

## IRAMM: Improving Strategic Decisions and Senior-level Teamwork in U.S. National Security Organizations\*

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**MAKING GOOD DECISIONS IS HARD:** Good analysis helps but should not be the sole basis for a decision. Good decisions consider non-quantifiable factors, such as the value structure and experiences of the decision maker and those who serve as advisers. Incorporating these factors can be difficult, as decision makers often have conflicting priorities and are confronted with contradictory inputs from staff. IDA developed the Integrated Risk Assessment and Management Model (IRAMM) to capture these informed personal views to help decision makers understand the foundations of their own views on national security issues and where those views fit relative to their peers and staff. The method also helps build teamwork among senior staff that can result in imaginative solutions to challenging problems and promote the consistent application of organizational policies. Another benefit of the IRAMM structure is the national-level perspective it provides, which makes it a useful tool for supporting the development, coordination, and implementation of national defense and security strategies, including the articulation of the resulting strategy to others.

The proven IRAMM process can help senior leaders better *understand the risk calculus* used by their staffs, make decisions using an *analytically sound* approach, and *build and sustain teamwork* among staffs in a manner that results in creative *solutions* to problems, better *support* to programs, enhanced *understanding* of priorities, and more *integrated applications* of policy.

**HOW IT WORKS:** IRAMM is a multi-step process that begins when the senior leader identifies the participants (usually senior staff); the major “challenge areas” the nation or security organizations may face in the future, such as major combat operations (MCOs), irregular warfare, cyber warfare, or homeland defense; and any special topics to be addressed in the interviews.

**The Interviews** (1-1.5 hours): Each participant is interviewed individually. The interview begins with an overview of the process and background on the challenge areas.

- Respondents identify scenarios for the first challenge area along with the **likelihood they will occur and the military, economic, and political consequences** to the nation if they do occur (with rationale), using as a basis the currently planned future force and asset structure and an IDA-provided consequence scale.
- Next, IDA calculates **strategic risk scores for all the scenarios** in the first challenge area. A pairwise comparison technique is used to ensure consistency.
- IDA then aggregates these scores to produce a **risk score with rationale for the first challenge area**.
- The process is repeated for the other challenge areas, and respondents are asked to suggest risk-mitigating solutions.

The interview may be repeated to calculate the risk associated with a different force structure or policy, which can then be compared to the baseline.

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\* Based on IDA [NS P-8339](#), *A Method for Improving Strategic Decisions and Senior-level Teamwork in U.S. National Security Organizations*, February 2017.

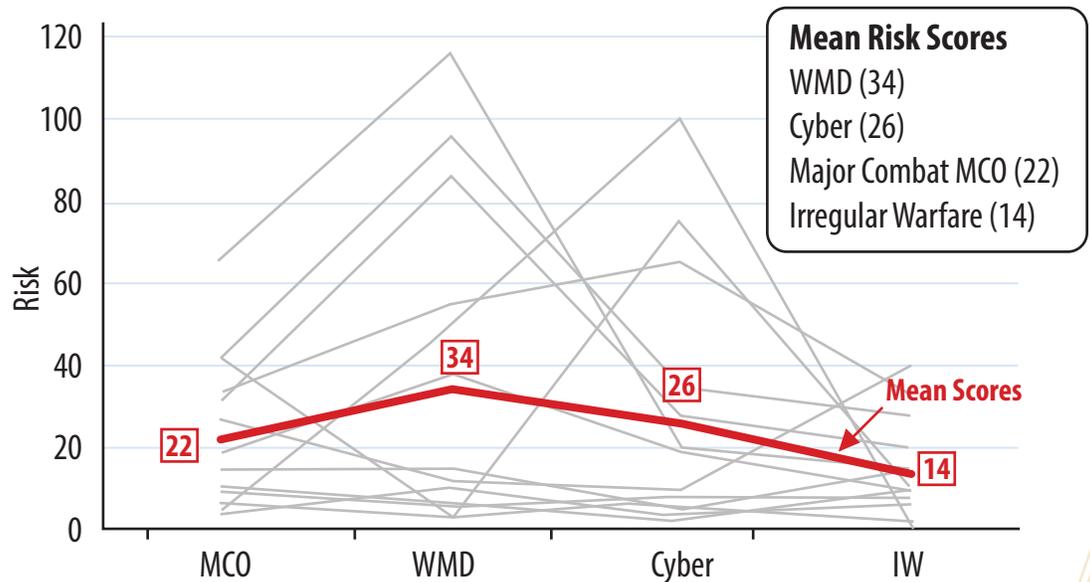
**The Group Meeting** (1-2 hours): The senior IDA facilitator first displays aggregate results (see figure) and highlights areas of agreement and disagreement with rationales. This often leads to discussions about basic concepts and beliefs and results in promising program/policy options to mitigate strategic risks. This discussion can lead respondents to modify their views and adjust initial scores and rationales before results are provided to the senior leader.

**Results to the Senior Leader:** IDA compiles and presents a summary of the IRAMM-based results and recommendations to the senior leader. The leader's deeper understanding of the issues and senior staff solutions enables the development of better programs, policies, and organizational strategies. The senior leader interview provides a basis for comparing their views with peers and staff.

**PROVEN TECHNIQUE:** IRAMM was first used over 10 years ago by the Office of the Secretary of Defense and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to inform the DOD program and build teamwork. The National Commission on the Future of the Army tailored IRAMM to address the risk portion of their congressionally directed charter. It recently

was used in a national-level assessment of risks to the United States in a major potential national security emergency. More than 75 senior leaders in the U.S. national security community have participated in the IRAMM assessment process.

Finally, IRAMM has been vetted at multiple professional society meetings and uses risk concepts that are compliant with industry and academic best practices. Also, its structured approach ensures that all views are represented in a disciplined way consistent with decision-making best practices.



**SUMMARY:** IDA's IRAMM can help national security organizations develop policies and strategies, make programmatic decisions, and efficiently build senior-level teamwork. IRAMM methods may be used at senior and lower levels as well, resulting in more informed leaders focusing attention on the strategic national context, thus making better decisions for the country.

*"I think this [IRAMM] process can serve as an important basis for you and your senior people to organize your thoughts and to identify, in the same language, areas of agreement and disagreement about capabilities worth protecting, items calling for further attention/investment, and candidates for selective disinvestment. In other words, it can help to elicit, tee up, and draw together for integrated discussions among senior players a variety of possibilities for strategy and risk-driven alternatives to salami slicing."*

Former Secretary of Defense and National Security Advisor Frank Carlucci  
in a 2013 letter to Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel