

**UNITED STATES ARMY
SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND**



Cognitive Joint Force Entry

White Paper

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1-1. Purpose. This paper describes the emerging idea of Cognitive Joint Force Entry. It provides an initial framework to consider how Inform and Influence Activities (IIA) can contribute to success in the shaping phase of campaigning. It also presents Cognitive Joint Force Entry as a vital capability in a critical domain working at strategic windows of opportunity where other instruments of national power may not or cannot function. Finally, it offers possible recommendations to advance the idea.

2-1. Operational Context.

a. *Global Trends 2030* contends that "the adoption of irregular warfare tactics by both state and non-state actors as a primary mode of war fighting will be a common characteristic of conflicts beyond 2022. The diffusion among non-state and sub-national groups of advanced weaponry, and of information and communication capabilities historically held by nation-states will significantly increase the threat posed by irregular forms of warfare. The decline of the regulated nation state order and the increased prominence of Violent Extremist Organizations (VEOs) suggest that over the next few decades, individual empowerment may prove critical. At the same time, the diffusion of weapons and information technology will encompass greater numbers of empowered individuals, while the cyber domain offers them several advantages over other forms of warfare."¹ The view characterizes an unpredictable, ill-structured environment infused with exponentially expanding information dissemination and exchange capabilities. *ARSOF 2022* further refines this view, identifying "the momentum of human interaction is reaching unprecedented levels; enabled by generational leaps in personal communication technologies and an associated social-media explosion,"² which highlights the criticality of the influence and information domain.

b. *Global Trends 2030* and *ARSOF 2022* identify the proliferation of information dissemination and communication capabilities, the diffusion of information technology, and the rise of irregular warfare tactics as potential challenges. These trends indicate that the United States could benefit from a greater persistent awareness of the global information environment, have the capability to apply influence and information activities to counter new challenges, and the availability of scalable options for senior leadership to shape environments in the earliest stages.

3-1. Problem Statement. How will Army Special Operations Forces provide the United States with information and influence activities to gain greater strategic depth, provide enhanced security, and set favorable conditions for follow-on actions?

3-2. Central Idea. The United States Army Special Operations Command (USASOC) provides Cognitive Joint Force Entry capability to support Geographic Combatant Commanders (GCC) and Joint Force Commanders (JFC) using information and influence activities to prepare the environment for follow-on actions. Cognitive Joint Force Entry is a proactive, Human Domain-centered strategy that synchronizes and employs all components of the global information environment to predispose populations of a foreign country or countries to favorably view U.S. activities or operations. It reflects campaigning to win in the shaping phase of an operation, and it is a component to achieve persistent influence within the operating environment to create decisive influence. It achieves strategic depth, builds cognitive security, and it provides scalable options to achieve favorable outcomes.

3-3. Solution Concepts and Components.

a. Win in the Human Domain. Cognitive Joint Force Entry is part of Strategic Landpower designed to prevail in the Human Domain. In COMUSSOCOM's Posture Statement to the House Armed Services committee on 11 Mar 2014, Admiral McRaven described the Human Domain. He stated: "Our SOF engagement takes place in the Human Domain — the totality of the physical, cultural, and social environments that influence human behavior in a population-centric conflict. The Human Domain is about developing an understanding of, and nurturing influence among, critical populaces. SOF is uniquely suited for operations that win population-centric conflicts, oftentimes, and preferably, before they start."³ Success within the Human Domain "depends on the application of unique capabilities that are designed to influence, fight, and win in population-centric conflicts."⁴ To achieve the goal of nurturing influence and winning in population-centric conflicts, the ARSOF approach will be to "first understand the population within the context of the operational environment and then take meaningful action to effectively influence human behavior toward achieving the desired outcome."⁵ Cognitive Joint Force Entry provides the mechanism for ARSOF to set the conditions for success in the Human Domain.

b. Establish a pro-active posture. ARSOF will employ Cognitive Joint Force Entry activities in the earliest stage to shape the future operating environment and achieve favorable outcomes before conflicts start. As the USSOCOM input to the 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) recommended, "Preventing war through presence and an innovative, small-footprint, low-cost, and responsive approach to posture is far cheaper than waging war and mitigating the instability and radiating effects that come with waging war."⁶ Cognitive Joint Force Entry addresses a key notion of that cost calculus by using information and influence activities to shape the environment beginning in pre-conflict stages. ARSOF achieves this by maintaining a persistent, continuous awareness of the global information environment, which provides the ability to anticipate challenges and identify opportunities for early and responsive

actions. The pro-active posture provided by Cognitive Joint Force Entry will preclude shortfalls in the past where "the US was slow to recognize the importance of information and the battle for the narrative in achieving objectives at all levels,"⁷ and the proactive posture addresses the critique that "the US response to the emergent battle for the narrative was characterized by an initial lack of leadership emphasis and resources that addressed information as an instrument of national power."⁸ Cognitive Joint Force Entry provides a vital capability in a critical domain at strategic windows of opportunity where other instruments of national power may not or cannot function. Adopting a pro-active posture through Cognitive Joint Force Entry will gain the initiative in setting the conditions for success by achieving favorable outcomes before conflicts start.

c. Dominate Cognitive Depth. For the purposes of this paper, Cognitive Depth is a dimension of the operating environment encompassing a populations' realm of perceptions, beliefs, opinions, and attitudes. It can have a global scope and includes the dimension of time. These components present a highly complex challenge for successfully generating persistent influence and preparing the environment for follow on actions.

1) The concept of Cognitive Depth can be viewed through a combination of terms drawn from psychology linked to doctrine. It is a dimension influenced by an extremely broad range of factors, "to include individual and cultural beliefs, norms, vulnerabilities, motivation, emotion, experiences, morals, education, mental health, identities, and ideologies."⁹ That broad scope is formed over time and incorporates multiple references in a complex framework of attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors, which are acquired.¹⁰ The source of attitudes are "culture, social role, laws, mass media, institutes, schools, parents, family, peers and others, various groups and direct experience."¹¹ Cognitive Depth, therefore, is formed, informed, and modulated by a whole-of-environment interaction. Understanding that complex arena to create effective strategies for the initial, shaping phase of a campaign requires significant skill, deep knowledge, and supporting capacity.

2) While Cognitive Depth may be formed by multiple factors, its potential scale can range from individuals and groups to populaces and nations. As *Global Trends 2030* has described an interconnected world with instant information access, it is possible that the perceptions, dispositions, and attitudes of people, groups, and populations can be exposed to a near limitless realm of influence, including global, virtual sources of influence. Cognitive Depth can therefore be both local and global and can range from the tactical to the strategic level. The global context may possess multiple strata where attitudes, perceptions, beliefs, and opinions can potentially create a range of decisions and behaviors. It includes what JP 2-0 calls "human factors affecting a leader's or key actor's decision-making influences."¹² Those decisions and

behaviors could include various degrees of influence impacting a campaign. Therefore, understanding and assessing the complex, global nature of Cognitive Depth will become essential. Joint Publication 5-0 indicates "As planners assess complex human behaviors...they draw on multiple sources across the operational environment, including both analytical and subjective measures that support a more informed assessment."¹³ The new information environment will be inherently dynamic and requires maintaining a persistent awareness to know how and where influence and information activities can be applied. Achieving persistent awareness will be a necessary precondition to effectively apply influence and information activities. Having the capacity to maintain persistent awareness remains an essential ingredient to success in the earliest stage of a campaign.

3) As Cognitive Depth has a wide range and includes the realm of perceptions, beliefs, opinions, and attitudes, it also incorporates the dimension of time, past, present, and future. This characteristic requires a capacity to maintain persistent engagement in the information environment, understanding the past and looking into the future. The Joint Publication 3-13, Information Operations, states: "the cognitive dimension encompasses the minds of those who transmit, receive and respond to or act on information."¹⁴ That description points to a space with processes working at the present time in the here and now. But because cognition is "a general term of the higher mental processes by which people acquire knowledge, solve problems, and plan for the future,"¹⁵ it also spans the past in terms of memory, functions in the present, and reaches into the future in terms of conceptualization. Maintaining persistent engagement will enable an understanding of the continuum of the information environment, which is necessary to implementing influence and information activities. The combination of persistent awareness and persistent engagement will yield deep cultural knowledge to craft and implement activities specifically tailored to the environment.

4) Another aspect of time as it relates to Cognitive Depth is the tempo at which change occurs, and - within the cognitive domain - change takes time. Because change takes time, implementing influence and information activities should occur as early as possible in order to achieve persistent influence. Due to the complexity in the way opinions and attitudes are formed and held, and because aspects of the cognitive domain directly relate to the notion of identity and the way individuals interact with the world, changes in the cognitive domain occur over time. Psychology texts refer to the complexity of attitudes and why they are fundamental aspects of individuals. "Attitudes help [people] to function in the social world"¹⁶ and result from "the multiple processes by which humans adapt to their environment."¹⁷ It indicates that attitudes are integral to the way that people function in relation to others and how individuals relate to the world. These primal factors contribute to the lengthy process where change occurs. Because of the lengthy process and the long lead times to effect change, information and

influence activities should be planned strategically and applied pro-actively to develop decisive influence in the earliest stage of campaigning. It should be planned through a whole-of-government approach and should be implemented in early, whole-of-government manner to achieve sustainable, persistent influence.

5) The Russian efforts regarding the war with the Republic of Georgia in August of 2008 reveal the aspects of persistent influence over time and achieving results through pro-active efforts beginning in the early stages of a campaign.

a) The Russians achieved persistent influence in Georgia and its separatist republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia through a variety of avenues. The earliest can be seen in pro-active efforts two years before the conflict when Russia granted the ethnic Russians of those areas citizenship, thereby imparting a "protected" status on them, establishing the potential to aid those citizens in humanitarian efforts or similar intervention.¹⁸ Seven months prior to the outbreak of actual combat, "Russia undertook a series of political and military tasks designed to sow fear and confusion ... and set the military conditions for success in a war with Georgia."¹⁹ Russia planned and executed its attack against the Republic of Georgia revealing a strategic understanding of Cognitive Depth and tempo by shaping the environment with pro-active steps.

b) Russia not only took pro-active steps, but it also achieved a persistent understanding of the environment, because "Russia identified and skillfully exploited the gap between Georgian and Western policies with respect to...Abkhazia and south Ossetia."²⁰ Russia understood the limits of Western governments and created strategic opportunities for action. They leveraged the notion of Russian ethnic identity for advantage by granting citizenship and creating a "protected" population, which built options for the future. They maintained persistent understanding of the environment allowing them to achieve persistent influence over time. While Russia's objective was war, that nation's actions reveal successful Stage 0 (zero) shaping activities and illustrate the significance of Cognitive Joint Force Entry.

d. Achieve Cognitive Security. Security is defined in JP 3-10 as "measures taken by a military unit, activity, or installation to protect itself against all acts designed to, or which may, impair its effectiveness" and as "a condition that results from the establishment and maintenance of protective measures that ensure a state of inviolability from hostile acts or influences."²¹ Cognitive Security is described as a condition in an operating environment where favorable opinions and perceptions within a populace reduce risk to the force and to the mission. It is characterized by a non-hostile, neutral, or supportive disposition for current and future US activities. It is one aspect of security in its broadest form and specifically relates to the cognitive

realm of opinion and perception. Cognitive Joint Force Entry facilitates establishing and maintaining Cognitive Security.

1) Cognitive Security results from using information and influence activities to shape opinion and create dispositions favorable to the US and its efforts. Additionally, the psychology related to the study of groups articulates that cognitive security can be strengthened. The concept of polarization reflects one process where individuals and groups increase their levels of certainty regarding an opinion or attitude. Polarization "refers to the tendency for individual's opinions to become more extreme,"²² which could solidify the favorable perceptions within a population towards US actions and thereby improve security. Another theory argues that "strong attitudes are ... powerful anchors and therefore have more impact on perceptual processes,"²³ which could be cultivated through selected information activities to expand Cognitive Security.

2) In China, the People's Liberation Army has worked to achieve Cognitive Security within its own borders. "Given the concerns about psychological warfare and the potential role of special operations in that context, the PLA has shown great interest in defensive measures against them. Given the political nature of psychological operations, the foremost concern is to strengthen the morale, will and political support of both the military and the civilian populace."²⁴ A detailed, thorough understanding of the information environment would lead to understanding the "powerful anchors" and enable improving Cognitive Security. Cognitive Security can be fostered and strengthened, establishing an environment that reduces risk, facilitates the implementation of follow-on actions, and enhances security for both the force and the mission.

f. Sustain Cognitive Resiliency. Cognitive Joint Force Entry also includes cognitive resiliency to counter opposing information and influence efforts. Favorable opinions and perceptions established through information and influence efforts build a resistance to the themes, messages, and appeals of opposing views. Cognitive Resiliency is an internalized resistance within individuals and populations against opposing influences, which provides a reflexive rejection of adversary, threat, and competitor influence and information efforts.

1) Any staunch fan whose sports team has a longstanding archrival can attest to the kind of perception the fan has of the rival team and the quality of that perception. The perception is formed over time and creates an inoculation-like effect which rejects the rival team in absolute terms. The psychology profession describes this mechanism in a variety of ways. One theory argues: "The degree to which attitudes are held depends on the personal importance, the degree to which it polarized a person."²⁵ It reflects a predisposition against opposing views. Another concept, "belief perseverance," is described as "the tendency to maintain a belief even after the

information that originally gave rise to it has been refuted."²⁶ This concept reflects the Cognitive Resiliency found in the staunch fan whose sports team has just been beaten by the archrival.

2) A report from as early as 2003 indicated that Chinese military concepts advocate "tempering the minds of the Chinese people by inoculation ... to develop psychological immunity"²⁷ as psychological defense in confronting adversaries. The Chinese approach has been characterized as "strengthening indoctrination to immunize one's leadership and population against the enemy's messaging efforts."²⁸ The description using medical terms reflects the intent to "inoculate" the population against opposing influences. And the Islamic Republic of Iran has sought to "gird itself against domestic subversion and enemy psychological warfare ... to inculcate heroic martial values in its fighting men in order to nurture a culture of resistance, jihad, and martyrdom."²⁹ Both the Iranian and Chinese examples illustrate forms of Cognitive Resiliency where foreign governments have implemented programs to create resistance against opposing influence.

3) Finally, studies from the American Psychology Association reveal that "Less attitude change has been observed for attitudes that are more extreme, more important, more accessible, higher in interest with larger latitudes for rejection of opposing attitudes,"³⁰ which, in lay terms, states the stronger the belief, the stronger the resistance and the greater the rejection of opposing ideas. It reinforces the notion of the individual's inherent ability to reject opposing ideas in Cognitive Resiliency. Information and influence activities in a campaign can contribute to security by sustaining and expanding the resistance to opposing themes, messages, and views. ARSOF must invest in developing cognitive resiliency within groups and individuals capable of resisting opposing messaging. These investments will enhance security and thus set the appropriate conditions for follow-on actions.

3-4. Findings

a. Cognitive Joint Force Entry requires a whole-of government approach, planned through a collaborative, integrated effort in coordination with appropriate members of the interagency, Geographic Combatant Commands (GCCs) and their Theater Special Operations Command (TSOC). USASOC might strive to achieve unity of effort by capitalizing on Presidential Policy Directive (PPD)-23's framework to enable Cognitive Joint Force Entry through integrated planning, collaboration, and coordination to achieve interagency unified action.³¹ Within the scope of PPD-23, ARSOF participates in interagency planning for Phase 0 shaping activities using Cognitive Joint Force Entry operations. ARSOF's routine, habitual collaboration with relevant interagency stakeholders and partners builds trust and establishes its role as a sought-after, necessary stakeholder in Phase 0. The effort at times identifies seams and

friction points among the various entities, which provide opportunities to improve interagency unity of effort.

b. To create the capabilities to maintain a persistent, comprehensive understanding of the global information environment, ARSOF must establish the capacity to assess and analyze data to support Cognitive Joint Force Entry. This ARSOF initiative could develop the tools to extract pertinent information and intelligence from "Big Data" to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the information environment, human terrain including social network analysis, and virtual domains including social media analysis. This initiative will require analysts with the requisite expertise in the global information environment, experts from socio/cultural disciplines, and others with relevant skills to support the process. The development of these capabilities will likely lead to sound analytical frameworks and actionable results.

c. In order to maximize access to potential expertise outside of the enterprise, ARSOF must develop processes to leverage U.S. Government agencies, non-government organizations, academia and think tanks to support Cognitive Joint Force Entry. ARSOF can create a community of interested and connected organizations and individuals to maximize the potential of multiple entities using formal and informal means. Formal means could include the use of existing mechanisms such as the Civil Military Advisory Groups (CMAG) to leverage their functions and roles. ARSOF can expand the network of SOF advocates by identifying SOF personnel throughout the IA, services, and joint enterprise and leverage these externally linked personnel to operate in support of a greater collaborative effort. ARSOF can also foster the development of a Futures Forum as a tool to expand the community of interest.

d. To lead SOF planning and executing Cognitive Joint Force Entry operations, ARSOF must develop personnel with a high degree of in-depth expertise to address the complex, global information environment. ARSOF must continue to invest in a professional education development process to groom experts in the profession of influence and information activities. Its scope incorporates Army, other Services, academia, and other civil sector training and broadening opportunities. ARSOF must develop planners capable of SOF campaign planning at the theater level with the skills to fully integrate interagency partners. Curriculum should leverage the Joint Staff recommendations for MISO Advanced Skills Training 2011.

e. ARSOF brings Cognitive Joint Force Entry into campaign design. Establish Cognitive Joint Force Entry as a recognized activity in the initial stages of campaign design and execution. Codify the term in exercises, publications, and forums. Include the term and concept in SOF publications and doctrine.

f. The newly formed Regionally Aligned Forces (RAF) might provide ARSOF with potential opportunities to maximize mutually beneficial capabilities. As the U.S. Army begins attaching regionally aligned forces to theaters to support Geographic Combatant Commands

(GCC), these forces are expected to become regionally engaged and culturally aware. Possibilities to maximize resources, enhance intelligence, expand operational reach, and leverage increased combat power might exist, which could enhance Cognitive Joint Force Entry operations. This is an opportunity to bring the conventional force into a discussion of mutual interest, demonstrate SOF / CF interdependence, and signal the potential for future partnership growth. LNOs exchanged with RAF forces could advocate the concept of Cognitive Joint Force Entry and assess RAF potential to contribute to overall force capability.

g. The challenges of the Future Operating Environment, the opportunities existing in the Human Domain, and the role of Strategic of Landpower in the near future require a refreshed dialogue about Phase 0 (zero) in campaigning. The refreshed conversation could address Cognitive Joint Force Entry and include entities and agencies involved in the initial stage of planning and executing a campaign. Goals of the dialogue would include identifying ways to maximize resources, improve collaboration, nest capabilities, understand authorities, and - above all - seek suggestions to enable the interagency effort. It will require a frank exchange of ideas. The venues might include working groups, panel discussions, and other vehicles to bring selected issues to flag level awareness.

h. ARSOF will need to exercise Cognitive Joint Force Entry by testing the application of this concept using exercises such as Silent Quest and other venues. ARSOF must incorporate Cognitive Joint Force Entry into its cycle of exercises to validate its concepts and applicability. Outcomes from the exercises will inform the way forward. Flag level table-top discussions, crafted vignettes, and interagency participation will provide opportunities to discuss the concept with key stakeholders.

i. Update doctrine. Cognitive Joint Force Entry creates strategic depth by using influence and information to shape opinion and perception, but it's not found in doctrine. There is a need to recast the current perception of depth depicted in current doctrine, specifically addressing depth in terms of pre-combat phases and depth in terms of the Human Domain. Joint Publication 5-0, *Joint Operation Planning*, states: "the concept of depth seeks to overwhelm the enemy throughout the Area of Operations (AO), creating competing and simultaneous demands on enemy commanders and resources Strategic attack, interdiction, and some IO are examples of the application of depth in joint operations."³² The JP view of depth focuses on the combat phases of a campaign with IO as a supporting tool but could be expanded to include Cognitive Depth. The notion of depth regarding the Human Domain in pre-combat phases should be explored, and the idea of cognitive depth should be considered in subsequent JP revisions.

j. Revisit current Army and Joint doctrine and manuals regarding the framework for applying information and influence efforts and regarding the approach to Phase 0 - Shape.

1) Refine the approach in current Army doctrine with regard to Phase 0 - Shape and Cognitive Joint Force Entry. The Army FM 3-53, *Military Information Support Operations*, provides a list of results under the heading of Combat Operations, which reflect possible options in pre-combat phases of a campaign. The MISO results include: "preventing armed involvement by neutral or hostile neighbor states; shaping the operational environment for the introduction of US forces, and reducing risks associated with introduction of [US] forces."³³ Separating and highlighting Phase 0 activities both conceptually and in format presentation would change the depiction of MISO from a combat enabling function to a key shaping role, supporting favorable outcomes without reaching a combat phase. Therefore, there may be benefit in considering a specific Phase-0 section focused on IO writ large and including MISO support, reflecting the intent to win in the earliest phase and not as a specific subset of Combat Operations.

2) Improve the current depiction of Information Operations in joint doctrine. Joint Publication 3-13, *Information Operations*, acknowledges the importance of information activities in Phase 0 but tacitly cedes its role to others: "Due to competing resources and the potential lack of available Information-Related Capabilities (IRCs), executing joint IO during phase 0 can be challenging."³⁴ The publication creates further distance from Phase 0 by characterizing information activities as a Phase I (Deter) function: "During this phase (Phase 1), joint IO is often the main effort for the Combatant Command (CCMD)."³⁵ Doctrine has characterized information activities as essentially too difficult to execute in Phase 0 while designating a primary space for it in latter phases. These assumptions which serve to pull influence and information activities to the right of the operational continuum should be challenged, and recommendations for change could be offered in the next doctrinal update.

k. Invest in further studies into other state and non-state actors' use of information and influence activities in the shaping stages of a campaign would provide amplifying information. A review of Russian activities in the Ukraine, Chinese efforts regarding shaping activities, and examples from ISIS, Taliban, and Al-Qaeda affiliates might add to the discussion.

4-1. Conclusion. The need for the military to support a whole of government approach to achieve national security objectives without committing large scale conventional forces is a present reality. ARSOF can contribute to that effort employing Cognitive Joint Force Entry using information and influence activities to win in the shaping phase of an operation. By achieving persistent influence, it is able to gain decisive influence within an operational environment and set favorable conditions for follow-on actions. Cognitive Joint Force Entry provides strategic depth and builds secure operating environments while it provides scalable options for senior leaders to achieve desired outcomes.

Appendix A References

Section I

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Glossary

Section I Abbreviations

AO	area of operations
ARSOF	United States Army Special Operations Forces
CA	Civil Affairs
CCMD	Combatant Command
CF	conventional forces
FM	field manual
FOE	future operating environment
GCC	Geographical Combatant Command
ICR	Information-Related Capabilities
IIA	Inform and Influence Activities
IO	Information Operations
IW	irregular warfare
JIPOE	Joint Intelligence Preparation of the Operational Environment
JOPP	Joint Operation Planning Process
JP	joint publication
MEG	MISOC Effects Group
MIS	Military Information Support
MISO	Military Information Support Operations
MISOC	Military Information Support Operations Command
NIC	National Intelligence Council
NSC	National Security Council
PE	preparation of the environment
PPD	Presidential Policy Directive
SECDEF	Secretary of Defense
SF	Special Forces
SOF	special operations forces
TRADOC	U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command
TSOC	Theater Special Operations Command
TTP	tactics, techniques, and procedures
USA	United States Army
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development
USSOCOM	United States Special Operations Command
UW	unconventional warfare
VEO	violent extremist organization

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