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JOHN A. ADAMS '71 CENTER FOR
MILITARY HISTORY & STRATEGIC ANALYSIS

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MEMORANDUM FOR Adams Center Advisory Board

From: LTC Joel C. Christenson, Ph.D., Director

Date: 4 May 2026

Subject: Adams Center Strategic Plan, 2026-2031

References:

- a. Memorandum of Understanding Concerning the John A. Adams '71 Center for Military History and Strategic Analysis at the Virginia Military Institute, 4 February 2002.
- b. Memorandum of Understanding Concerning the Mission, Operation, and Funding of the John A. Adams '71 Center for Military History and Strategic Analysis at the Virginia Military Institute, 31 October 2007.
- c. By-Laws of the John A. Adams '71 Center for Military History and Strategic Analysis, 20 May 2010.
- d. Addendum to the Memorandum of Understanding Concerning the Mission, Operation, and Funding of the John A. Adams '71 Center for Military History and Strategic Analysis at the Virginia Military Institute, 31 October 2011.
- e. Memorandum for the Advisory Board, "Strategic Vision 2012-2017," 10 June 2013.

1. Background. Twenty-four years following its establishment, the Adams Center is fully funded and faces a future of limitless opportunities. Looking to that future, we remain rooted in the founding ideas, principles, and priorities of Mr. John A. Adams '71 (as reflected in References A through D), and in the successful programs and initiatives that have guided the Center to this moment. As Adams envisaged, we strive to promote constructive discussions of American military policy among VMI cadets, scholars, and national security professionals to stimulate innovative thinking grounded in a firm, critical understanding of the past. We are guided by his belief in the enduring relevance of the Cold War, which birthed the modern U.S. military

establishment and continues to define many of the nation's most pressing national security challenges. And we are committed to principles at the core of the Center's previous strategic plan (Reference E): that history has enduring utility to contemporary national security challenges (*applied history*), and that partnerships are essential amplifiers of our efforts.

2. Mission. To produce, preserve, and perpetuate knowledge related to Cold War military history and strategic analysis.

3. Vision. A vibrant center operating at the intersection of academia and practice, recognized for its innovative approach to Cold War military history and strategic analysis.

4. Audience. Consistent with the founding vision of John A. Adams '71, the Adams Center strives to serve—and to foster meaningful interaction among—VMI cadets and faculty, the broader community of Cold War and military history scholars (at all career stages), and national security practitioners.

5. Partnerships. Relationships with partner organizations within and outside VMI strengthen Adams Center programs and initiatives, expand the Center's reach, and enrich the intellectual lives of cadets and the VMI community. Current partners include:

- 1) Within VMI: Preston Library, VMI Archives, the Center for Leadership and Ethics, and the Department of International Studies.
- 2) The George C. Marshall Foundation, Lexington, Virginia.
- 3) American Battle Monuments Commission, Arlington, Virginia.
- 4) Marine Corps History Division, Quantico, Virginia.
- 5) National Museum of the U.S. Army, Fort Belvoir, Virginia.
- 6) National D-Day Memorial, Bedford, Virginia.
- 7) Joint History and Research Office, Pentagon, Washington, DC.
- 8) The Society for Military History.

Because strong partnerships are essential amplifiers of our efforts, the Adams Center will seek to develop cooperative relationships with innovative organizations near and far. We will focus on

develop collaborative relationships with Cold War- and military history-focused organizations in the government, academic, and non-profit sectors within the United States and abroad.

6. Proposed Five-Year Strategic Goals, 2026-2031. The strategic goals and operational objectives proposed below flow from the Adams Center’s mission and, in action, will move the Center toward its vision. They are:

- 1) Develop the Adams Center as an innovative hub of research and teaching in military history and strategic analysis.
- 2) Establish the Center as a recognized leader in the emerging field of digital military history.
- 3) Foster the intellectual growth and support the professional development of the next generation of history-minded national security leaders.

7. Proposed Objectives. In light of its mission, vision, and strategic goals, the Adams Center will pursue the following objectives:

Strategic Goal 1: Develop the Adams Center as an innovative hub of research and teaching in military history and strategic analysis.

Objective 1-1: *Strengthen the longstanding Cold War Essay Contest and Dissertation Grant programs.* Promote these opportunities widely to expand awareness, and keep award amounts competitive with regular adjustments.

Measurable Action: Every three years, benchmark Essay Contest and Dissertation Grant awards against similar prizes, and if necessary, recommend adjustments to the Advisory Board.

Objective 1-2: *Stimulate new thinking about—and the development of innovative techniques in—the teaching of military history.* Support the biennial Summer Seminar in Military History in partnership with the Society for Military History. Provide opportunities to VMI faculty looking to incorporate aspects of military history (broadly defined) into their classrooms.

Measurable Action: For each iteration of the Summer Seminar that the Adams Center supports, ensure that one VMI faculty member is accepted for participation as a Fellow, and that one VMI faculty member is afforded

the professional development opportunity to serve as Assistant Program Director.

Objective 1-3: *Connect the VMI community (cadets, faculty, and staff) with national security historians, theorists, and practitioners.* Sustain annual foreign defense attaché visits as a cornerstone of Adams Center programming, and ensure an active schedule of intellectually rigorous visits by prominent intellectuals, strategists, and military leaders that maximize meaningful cadet-expert interchange.

Measurable Action: Execute two major history-focused Adams Center events per academic year with cross-departmental reach, and sponsor or support at least two such events led by other entities such as the Department of History, Department of International Studies, the Center for Leadership and Ethics.

Objective 1-4: *Support VMI as the continued home of the Journal of Military History.* Sustain the Adams Center's commitment to the *Journal* and, as necessary and consistent with VMI priorities, enhance the Center's contribution to its operations.

Measurable Action: At intervals coinciding with the Journal of Military History's contract with VMI, review and seek to enhance the Center's support to the Journal, consistent with Institute priorities and the Adams Center's fiscal outlook.

Strategic Goal 2: Establish the Center as a recognized leader in the emerging field of digital military history.

Objective 2-1: *Complete initial development and deployment of the AI-enabled Secretaries of Defense Archival Records Research Assistant tool on the Adams Center's public website.* Create research pathways into under-utilized Cold War national security records for VMI cadets, faculty, and the broader scholarly community. Promote the tool for widest possible awareness, access, and use.

Measurable Action: Launch the Secretaries of Defense Archival Records Research Assistant tool on the Adams Center's public website in calendar year 2026. Promote its use using print media, social media, and in-person events.

Objective 2-2: *Augment the Secretaries of Defense Archival Records Research Assistant tool with annual infusions of between one and three searchable, full-text digital collections.* Employ cadet interns to digitize collections. Build a free and open full-service digital archive on the Center’s public website.

Measurable Action: Each summer, deploy one to two cadet interns to the National Archives to digitize one to three Secretary of Defense archival records collections for full-text inclusion in the Secretaries of Defense Archival Records Research Assistant tool.

Objective 2-3: *Seek collections of unique, high-value Cold War archival records/papers for digital preservation and inclusion in the Adams Center’s online archive.* In 2025 the Center digitized 95+% of the Samuel Hynes papers it received via donation in 2022. In 2026 we will complete this work and begin making those papers available to researchers. The Adams Center also made previous efforts to acquire David Glantz’s papers. We will renew outreach with Dr. Glantz about those papers while seeking other high-value collections.

Measurable Action: Within three years, make the Samuel Hynes Papers available to researchers and add one other high-value collection to the Adams Center’s online archive.

Objective 2-4: *Restart the Adams Center’s oral history program, and add to the 200+ oral histories the Center deposited with VMI Archives between 2002 and 2022.* Collection will focus on the Cold War era, as it did before, but will expand to gather reflections from the post-Cold War era and especially the stories and experiences of VMI alumni who served in post-9/11/2001 operations. Train select cadets in oral history theory and practice, and integrate them into the project.

Measurable Action: Each year, accession 10 oral histories to the Adams Center collection in VMI Archives.

Strategic Goal 3: Foster the intellectual growth and support the professional development of the next generation of history-minded national security leaders.

Objective 3-1: *Grow the Adams Center’s Summer Internship Program.* For years, the Center has placed outstanding cadets with partner organizations committed to giving them immersive, enriching experiences in the field of history—as historians, archivists, and curators. Maintain existing partnerships and add expand as appropriate.

Measurable Action: Within five years, add two new internship partners to the Adams Center's Internship Program, and integrate the Program into the new experiential learning program under development through VMI's 2026 Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP).

Objective 3-2: *Organize conferences on Cold War and post-Cold War national security affairs that bring cadets face to face with scholars and national security practitioners.* Consistent with the Center's mission and its embrace of applied history, conferences will focus on the historical dimensions of contemporary national security challenges. Aim to draw 50 to 75 non-VMI participants and 75 to 100 cadets.

Measurable Action: Hold one conference every three to four years focused on the historical dimensions of contemporary national security challenges, consistent with the Center's programming aims and fiscal outlook.

Objective 3-3: *Grow the Center's outreach to applied historians and national security professionals serving the nation.* Seek opportunities for off-Post Adams Center engagements with these communities, particularly in the National Capital Region. Continue to sponsor the annual Phi Alpha Theta (history honor society) Applied History Field Trip to Washington, DC, connecting cadet and faculty planners with the Adams Center's growing network. Leveraging this community and the extensive, committed community of VMI alumni in the Washington, DC area, seek opportunities to sponsor lectures, panel discussions, and symposia there focused on the historical dimensions of contemporary national security challenges.

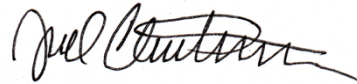
Measurable Action: Working with local partners, sponsor one history-focused event (reception, lecture, or panel discussion) in the National Capital Region every two years.

Objective 3-4: *Support cadet archival research, scholarly engagement, and cultural immersion.* Provide financial support to cadets engaging in archival research but not participating in VMI's Summer Undergraduate Research Initiative (SURI). Support more cadets' efforts to present their research and writing at scholarly conferences. Continue to support the annual Olmsted trip that gives commissioning First Classmen with immersive week-long experiences in non-English speaking countries, increasing that support as needed.

Measurable Action: Each year, support up to five cadets with financial grants to conduct archival research for History honors and capstone projects. By 2027, work with the History Department Honors Committee to develop a workable, repeatable application, review, and award process to disburse grants.

Approved by the Adams Center Advisory Board

6 May 2026



LTC Joel C. Christenson '99
Director