

Strategy Conference begins with first principle of defense: identify future threats

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Deputy Secretary of Defense addresses the first fight -- for technological superiority and operational excellence

See the DepSecDef presentation at www.youtube.com/usarmywarcollege.

There's a clock ticking that demands significant and lasting changes in the next two years, based on the big strategic issues we face -- to include the nature and character of future ground warfare.

"The pace of strategic change that we see right now ... and the pace of technological innovation that's going on primarily in the commercial sector will not allow us to simply graft incremental changes upon the operational organizational constructs which we are familiar and comfortable with," said U.S. Deputy Secretary of Defense Robert O. Work in the keynote address about Future Defense Strategy April 8, 2014 at the United States Army War College at Carlisle, Pa.

'First principles for 21st century defense' is an especially apt theme, he said -- exactly what the entire Department is trying to do, wrestling with the future shape and structure of our joint force. It's starts with getting principles right.

One of the first principles of successful innovation is to correctly identify those specific future challenges that demand solving today, he said, making the right adjustments and changes to get after them, he said. In his remarks, he noted that job one is to recognize the multiplicity of types of adversaries and the inevitable proliferation of precision guided munitions, among other technological advances. This first principle informs the strategies, technologies, organizational constructs, and operational concepts to fight future adversaries, he said.

Third offset strategies will target a plethora of different types of competitors, and each of the strategies we pursue against them will be different. Third offset strategies will be possible by identifying the technologies, the operational and organizational constructs, new operational concepts to fight our future adversaries.

“If you do choose right, you’ve set yourselves up to be among the best competitors in the future landscape.”

Drawing comparisons with the experience of Israeli Defense Forces, he noted the qualitative and quantitative challenge of hybrid threats – although smaller forces, they will be disciplined, organized, with effective command and control and will be equipped with stand-off weapons in large quantities. “Defeating hybrid adversaries will demand entirely different skills than those needed for counterinsurgency,” said Work.

In addition to irregular warfare and hybrid warfare, our land warriors must be ready to fight wars like we have seen in Crimea and Ukraine. “In both places, the Russians have unleashed what their chief of the general staff called ‘nonlinear warfare’ which evolves from covert action by special operation forces to sustained unconventional combat waged under an umbrella of denial, and then ultimately escalating to high-end force-on-force proxy warfare, with the state actively involved in combat operations,” said Work, who drew a contrast with our understanding of the norms and ‘avenues of approach’ of a conventional fight. “Nonlinear adversaries are going to use agents, paramilitaries, deception, infiltration, and persistent denial to make those avenues very hard to detect – operating in the so-called Gray Zone.”

As difficult as fighting in the Gray Zone will be, worse will be escalation to state-sponsored and space-directed proxy war, he said.

“Future ground warfare, regardless of type, is going to see a proliferation of guided munitions and advanced weaponry,” said Work. “We’re not too far away from guided 50-caliber rounds. We’re not too far away from sensor-fused weapon that instead of going after tanks will go after the bio-metric signatures of human beings.”

The Defense Innovation Initiative is about focus on increasing our competitiveness by attracting talent, through technological superiority and operational excellence, and through accountability and efficiency throughout the [Defense] Department.

Learn more about the technological innovations and new operational concepts described by Deputy Secretary Work at www.youtube.com/usarmywarcollege.

The Strategy Conference is co-sponsored by The War College's Strategic Studies Institute with the Office of the Secretary of Defense for Policy.

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