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Commentary & Reply

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MORALITY AND *PRIVATE RYAN*

To the Editor:

I first want to thank Professor William J. Prior for his thoughtful and erudite review essay of *Saving Private Ryan* ("[We aren't here to do the decent thing': *Saving Private Ryan* and the Morality of War](#)," *Parameters*, Autumn 2000). Like him, I believe that this film is a rich source of discussion of military ethics, and I would like to take up some of the points he introduces.

Professor Prior nicely parses out the different and conflicting ethical viewpoints expressed in the film: of the individual, of the member of a unit, of the member of a nation state, and of the moral agent. He also tries to reconcile these viewpoints, finding them ultimately incompatible. In his account, the gulf between "ordinary decency" and the moral demands of service in war can never quite be bridged, so that the soldier will often experience guilt for his actions in wartime, however necessary, however consistent with the special moral requirements of service in war.

Such contradictions, or paradoxes, certainly exist in ethics. As philosopher Martha Nussbaum has pointed out, the heroes of Greek tragedy as often suffer for their virtues as for their vices, but I do want to suggest a formulation that may bring the disparity of ethical perspectives closer to agreement.

Professor Prior is correct to say that Captain Miller acts out of a sense of decency when he releases the German prisoner. In so doing, Miller implicitly reminds his men of the standards of ordinary decency by speaking, for the first time, about his civilian background, but Captain Miller is also acting, in this instance and throughout the movie, out of a sense of professional obligation. Although he is not a professional soldier, Captain Miller takes his obligations as an officer very seriously. It is obvious throughout the film that he has studied the military art, and that he feels an unlimited and unremitting requirement to care for his men. These are traits of military professionalism, but so too is the enlightened and moral sense that Miller takes to the business. He is a professional officer by virtue of his superior education and sensibility as much as because of his excellence as a soldier.

When Captain Miller prevents his men from killing the German prisoner, he knows that the laws of war, the regulations of the US Army, and the best traditions of his adopted profession militate against the killing of prisoners. Although he tolerated some questionable conduct in the heat of action at the bunkers on D-day, he draws the line at this cold-blooded killing of an enemy soldier who has been disarmed and taken into custody, perhaps out of a sense that such conduct could have a demoralizing effect on his own men, even undermining his own authority in that he will have tolerated a breach of military law. Miller's actions assert his authority (I might say, his moral authority) by forcing an important issue under conditions that allow him to make and win his point. His men will act as soldiers, not as murderers.

Unlike Carpazo in the village, who unrealistically (if understandably) wants to have a reminder of his niece with him in combat, Miller is acting as a soldier as well as as a decent man in that situation. This is also the moment at which Miller reveals that in civilian life he had been a teacher of English composition. Miller's right to command is upheld by his education and mastery of the chief language of the allies (he also understands French). He is a fit representative of the culture for which he fights.

In contrast, Upham, the translator, knows the language of the enemy, and in the film this perhaps causes him to have too much empathy with them. He is ineffective in combat in part because he is estranged from the us-and-them attitude which the combat soldier is bound to have. Upham is also conversant in the language of femininity: he does a

very convincing imitation of the singer Edith Piaf. This may be another suggestion of why he is out of place in the masculine world of the combat unit.

I believe that the character of Private Ryan may also be discussed in such a way as to show a reconciliation or continuity between what Professor Prior calls ordinary decency and the morality of war. The young Private Ryan is a somewhat ambiguous figure morally. He may be said to be up for grabs in terms of the moral quality of his future life. Although he is surely brave and high-spirited, with a large capacity for comradeship, he is also callous, with a streak of meanness or misogyny. He tells with obvious relish the rather brutal story of his intrusion on a brother's efforts to seduce a girl.

If, by the time he is an old man, Ryan is a good man, compassionate and responsible, I would argue that this is in part because of, rather than spite of, his military service. He has benefited from examples of courage and self-sacrifice in his comrades, and of responsibility and maturity in Captain Miller, who has told him explicitly that he must make his life worthy of the sacrifices laid down to preserve it. Although this point is surely sharpened in the special circumstances of Private Ryan's salvation, it mirrors the feelings of many veterans, and not only those of this war, who have put their survival to good use.

If I have one quibble with Professor Prior's article, it is that he concludes with the word "guilt." I believe that this is the wrong note on which to end. There is a large literature about the guilt of combat veterans. There are many who no doubt are less than proud about what they did or failed to do. But the prevailing feeling of most of them, and again not only on the part of veterans of World War II, is justly one of pride, just as the prevailing sentiment toward them must be one of honor.

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The Author Replies:

I want to thank Lieutenant Colonel Bonadonna for the attention he has paid to my essay on moral conflict in warfare. I think he is in large measure in agreement with my analysis; at any rate, I am in large measure in agreement with his. If I focus below on a couple of areas of disagreement, one of which is largely a matter of emphasis, I don't want that to obscure the fact that there is a large area in which we have the same view.

I agree with Colonel Bonadonna's character analysis of Captain Miller, and with the point that when Miller refuses to kill the German prisoner he acts in accordance with his professional obligation. The laws pertaining to the treatment of prisoners are an attempt, in light of the considerations of "just war" theories, to reconcile the morality of war and the morality of decency. As Colonel Bonadonna states, these laws represent the best traditions of the military profession. I claim, however, that there are practical considerations pertaining to the prosecution of the war and the completion of the mission that argue in favor of killing or at least disabling the prisoner. My contention is that this conflict is built into the situation in which Miller finds himself. I would also note that Stephen Ambrose says that American soldiers did kill prisoners; Ambrose was a technical advisor for the film, and the scenario described in the film provides a situation in which such an (admittedly illegal and immoral) act may appear justified.

I find Colonel Bonadonna's analysis of Corporal Upham problematic. Upham, we should remember, is after all correct about the fact that the prisoner should not be killed. If he is somehow out of place in a combat unit, that suggests (though it certainly does not prove) that the morality of decency is somehow out of place there as well. Incidentally and for what it's worth, I think that Upham's failure of courage in the final battle is attributable not to a lack of masculinity, but to inexperience and a lack of training. He has not held a weapon since basic training. He has not experienced combat until the start of the mission. He is surrounded by combat veterans who are highly trained members of an elite unit. He can't be expected to behave as well under fire as they do. One wonders, though, whether continued service in such a unit might not inure Upham to the moral principle he is zealous to defend in the first encounter with the prisoner. (He does, after all, eventually kill the man himself, when the man has once again become his prisoner.)

Finally, I agree with Colonel Bonadonna that Private Ryan shows growth in the film, growth that is at least in part due to the sacrifice made by Miller and others on his behalf. I also think that soldiers who have served in combat may justifiably take pride, and moral pride, in their service. By referring to the morality of war as a morality I meant to argue that this pride is not simply mistaken or the result of moral insensitivity. It may also be the case that a soldier may serve, even in combat, and escape without performing acts incompatible with the morality of decency. My claim was only that some situations create conflicts between the morality of decency and the morality of war, and that when soldiers act against the morality of decency they must feel some guilt. Years ago I spoke to an elder in a church I was joining about my pacifist convictions. The man had been a bomber pilot in World War II. He was clearly proud, and justifiably so, of his service. Still, he said, "Those people on the other side, they were human beings too." That is the conflict about which I was attempting to write.

William J. Prior

MORE ON MACKINDER AND GEOPOLITICS

To the Editor:

I read with dismay the intellectual confusion presented by Christopher J. Fettweis in his article "[Sir Halford Mackinder, Geopolitics, and Policymaking in the 21st Century](#)" (*Parameters*, Summer 2000). Four major problems exist with his logic and argument.

Defining Terms. Fettweis apparently believes that anyone who looks at international relations through a geographical lens is a "geopolitician." This is sloppy usage and shows a fundamental misunderstanding of a diverse body of literature. Broadly speaking, "geopolitics" may be divided into the schools of the organic state thinkers--those who wish(ed) to transcend the balance of power--and the geostrategists--those who wish(ed) to maintain the balance of power. While the first school largely disappeared with the demise of the Third Reich and General Karl Haushofer, the second school remains--and, as Fettweis clearly points out, has many different variants. In any event, to (mis)use the term geopolitics as a pejorative does little to advance debate.

Levels of Analysis. Tied in with the first problem is Fettweis's miscomprehension of levels of analysis. For him, geopolitics concerns itself only with international relations writ large. However, as Geoffrey Parker points out in his *Geopolitics: Past, Present, and Future* (1998), "geopolitics" may be viewed from the macro (global), meso (regional), or micro (national/state/local) levels. In other words, geography does not matter merely to superpowers. Even the most casual examination of the Balkans or Caucasus (Armenia and Azerbaijan come to mind) over the past decade shows that geography matters to the local populace just as much (if not more so) than it does to the statesmen and strategists.

The Fallacy of Technology. Third, Fettweis buys into the modern-day trend that technology has shrunk the world and that the ends of the earth may be traversed with little inconvenience. To an extent this is true. A battalion of the 82d Airborne Division or a battalion of Marines may be able to reach hotspots quickly. But what about sustainability? What about combat power? Fettweis overlooks the lifeline of military operations: logistics. Geography constrains logistics precisely because transportation assets are finite and shipping personnel and materiel over long distances is time-consuming. Russia's central position makes, in his words, "successful attack nearly impossible" because its strategic depth and climatic conditions offer adversaries logistical nightmares.

In addition, Fettweis's belief in the dominance and efficacy of air power seems misplaced. Kosovo may well have been the first conflict resolved through air power, but the Yugoslav army still maintains large quantities of materiel that could not be effectively engaged from the force protection-induced altitude of 15,000 feet. Similarly, cruise missiles did little to hurt Osama bin Laden and his training facilities in Afghanistan. And, to return to logistics, the vaunted B2 bombers of which Fettweis speaks require some 500 man-hours of maintenance for every hour of operational use, making it hardly the weapon system of first resort.

Benevolent Hegemony. Last, Fettweis admonishes the followers of geopolitics for concerning themselves with finding a new threat--or creating new adversaries through such logic. He believes that the United States instead should use its unipolar position to shape the future. But how precisely? The engagement and enlargement strategy has surely created

as much resentment against the United States as reward (see, for example, Peter Rodman, "The World's Resentment," *The National Interest*, Summer 2000).

Geostrategic analysis offers both practitioners and observers a useful tool for examining international politics at the global, regional, and (sub)national levels. With this in mind, serious practitioners of this school of thought do not reduce strategy or politics simply to the geographical. Myriad factors play roles--all roles, however, play out in the contexts of time and space. In an era where no peer competitor exists and no countervailing ideology threatens the nation, it seems that geostrategic analysis is more useful than ever. The analysis of geography and its effects on strategy, culture, and politics offers valuable insights to policymakers. However banal Mackinder's theories seem to be to Mr. Fettweis, lumping all geostrategic theories in with Mackinder's ideas from 1904, 1919, and 1943 oversimplifies things considerably and denies the richness of the literature. To do away with geostrategic analysis, as Fettweis suggests, would be the equivalent of throwing out the baby with the bath water.

Michael P. Noonan
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To the Editor:

Trying to follow what is published in *Parameters* regularly, I found the article by Christopher Fettweis, "[Sir Halford Mackinder, Geopolitics, and Policymaking in the 21st Century](#)," below the usual standards. Mr. Fettweis is introducing into one of the leading American military journals the anti-American concept of "critical geopolitics" promoted by a left-wing Irish professor in Virginia, Gearoid Ó Tuathail.

The article contains a number of mistakes, of which I will mention a few:

Karl Haushofer's influence on German World War II policy was not of the kind Mr. Fettweis claims. The great idea of Haushofer was an axis of Japan, the Soviet Union, and Germany. When in June 1941 Germany attacked the Soviet Union, Haushofer lost what little influence he had and his dream was crushed.

There never even was an Institute of Geopolitics in Nazi Germany: "There was never an Institute for Geopolitics. My father's only assistance was my mother; he never had any other staff." (Interview with Heinz Haushofer, July 1978, in G. R. Sloan, *Geopolitics in United States Strategic Policy 1890-1987* [New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988], p. 57. Sloan is a graduate of the Britannia Royal Naval College, Dartmouth, and a highly respected geopolitician.)

On Haushofer's influence on the German leadership: "Haushofer only met Hitler three times in his entire life. When my husband and Hitler were in Landsberg Prison, Haushofer visited only my husband. Hitler drew his geopolitical thoughts in *Mein Kampf* directly from Ratzel. Professor Haushofer never influenced him." (Interview with Frau Ilse Hess, 25 July 1978, in Sloan, p. 53.)

It is an incorrect claim that Swedish troops in a war of aggression laid waste to Russia. Sweden was at the beginning of the Great Northern War (1700-1721) subject to a surprise attack and secret coalition by Russia, Denmark, and Saxony, and King Charles XII was faced with a multifront defense. He had to deal in turn with Denmark, Russia, Saxony, and then Russia again. The Swedish army in Russia, when turning south, was welcomed by oppressed Ukrainians.

It is true that Swedish troops captured Moscow in 1609. This was on invitation of one of the Russian pretenders to the throne during the "Time of Troubles" to prevent a Polish capture of the capital. There was also a dynastic conflict at the time involving Swedish Prince Charles Philip (brother of Gustavus Adolphus) for a future as Tsar of Russia. But Moscow chose a Romanov instead. Russo-Swedish wars (there have been quite a few) have mainly been of a defensive nature on the part of Sweden.

Mr. Fettweis also leaves out the matter of the influence of the founder of geopolitics, Swedish Professor and Member of Parliament Rudolf Kjellén, on Karl Haushofer. For further information on Professor Kjellén, see my article "Rudolf Kjellén and Modern Swedish Geopolitics" in the Autumn 1998 issue of *Geopolitics*.

Bertil Häggman
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The Author Replies:

I appreciate this opportunity to address this pair of well-reasoned and thought-provoking criticisms, and to clarify some of the points I made two issues ago. In the end I believe there is much that my critics and I can agree upon.

For instance, I agree with Mr. Noonan on a fundamental point--geography is certainly a vital consideration for military operations and tactics. He made a convincing argument for a proposition with which I concur, that in general geography becomes more relevant as one's scope of inquiry shrinks. However, my article was not an examination of tactics, but rather a critical look at Mackinder and geopolitical approaches to US national interests and grand strategy. Failure to address other geopolitical levels of analysis does not imply "miscomprehension" or ignorance of their existence. One has only so much time.

The term "geopolitics" has indeed taken on an unfortunate pejorative connotation in some circles, due to its association with the Nazis and then with the realpolitik of Henry Kissinger. However, I do not see how Mr. Noonan's categorization of geopolitical theorists would be helpful, for it merely clouds the debate. The key issue differentiating his two schools of thought is the approach to the balance of power, which of course is a matter open to many interpretations, depending on where one sits. Basically it seems to boil down to this: if a theorist is on your side, he is a "geostrategist"--if not, he is an "organic state thinker." One man's peaceful balance is another's dangerous imbalance that needs attention.

I am often fascinated by arguments decrying the "fallacy of technology." They always begin by admitting that technology is indeed changing international politics, but assert that there are some aspects that remain the same, as if the rest of us expected the entire system to change overnight. It seems we can all agree that the limitations of the physical world are becoming less imposing with the arrival of each new technological innovation. Technology is changing the world faster than the social sciences can adapt, and therein lies our problem.

I'm afraid Mr. Noonan and I will have to disagree on the potential for the kind of benevolent hegemonic leadership by the United States that he implies is an impossible pipe dream. Even realists like Ken Waltz and Christopher Layne have argued that successful aspects of successful states are imitated by others. As the most "successful" state in almost every category, the United States can expect that its behavior will be closely watched by other nations eager to replicate that success. The nature of American hegemony in the next century will go a long way in determining the actions of the other states and the nature of the system with which we will be faced. Other states may grumble at perceived American meddling and arrogance, but they do little to offset it--in fact, American leadership is welcome in most quarters. How precisely is the United States to use its unipolar position to change the world? The short answer is: lead, preferably by example.

The assertion that "geostrategic analysis is more useful than ever" in a world devoid of peer competitors and ideological conflict is intriguing but unsupportable. When there is no competition for territory, no obvious enemy to conquer or defend against, geostrategists must invent one, for geopolitical analysis is by its nature competitive. The identification of the importance of spatial considerations seems to always entail competition over that space. In the absence of great power rivalry, the map of the earth does not have to be the map of a battlefield--but it will be if we approach grand strategy from a geopolitical perspective.

Mr. Häggman begins his critique with the assertion that critical geopolitics is "anti-American," which seems to imply by extension that I was attempting to introduce some hidden anti-American agenda into *Parameters*. This is surprising, for surely Mr. Häggman knows that critical geopolitics (and all critical theory) may be many things, but one thing it is not is "anti-American." It is instead a terminological umbrella under which many different theories find a home, some of which are more "left-leaning" than others. Most, however, merely call for new investigations into the foundations of thought upon which our most basic ideas are constructed, trying to help us define and understand the true nature of the post-Cold War world and of politics itself.

In my article, I was suggesting that the United States would be better off recognizing the vacuous nature of some of its intellectual geopolitical heritage and developing new frameworks with more potential to bring about national and international peace and prosperity in the next century. I hope this does not strike the reader as anti-American, for that was never its intent.

I must admit that I am confused by Häggman's twofold "corrections" of my work. I wrote that Karl Haushofer was very influential on the overall development of geopolitical thought, not on Nazi policy. The latter is a controversial issue in geopolitical theory, one for which Mr. Häggman has a clear opinion. I did not assert that there was an "Institute of Geopolitics" in Germany, for instance, or that Hitler consulted Haushofer. What I did do was argue that Haushofer put geopolitics on the American intellectual radar screen, if inadvertently. Second, my article made the minor point that Sweden invaded Russia; Mr. Häggman seems to refute that assertion by restating it. To occupy the capital at the request of a puppet government is to invade the country, as Soviet actions in Czechoslovakia and Afghanistan demonstrated. Invading Swedish armies may have been "welcomed by oppressed Ukrainians" and serfs, but so were the French and Germans. Russia has been the scene of many invasions, several of which were by Swedes.

Ideas have staying power. "Heartlands" and "rimlands," "shatterbelts" and "pivots areas"--these are the kind of ideas more appropriate to games of Risk® than to international relations, yet they have imbedded themselves into the strategic subconscious of this nation like pebbles stuck in a shoe. My article tried to deconstruct the geographically-based notions that affect our policy, to show that recommendations for grand strategy informed by alleged mystical insight into mother earth have outlived their usefulness, if in fact they ever possessed any at all.

Christopher J. Fettweis

TAKING ISSUE WITH RALPH PETERS' "THE HUMAN TERRAIN OF URBAN OPERATIONS"

To the Editor:

It is safe to assume that the readers of *Parameters* look forward to Ralph Peters' frequent contributions. He addresses interesting, important, and controversial subjects for which there is no party line. His article "[The Human Terrain of Urban Operations](#)" (*Parameters*, Spring 2000) is a primary example as it concerns an extraordinarily difficult and complex topic.

Until recently, the subject of urban operations has been relatively neglected in formal military doctrine. The Army basically made the siege an absolute science; the Air Force concentrated on "place annihilation"; the Navy contributed information and analysis; and the Marines were left with the eyeball-to-eyeball fighting. The overall strategy was designed to keep our fighting forces out of range, à la force protection or "casualty avoidance," and give them the ability to hit without being hit. The emphasis was on keeping a distance with techno-gadgets, non- or less-lethal weaponry, and imaging.

The earlier doctrines were written for urban operations in support of conventional forces. Even General Krulak's "Three Block War" describes a "holding territory" type of operation. The US military seems to recognize the difficulties and has aggressively attacked the complexities of military operations in urban terrain (MOUT), including those of the resident population, refugee creation, and terrorists. However, there is little understanding about how to conduct other types of urban operations--those more closely involved with the human element: humanitarian and various forms of low-intensity conflict. The natural starting point is, of course, organizing our thinking about urban areas where US military forces may be required to conduct a large range of operations.

To accomplish this agenda, we have to (a) assess the urban areas as accurately as possible, (b) create the required doctrine and operational guidelines, and (c) make certain that these fall within the guidelines of US foreign and defense policy. Lieutenant Colonel Peters starts rather appropriately with the first task: assessment of urban areas. However, his assumption that there is a relationship between types of cities as he categorizes them and the prevalence of violence is fundamentally flawed.

First, Lieutenant Colonel Peters' categories of hierarchical, multicultural, and tribal urban areas simply don't work. Categories must be distinguishable and inclusive on the basis of criteria held in common in order to be useful and comparative. In the case of "hierarchical" the criterion for inclusion is defined as centralized administration; in the case of "multicultural" the criterion is the existence of two or more cultural groups; in the case of "tribal cities" the criterion seems to be geography. Most important, to be truly useful, categories or typologies must be "findable" in the real world. This test of verifiability simply means that one should be able to make three lists--one of hierarchical cities, one of multicultural, and one of tribal cities--and know exactly where each city fits. In the real world one would have to assign Chicago, New York, Albuquerque, Denver, Miami, Los Angeles . . . and Athens, Istanbul, Delhi, Damascus, London, and Tokyo to one of the categories without too much trouble. That might be difficult.

Then, if the categories worked, one should be able to find a direct relationship between those lists and the level of violence. If you can't list the cities and then relate that to levels or types of violence, the categories are not very useful and maybe even misleading or dangerous when used as a basis for policy. The more critical question is: Would these categories tell us how to conduct more successful MOUT operations?

Other points:

- We do not *know* that historical cities were more repressive than modern cities. In some ways, the reverse may actually be true. Historical cities were certainly less intrusive--i.e., they did not have the technology of the modern state that allows control of individual citizens in a variety of ways.
- That cities on the "fringes of civilizations" have problems is not a result of the causal power of history (i.e., "they have *always* hated each other"). Rather, "causes for killing" are clearly related to political, economic, and/or ideological factors.
- Munich may have "whimpered" not in relationship to its categorization as a "hierarchical city" but because it was the end of a painful war. Likewise, Mogadishu was just really beginning to mobilize political and military forces against a number of likely "enemies." That war will also eventually end with a whimper. They all do.
- I am not sure how cities "squander" creative energies by being multicultural. We need some clarification on that point. Some people even like having spaghetti, chow mein, sushi, and hot dogs available on the same street. It is only when differences become politicized that competition can turn into conflict. This is a challenge for democratic politics.
- Most people agree that the fighting between Palestinians and Israelis is not irreconcilable, given historical patterns which have more peaceful times than conflict periods, and not related to profound difference in beliefs, values, and ambitions--they are all "peoples of the Book(s)" having remarkably similar codes of belief and conduct but very different political experiences. Most of the time, under most conditions, their social relationships are quite peaceful.
- There seems to be some definitional problems with race, blood, and color. If there are "differences in blood" one just might find differences in "race." Race is associated with genotype and phenotype and becomes important when associated with preferential access to valued goods and services. Blood types A, B, or O are not predictors of violence. And color is not the same thing as race or blood. If people, like flowers, come in different colors, we just might have to blame God. We can make color either a benefit or a curse.
- Social organization is most basic at the level of intermarriage--usually an ethnic in-group or out-of-group phenomenon. Hence Lieutenant Colonel Peters' argument about the former Yugoslavia disintegrates. Ethnic groups are not primitive social organizations on an evolutionary march to civilization. They are simply one way human populations organize in support of socialization. The marriage patterns (endogamy) may have been overlooked by modernists, but are critical indicators of political loyalties and economic consumption patterns whether under the rule of an empire or modern state.

- We do know many of the reasons why people kill, and it isn't for a phantasmagoria of identity. There are very real political, economic, and social concerns that form "more than the total of the sum of the parts." But in knowing, there is responsibility.
- A major ethical concern is the implication that single ethnic group or monocultural cities are somehow "best"--if they can be found to exist. Admittedly, there are practical, even compelling arguments for separating people so they can't fight (ethnic cleansing), and/or the deprivation of the object of hatred (genocide). However, the solutions should not be less palatable than the problem.

Perhaps it would behoove us to ask two basic questions: Given the various types of urban operations, can we identify those urban areas where US military forces may be sent, and what do we need to know about different urban terrains and their respective human populations for a variety of operations--humanitarian, low-intensity, non-combatant evacuation, etc.? These questions may take us back to the drawing board.

Dr. Pauletta Otis
Professor of International Studies, University of Southern Colorado
Former Distinguished Professor of International Strategic Studies, Joint Military Intelligence College

The Author Replies:

Dr. Otis reports her beautiful view of the world from a university campus, so she has the advantage of me. My own views always seem to be crippled by experience.

Ralph Peters

KOSOVO AND INFORMATION SUPERIORITY

To the Editor:

Dr. Timothy Thomas's article "[Kosovo and the Current Myth of Information Superiority](#)" (*Parameters*, Spring 2000) was timely and interesting. This is a type of warfare that the United States and our allies will be facing in the future, and it needs to be discussed.

However, I feel that Dr. Thomas missed the mark in addressing NATO's information superiority. I would contend that it was Serbia that started with information superiority and maintained it throughout the conflict. The United States and NATO were using their perceived and touted "information superiority" to better their conventional targeting, while Milosevic was using his actual superiority to almost accomplish his goal of ethnic cleansing in Kosovo. Without the timely intervention of third parties, we could still be ineffectively lobbing steel onto Serbian soil.

Thomas does a very good job of showing strengths and weaknesses of both sides during the conflict. Serbia was able to stay well within our decision cycle and make us react to their informational strengths, while NATO was able to bring overwhelming combat power into the conflict. But was that combat power necessary and well used?

Through careful manipulation of his armor and decoys, Milosevic was able to force NATO to waste millions of dollars of munitions. Serbia's use of readily available intelligence (satellite times, NATO targeting information) allowed him to position his forces for their maximum effectiveness: either to preserve his limited combat power or to expose another chink in the NATO partnership. Serbia's use of the media and electronic news facilities allowed Milosevic to cause tension and ruptures in the NATO fabric. These tensions hampered military decisionmakers and targeters by having to elevate targeting to the national political arena, eliminating any informational advantage that NATO's technological edge offered.

Thomas reviews NATO's reported success versus Serbian tanks and armor, but did that force Milosevic away from his goal of ethnic cleansing in Kosovo? No. He still managed to inflict a massive amount of suffering on the ethnic

Albanians during the air war.

The article raises several questions from my perspective:

- Were information planners integrated into the planning stages of the operation, or was the planning left in the hands of conventional military thinkers?

Kosovo demonstrates the future of conflict, a powerful military force confronted by a weaker opponent, asymmetrically. The weaker opponent will try to find a way to defeat the strong military power in an arena where the power is weaker. Milosevic succeeded in that aspect by using information to accomplish his goal.

Our planners (planners refers to both military and civilian/political planners) were never integrated into the operational planning for Kosovo. I can only imagine the scene at the KFOR planning facility. Military targeters jumping into the traditional steel-on-target mode over a huge, modern digital map, while the information operations planners are given a small desk in the back room and allotted two minutes to brief the assistant to the assistant chief of operations.

KFOR missed the boat militarily, and the NATO allies missed the boat politically. This was not a traditional conflict where military power and prowess dominated, but one where information was vastly more important.

For an operation of this magnitude, political and military information planners need to be not only integrated into the planning, but dominant in the planning. Steel-on-target planners need to be integrated into the information operations plan, not the other way around. Civilian and political planners need to be integrated so the entire range of options (diplomatic, economic, information and military) can be used.

- The lack of human intelligence hampered the entire range of the operation. NATO's reliance on technical sensors to provide information to planners played into Serbia's information superiority. The predictable, well-published, and promoted intelligence platforms allowed Serbia to enact a full range of countermeasures and deceptions.

There were no human intelligence networks to rely on in the targeting network for initial information, targeting, or any assessment or feedback. Serbia once again dominated this aspect of warfare, while NATO ignored it. With the simple introduction of a clandestine intelligence network in the target area, NATO would have had immediate feedback to targets and more accurate and timely targeting information. Human sensors on the ground would have also given NATO the ability to access populations for counterpropaganda and NATO's psychological operations. This access would have been a huge asset to the information campaign.

- Were NATO's military intelligence assets efficiently used? I suspect once again that the MI assets were used to feed the traditional steel-on-target planners, and not to support informational goals or advise NATO leaders that their decision cycle had been compromised by Serbia well before the air war started. The target for MI assets should have been the decisionmaking cycle for Milosevic and his leaders--what were they thinking, how were they going to react--followed by recommendations on how to stay inside their planning cycle. Instead, the efforts of the thinkers were wasted on developing target folders to brief pilots and program TLAMs.
- Despite our much-touted PSYOP assets, NATO was not able to gain access to the Serbian population. We could not override their signal with the truth. As a result, the Serbian population played right into Milosevic's information operation.
- My final question lies in the basis of the article. The article discusses military information superiority. The discussion needs to center on whether or not the United States and the NATO allies effectively used the full range of interagency assets to counter Milosevic's full range of information. It seems to me that the military was left to execute a plan that should have been spearheaded by civilian agencies using the military as a hammer if the carrot didn't work, as a potential source of information and information-based targets.

Kosovo should not be touted as a NATO success for information superiority; it should be studied for what it actually was: a lesson from a master in how to manipulate information on the modern asymmetrical battlefield.

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The Author Replies:

I appreciate Major Gottschalk's comments on my article, but to respond to it properly would take a long article in and of itself. He raises many different and interesting issues. Major Gottschalk is talking about information superiority from several points of view--PSYOP, Milosevic's internal and external use of propaganda, interagency coordination and responsibility, lack of human intelligence (and implication of an overreliance on technology), and military intelligence. My article focused on the last two issues (use of intelligence gathering devices and analysis) and barely touched on the other areas.

Major Gottschalk's point of view is that there is much analysis yet to be done in the other areas, and I agree with him. I do not agree, however, with his contention that "it was Serbia that started with information superiority and maintained it throughout the conflict." Major Gottschalk is correct if talking about the soft side of information superiority (propaganda, perception management, etc.), but is off the mark if his focus is information superiority in the technological sense. The direction of his argument demonstrates once again that one's understanding of information superiority depends on which aspect (pure information or information systems) one is discussing.

Timothy Thomas

Reviewed 17 November 2000. Please send comments or corrections to carl_Parameters@conus.army.mil