



**The Brookings Institution:  
Joint CSAF-CNO Discussion on  
the Air-Sea Battle Concept**

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**Final (v. 3)  
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Page 1 of 5**

## **Introduction**

Thank you for that kind introduction. Peter and Michael, thank you very much for inviting Admiral Greenert and me to be here today at Brookings. This is a very well-suited setting for an extensive discussion on Air-Sea Battle—a very important topic that we believe must be further illuminated in order for professionals, like those in this room and elsewhere, to gain a better understanding of what we intend with the Air-Sea Battle concept.

With our time today, we hope to clarify the concept, across its many dimensions. I'll begin with a few selected thoughts on Air-Sea Battle, and then turn the podium over to Jon for his opening, and no doubt even more insightful, remarks. We then will open the floor to your questions.

## **Global Access—A Strategic Imperative**

The watershed events of 1989 to 1991—namely, the dismantling of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union—represented not only tectonic shifts in the geostrategic environment, but also a major realignment in our Nation's strategic military posture. This transformation, from a largely static, garrison-based force structure, to an expeditionary structure that could deploy rapidly to project combat capabilities and effects whenever and wherever U.S. interests required them, was catalyzed by the immediate need to meet the exigent requirements of Operation DESERT STORM and the post-surge rotational requirements in the years and decades that followed.

But more importantly, to great effect over the long term, we sustained this shift to an expeditionary, power-projection military. Facilitating this ability to project global military power, for the following two decades, was largely unfettered access to the global commons of air, sea, space, and cyberspace. I point to only a few major operations—DELIBERATE FORCE, ALLIED FORCE, ENDURING FREEDOM, IRAQI FREEDOM, and ODYSSEY DAWN—as examples that bear witness to our success.



Indeed, U.S. power projection capability in the post-Cold War era has provided the foundation upon which the credibility of our security commitments to allies and partners substantially rests. This includes, where necessary, operations by friendly land and amphibious forces, emphasizing the fact that, in modern warfare, we must maintain air and maritime control if we are to put ground forces in a position to perform their essential operations.

And because these security commitments often directly underwrite our political and economic leverage, anti-access and area denial strategies and capabilities that threaten access to the global commons and our ability to project power also challenge the security, political stability, and economic prosperity of the United States and its allies and partners. If potential aggressors are permitted to slow deployment of U.S. and friendly forces into a theater; if they can prevent us from operating from desired locations within that theater; or if they can cause us to operate over longer distances than what would be operationally advantageous, then these potential aggressors essentially can separate us from our partners. This could drive our partners either to seek accommodation with the potential aggressors, or to develop alternate, potentially less stable means of self-defense, including weapons of mass destruction.

Clearly, any outcome stemming from diminished U.S. credibility of its security commitments, anywhere in the world, is detrimental to our strategic interests, including in the political and economic spheres. Indeed, free access to the commons is fundamental to the global marketplace and world economy on which U.S. prosperity relies. For example, a majority of petroleum and a vast majority of intercontinental trade by weight—90 percent by some accounts—travel by sea. More than two billion passengers and over 35 percent of international trade, by value, transit by international airspace annually. And from around the Cape of Good Hope or through the straits of Hormuz and Bab el Mandeb, roughly half of the world's shipping container traffic and 70-some percent of petroleum products shipments transit through tanker routes along the Indian Ocean rimland, eventually through the Strait of Malacca and into South and East Asia and the western Pacific.



These are but a few high-level examples that suggest the truly global, not just regional, use of the air and maritime commons, and therefore why we need to preserve our access, in order to secure our strategic interests. The Air-Sea Battle concept, therefore, is a genuinely global concept, consistent with the globalized environment in which we operate. It is not designed for any one particular region of the world, but rather is to ensure that U.S. forces remain able to project power to support combatant commander requirements worldwide. Simply put: Air-Sea Battle is indifferent with regard to specific regions of the world, and is intended to assure access wherever our wide-ranging strategic interests are located.

## **Burgeoning Anti-Access and Area-Denial Capabilities**

What now makes A2-AD threats a more urgent matter is that, in the two decades since 1990-91, our access to key areas of strategic interest, as well as the relative permissiveness of selected operating environments, has been and continues to be threatened by the proliferation of advanced technology and computing power, facilitating modernization efforts of potential adversaries. Many of these anti-access and area-denial capabilities and strategies are specifically designed to challenge the U.S. military's power projection capability. Ballistic and cruise missiles; advanced submarines, fighters, and bomber aircraft; enhanced electronic and cyber warfare capabilities; and over-the-horizon surveillance and modern air defense systems, as well as the improved ability to network and integrate these capabilities: these all present significant challenges that will contest our access to, and freedom of movement in, strategically significant regions.

And in vital areas such as the Hormuz and Malacca straits, even low-technology capabilities, such as rudimentary sea mines, fast-attack sea craft, or shorter-range artillery and missile systems, can turn vital, freely flowing movements in the global commons into maritime chokepoints to be exploited by aggressive or coercive actors.

These capabilities—both the more advanced and the less exquisite—are increasingly available at lesser expense, effectively affording modestly-resourced actors, including some non-state entities, with the ability to shape outcomes in regional operating environments, and perhaps even the geostrategic environment



indirectly—an ability that once was the exclusive domain of only well-funded and well-endowed nation-states.

It makes sense, therefore, that potential adversaries would pursue these capabilities, insofar as they provide an alternative to direct confrontation with conventionally, strategically, and materially superior American armed forces. Through A2/AD capabilities and strategies, potential aggressors can circumvent America's traditional military strengths, thereby blunting U.S. military power.

## Implications of Fiscal Constraints

One of the imperatives, in order for the Air-Sea Battle concept to reach its potential, is moderated parochial tendencies amongst the Services, and enhanced cooperative efforts—particularly in a fiscally constrained environment. In our increasingly globalized world, the scope and complexity of our geostrategic interests have been on an ever-upward trajectory, and will remain necessarily global even as our materiel and financial resources to safeguard these interests decline.

Consequently, as service chiefs, and consistent with the new Defense Strategic Guidance, we intend to lead our forces toward an unprecedented level of Joint integration—an institutional-level, “pre-integrated” Joint force, if you will, that enjoys comprehensive and habitual relationships across operations, training, and acquisition and modernization functions—not just *ad hoc* and piecemeal partnerships that form as needed in a particular circumstance. With this deeper integration of complementary and cross-domain capabilities as our foundation, we then can adopt flexible approaches to developing tactics, techniques, and procedures to meet emerging operational challenges. The ultimate goal is interoperable air and naval forces that can execute networked, integrated attacks—in-depth, to disrupt, destroy, and defeat an adversary's A2/AD capabilities, in turn sustaining the deployment of U.S. Joint forces—air, maritime, land, amphibious, and special operations—wherever and whenever they are needed to help counter potential aggression or hostile actions against U.S. and partner-nation interests. Our testing, late last year, of an F-22's in-flight retargeting of a Tomahawk cruise missile that launched from a U.S. Navy submarine is an example of how we are moving closer toward Joint “pre-integration” under our Air-Sea Battle concept.



Another implication of ongoing budget pressures is the need for well-considered and disciplined prioritization of required capabilities. As the Air-Sea Battle initiating concept evolves, garners support, and gains traction, we cannot allow every innovation or potential program to fall under the Air-Sea Battle banner. For a concept that will prove to be complex in its many dimensions, its litmus test is actually relatively simple: If an initiative does not demonstrate sufficient potential to improve the integrated ability of air and naval forces to project power against adversary anti-access and area-denial threats, then it is not Air-Sea Battle.

## Conclusion

In short, ladies and gentlemen, our ability to project global power underwrites our Nation's ambitious and complex strategic posture. Accompanying this posture are more numerous and increasingly robust engagements with global partners, across a wide range of interests—commercial, financial, diplomatic, legal, military, and others. Our Nation's ability to project military power, therefore, is vital not only to our own security interests. And it's important not only to our own Grand Strategic interests. Indeed, to the extent that our global partners depend on U.S. participation in the global economy, on U.S. diplomatic leverage, and on U.S. security assurances to defend shared interests, our power projection capability is important, to a large degree, for regional stability and global economic prosperity as well.

I'd like to turn the podium over to Admiral Greenert now, so that he can elaborate further on the Air-Sea Battle initiating concept. Thank you.