conduct a Deep Dive assessment examining the behavior of select state and non-state actors (e.g. Russia and Daesh (ISIS)) in Gray Zone conflicts relating to their strategic objectives. Specifically, identify indicators of increased aggression, ambiguity, integrated use of elements of power, collaboration among adversaries and destructive leadership.

2. As part of this effort, I request you coordinate with representatives from all the Services. I also request the SMA office coordinate with the U.S. National Intelligence Council (NIC) Strategic Futures Group to document findings from simulations already conducted by the NIC and examine the feasibility of conducting simulations during CY2016. Among others, I request that you specifically consider the following:

a. Coordinate with the Joint Staff J5 and J7.

b. Work with the Office of the Secretary of Defense's Minerva Research Initiative to bring together top scholars through seminars and research-informed analysis.

c. Assist Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) G-27 in analyzing maneuver in the narrative space and performing quantitative assessments with the Athena model.

d. Coordinate with U.S. Strategic Command J-5 to assess new deterrence concepts for Gray Zone conflicts.

e. Work with U.S. European Command J-5 in performing Deep Dive assessments as they pertain to Russia.

f. Work with the Asymmetric Warfare Group to support the analytic effort.

g. Coordinate with the National Defense University for support in the cognitive study and for simulations.

h. Coordinate with the Combating Terrorism Technical Support Office (CTTSO) for computational support.

i. Work with the Department of Homeland Security to examine the implications of VEO and TCO activities in the context of Gray Zone conflicts and their effects on homeland Security.

3. Notwithstanding the specific requests above, please feel free to take advantage of any additional opportunities or partners that may present themselves. In particular, many of our foreign partners have expressed interest in the subject of the Gray Zone.

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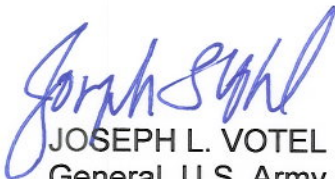
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Although I cannot speak for them, I am sure that several will be anxious to participate as able. As a matter of principle, it would be most helpful to ensure that the products resulting from this effort are produced to allow maximum distribution possible, both within the USG and among our foreign allies and friends. Should you desire, the USSOCOM Wargame Center may provide an excellent venue for wargames, simulations, or Gray Zone related seminars.

4. From both my personal experience and on behalf of the Special Operations community, I want to express my sincere admiration and gratitude for your challenging and innovative work over the years. You perennially tackle some of the most complex and intractable issues our nation faces. I thank you for your efforts to date.

5. Our point of contact is CAPT Philip Kapusta, J51, Comm (813) 826-1717, NIPRNet email philip.kapusta@socom.mil, SIPRNet email philip.kapusta@socom.smil.mil.

*Thank you for your
focus on this
project!*


JOSEPH L. VOTEL
General, U.S. Army
Commander