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## Commentary & Reply

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# Commentary & Reply

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From *Parameters*, Winter 2001-02, pp. 135-43.

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## PONDERING WAR WITH CHINA

### To the Editor:

Lieutenant Colonel Roy C. Howle's article, "An Evitable War: Engaged Containment and the US-China Balance" (*Parameters*, Autumn 2001), is troubling. While the author appears realistic regarding the PRC leadership's ambitions, he seems to be unrealistic about what US policy short of war can accomplish in preventing PRC aggression and what the most likely place is for a US-PRC confrontation. The author states that China's leaders have the ambition to achieve regional hegemony and that they believe the United States is the principal obstacle to this. What the author fails to do is (1) follow these facts to their logical conclusion--that PRC leaders must find some way of deterring the United States from intervening to stop their expansion; (2) recognize that the most important of their ambitions (to both the PRC and the United States) must be the reunification of China; and (3) recognize that the United States is not merely an "obstacle." Rather, deterring US intervention is itself part of achieving hegemony.

The author also seems unaware of at least two basic historical realities. First, he seems to believe that "economic ambitions [can] take precedence over military ambitions." The truth is rather different. The rise of Imperial Germany, for example, demonstrates that economic growth can give rise to political and military ambitions.

As for "engaged containment," it has a long history of failure. Geoffrey Blainey points out how three of its most prominent advocates would have been dead wrong in their predictions regarding fall 1914: "If [Henry Thomas] Buckle and [J. E.] Cairnes and Albert the Good had lived to glimpse the crowded channel steamers . . . in June, 1914. . . or . . . the warehouses of German goods by the canals of Manchester and St. Petersburg, they would probably have prophesied a peaceful autumn for Europe." (Blainey, 1973, p. 25.)

The point is that economic engagement cannot substitute for military deterrence. Neither can economic growth nor the promise of economic favor or punishment substitute for or deter the fulfillment of politico-military ambitions.

The third problem with the author's argument is his selection of the Spratly Islands as the most likely location for a "defining moment" for the United States and China. A "defining moment" seems to occur when conventional wisdom regarding a nation's place in the power hierarchy is proven wrong. The author's chief example is the Spanish-American War. In that war the United States defeated Spanish ground and naval forces. The United States demonstrated that Spain was not a great power and, in addition, that the United States was, perhaps, more powerful than many in Europe had thought.

The problem with postulating a "defining moment" in the Spratlys is the low probability of direct conflict between the United States and China over those islands. The United States, at least at the moment, does not have any firm commitment, by treaty or otherwise, to defend the Spratlys or either of the parties (the Philippines or Indonesia) contesting ownership of the Spratlys with China. The author states that we would be fighting for "stability." Based on the Gulf War, I don't believe many Americans will be interested in sending their young men and women to die for "stability." Thus, we are exceedingly unlikely to go to war with China (or anyone else) over the Spratlys. Clearly, the real place for a confrontation is over Taiwan. It will also be extremely difficult for the United States to make a compelling case for intervention there. Legally, the United States has signed up to the "one-China" doctrine. As a result, legally speaking, a war between Beijing and Taipei would be in the nature of a civil war, in which our intervention would have to be judged legally to be interference in the internal affairs of the PRC.

Intervention by the United States against China would constitute an act of war by the United States against the PRC. Such an action would legally justify any counteraction the PRC wished to take against the United States. US bases, carrier battle groups, forward-deployed air wings, and Army and Marine Corps units would cease to be potent

weapons of war and instead become highly lucrative targets for PRC theater/tactical nuclear weapons. Further, not only would the United States be unable to retaliate in kind for such attacks--as we have retired to storage our entire arsenal of theater/tactical nuclear weapons--but threats to escalate to the use of so-called "strategic" weapons would be extremely risky since, to paraphrase one Chinese general's comment to Joseph Nye, "We know you will not intervene because you want to keep Los Angeles." Thus, under these circumstances, we would be able to deter an unprovoked nuclear attack by the PRC, but attempting to "extend" our nuclear deterrent to cover Taiwan would be fraught with grave risks to the US homeland given our lack of theater/tactical nuclear systems.

Should the PRC leadership decide for war with Taipei, there are three possibilities for the United States, none of them good. First, the United States engages in a useless economic blockade or embargo which, in the end, only proves once again how impotent such tactics are and, indeed, how powerless the United States really was to stop the PRC from taking Taiwan by force. Second, the United States goes to war with the PRC, taking very high losses in people and materiel but in the end achieving strategic victory by preventing the PRC from taking Taiwan (a replay of the Battle of the Coral Sea with fantastically higher US losses). Whether this changes judgments regarding the power hierarchy in the Pacific is not predictable, since it will depend on just how Pyrrhic our victory is and how good a face we can put on it afterwards. We can predict, however, that with Chinese possession of theater/tactical nuclear weapons and our lack of them, it won't be a walkover.

Third, the United States goes to war and loses. We both take immense losses and fail to save Taiwan. This would truly be the author's defining moment. It would be a watershed in world politics. The PRC would have proven its mastery over the United States in Asia. US prestige in the world and especially in Asia would decline sharply, thus dramatically reducing its political power. The United States would, like Germany after World War I, be left to ponder where it had gone wrong in its politico-military thinking. Such a post-mortem might start by asking the question where we ever got the crazy idea that getting rid of our theater/tactical nuclear weapons would be a good thing.

Dr. Michael F. Altfeld  
Oakton, Virginia

### **The Author Replies:**

In response to Dr. Altfeld's critique I would like to point out that the purpose of my article was to generate debate on the topic and cause the players in this sphere to consider other options in developing foreign policy (the operative term being "foreign"). It appears I have at a minimum reached an intermediate objective. The major problem to date has been the tendency to apply Western values and bias to the decisionmaking processes of foreign entities in the development of foreign policy. In formulating his critique Dr. Altfeld continued the trend.

First, the Chinese are not interested in deterring the United States since they believe we ourselves are already in an inevitable decline. Suggesting they deter us indicates a tendency to mirror-image onto the Chinese what we would do and sets into motion a series of decisions that will cause us to miss completely how the Chinese think. If, based on their assessments, we are doomed to collapse of our own weight or are doomed to make a strategic error that is fatal to our own national interests, they will wait and apply pressure in areas where we do not expect it, or will attack us or our interests asymmetrically. That is what they will do, and we continue to think of them in the classic post-modernist West European sense.

Second, make no mistake, Taiwan is indeed the most important single stumbling block to smooth US-Sino relations, but is not in any way the most important of the PRC government's ambitions. The most important of their ambitions is domestic economic development, which makes possible military modernization. However, reunification may be Jiang Zemin's most important ambition, since he can then use it to promote himself as a worthy successor to Mao, Zhou, Deng . . . as "the man who unified China." Above all, getting Taiwan back is not as important to the Chinese as not losing it, and that is a crucial distinction.

Third, predicting Chinese behavior based on Western history and Western foreign policy dictates is what got us to this point, and was one of the determining factors for my decision to write the article on this subject. In this regard, I don't find Dr. Altfeld's criticism convincing, and his line of reasoning betrays a fundamental lack of understanding of China. What the Chinese consider important and worth fighting for is not what we consider important, but which, once

attacked, can have a profound impact on other US interests, allies, or friends. The Spratlys, for example, are an excellent case in point of an opportunity for the Chinese to assert an asymmetric response to our stance with regard to Taiwan. Where we in the West don't see a link between the two, the Chinese clearly would.

I appreciate Dr. Altfeld's time and energy spent in submitting his critique because it validates for me the work put into such an effort while at the US Army War College. In short, I have accomplished my mission; the debate has been joined.

Lieutenant Colonel Roy C. Howle, Jr.

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## **DEFENDING TAIWAN**

### **To the Editor:**

In his article "What if . . . `China Attacks Taiwan!'" (*Parameters*, Autumn 2001), Richard Russell argues that our intelligence may underestimate the growing invasion capabilities of the PRC, misjudge Chinese invasion strategy, and overlook Chinese perception of a short window of opportunity, and hence internal pressures for an early attack. A decision to attack would not be telegraphed by the time-consuming massing of an invasion fleet. The Chinese are masters of deception and proponents of suspense. The first step would be a surprise missile and air assault designed to destroy Taiwan's ability to interdict invasion by sea and air, which could then follow swiftly. At some point in the future, and Russell suggests perhaps very soon, the PRC will be able to overwhelm Taiwan's defenses by sheer numbers by air, sea, and land, and by its demonstrated willingness to accept losses inconceivable to others. One must promote the best scenario, but prepare for the worst, which is the one Russell proposes. Hope is not a policy option.

The Chinese would not initiate an invasion if they thought that the United States could or would intervene in time to defeat it. Thus there is the additional question of American will. Some future President or Congress, if not the current ones, might not be prepared to accept the risks and costs involved in the defense of Taiwan. In Roy Howle's article in the same issue, "An Evitable War: Engaged Containment and the US-China Balance," he observes that "America's weakness lies not in her capabilities but with her national will." Credibility is at issue.

The fear that America either lacks credibility, or the ability to respond in time to a surprise attack, is all too plausible. It follows logically that if Taiwan is to be able to deter an attack, much less to defeat one, it must have more than a defensive capability. It must be able to impose unacceptable risks and losses on the PRC bureaucracy and military. This means more than sinking ships and destroying coastal cities on the Taiwan Strait. It means the ability to strike at the heart of PRC power and control: "enough" strategic nuclear missiles on submarines roaming the seas, beyond the reach of the PRC military, protecting Taiwan from surprise attack and the United States from agonizing indecision. The United States could assist in Taiwan's procurement or production--no more than China has been doing for assorted paranoid regimes. If Russell's analysis is correct, it should be done now.

Charles T. Stewart, Jr.  
Emeritus Professor of Economics  
George Washington University  
Washington, D.C.

### **The Author Replies:**

Professor Stewart correctly points out that Chinese perception of US intentions, resolve, and military capabilities to respond quickly to a Chinese military assault against Taiwan is a critical factor in the cross-Strait stability equation. His point that American policymakers need to address these hard issues sooner, rather than later, is well-taken.

I do, however, have serious reservations about Professor Stewart's recommendation that the United States assist Taiwan in developing nuclear deterrent capabilities. As a general observation, I am skeptical of the arguments that nuclear deterrence is inherently easy and that the proliferation of nuclear weapons enhances international security. American efforts to help Taiwan develop a nuclear deterrent posture would render our efforts elsewhere to stem the

proliferation of weapons of mass destruction as hypocritical and undermine their overall effectiveness. More specifically, American assistance to a Taiwanese nuclear weapons program would surely be seen as "crossing a red line" and as a direct threat by Beijing, substantially adding to the Chinese incentive to militarily move against Taiwan. The Chinese would need to preempt Taiwan before it could make nuclear forces operational.

The Taiwan Strait poses a stubborn dilemma for American policymakers. How are they to walk that fine line between efforts to bolster deterrence and reduce the prospects for a Chinese assault against Taiwan while stopping short of efforts that could precipitate a conflict? I strongly suspect that Professor Stewart's policy prescription for assisting Taiwan nuclear weapon capabilities would cause the American tightrope walker to lose balance and fall.

Richard L. Russell

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## **JUDGING THE ABILITIES OF FEMALE SOLDIERS REQUIRES DATA**

### **To the Editor:**

We read with interest the two articles on women in combat units in the Summer 2001 edition of *Parameters*--"Combat Roles for Women: A Modest Proposal," by Kim Field and John Nagl, and "Women in Combat Units: It's Still a Bad Idea," by Anna Simons. We believe it is impossible for the senior leadership of the Army, members of the force, the Congress, or the American people to make a judgment about women in combat units until they have studied empirical data derived from actual performance of women in these units. Anything short of that is at best academic musing such as that offered by Dr. Simons and at worst, pure conjecture.

This situation is not unlike the revelation of competence that resulted when the National Training Center (NTC) opened in the early 1980s. In the days preceding the NTC, the tactical ability of soldiers and leaders was judged solely by subjective self-appraisals or those of an evaluator, umpire, or similarly experienced commander. The NTC, however, demanded demonstrated skills. There was no subjectivity involved. Likewise, until women have the opportunity to demonstrate the ability to serve in combat units, all judgments concerning their ability will be purely subjective and probably wrong.

Of course a true evaluation of women in combat units will not be possible until they have progressed through the myriad of assignments, including attendance at all of the service schools, that male soldiers experience. At present, female soldiers are judged based on how they are seen in the job assignments they currently occupy. It is difficult for male soldiers to think of women as hardcore tankers or infantrymen when they are seen for the most part in traditional female roles in noncombat units.

With regard to force cohesion, Dr. Simon described perfectly the usual concern expressed by those opposed to women in combat, namely that they will destroy unit cohesion. However, we believe the implication of not permitting women in combat units will negatively affect the Army as a whole, not just small parts of it. Good people do not stay with lousy organizations for very long. We believe that discontent, dissatisfaction, fear, and feelings of worthlessness or inferiority brought on by prejudice and gender bias toward women soldiers will destroy Army cohesion as quickly as having inequitable or differing standards for men and women soldiers or recruiting soldiers with less than desired intellectual capabilities.

Another aspect is that of physical capability. The common perception is that physical strength is the key ingredient to being a soldier, and since women are not as strong as men, they will detract from combat units. While it may be generally true that women don't have the same physical strength as men, it is also not germane. We have seen more than one skinny, physically weak male soldier demonstrate incredible grit and determination under the most difficult and dangerous of situations. It turns out more often than not that the truly difficult tests for humans turn more on these characteristics than on pure physical strength. In the personal experience of one of the undersigned in trying to stay alive under combat conditions, grim determination, tenacity, and the ability to rapidly make sense of multiple, complex, disparate pieces of information were far more important than the ability to run or lift heavy weights. A few very bright, determined soldiers who understand the term cohesion are better any day, any time, than a comparably sized group whose only attribute is physical strength. As best we can determine, success in combat is more a function

of intellectual power than physical strength. Tactics is and will remain a thinking person's business.

As Majors Field and Nagl pointed out, there is without question a minimum strength and endurance requirement for all soldiers. Equally true is the fact that some military occupational specialties (MOSs) require fit individuals who have strength and the ability to endure hardships and deprivation. But if the standards for these specialties are clearly published, then anyone who meets them should be admitted.

The critical question that must be eventually answered for each MOS is, "What are the physical and mental requirements to do the job to what standard?" If no standards exist, then admittance to and denial from any job can be arbitrary. Without definitive and comprehensive standards, the tasks of recruiting, accessing, and assigning individuals to various MOSs are simple. The result of doing so, however, ensures that the investment made in human capital will not provide the greatest possible return either on the battlefield or in garrison.

Following close behind the physical strength argument is the one that suggests women do not possess the requisite courage to close with and destroy a determined enemy. Our experience suggests that moral and physical courage appears to be more or less equally distributed by gender. We think it is impossible to judge the absence of physical courage in women simply because they have been excluded from the combat arms branches and there is therefore no empirical evidence upon which to formulate an accurate opinion. There are many historic examples of physical courage exhibited by women. Army nurses are famous for facing danger, hardships, and death to protect their patients. Courage is what causes nurses to lie across their patients to shield them during bombing raids; it also allows nurses to stay behind with patients who can't be moved and face the oncoming enemy when the hospital bugs out. Examples from Operation Desert Storm suggest that when placed in harm's way, women perform as heroically as men do.

While neither of us is a social scientist, there is absolutely no question in our minds that most judgments made on women in the Army today are based on one of two very erroneous viewpoints. The first derives from a long-standing cultural bias that limits women to the role of mother, homemaker, or wife to be protected from the vulgarities of life and incapable of engaging in traditional male activities. Women who are characterized in this fashion are not welcome in male-only domains and are in fact castigated if they try to join. The second is some form of extrapolation to combat roles from those specialties traditionally occupied by women. It is difficult for most people to visualize women in a role for which they have not had the requisite training or experience.

All of us need to keep in mind that from birth, women have for varying reasons been excluded from the activities that make males stronger, more aggressive, and assertive. It was not until very recently that women participated in physical activities more strenuous than gymnastics, soccer, softball, and basketball. Today, women compete in ice hockey, boxing, karate, and Iron Man competitions. Similarly, 15 years from now, when the first female tanker completes battalion command, including a rotation or two at the NTC, there will be few questions about the ability of women to close with and destroy the enemy.

Major General Lon E. Maggart, USA Ret.  
Colonel Jeanette S. James

### **The Author Replies:**

Once again I am struck by the extent to which those who want women integrated into combat units totally miss my point and refuse to engage my arguments. I could muse about why I think this is so, but that wouldn't be very academic of me, would it? I'm not arguing about what individual women can't do. Instead, my concern is with what the presence of females not only would do, but can do, and often does do to men. And about this there is ample evidence--just look at the corporate world (never mind recent scandals in the military), or listen to men. I find it hard to believe that any adult doesn't get this. Even for those convinced that they see individuals--and not males or females--when they look at or interact with members of the opposite sex, do they really think everyone reacts in such neutered terms (no matter how much we might wish they did)?

As for the claim that "not permitting women in combat units will negatively affect the Army as a whole," I would simply ask: Have we lost wars due to the absence of women from combat units? Will future wars be lost because women aren't commingled with men on the front lines? If this can be *demonstrably* proven to be so, then proponents

of women being integrated into combat units might actually have a point. But barring the sort of proof that would be needed, which requires a long, drawn-out war--not an NTC exercise--why not let others conduct experiments? That way we in the United States can preserve the effectiveness we already know we have, and, as of 11 September, now need.

Anna Simons

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## **WARGAMES--A COUNTERPOINT**

### **To the Editor:**

I am writing to respond to the article "Wargames: Winning and Losing," by Robert P. Haffa, Jr., and James H. Patton, Jr. (*Parameters*, Spring 2001). I wish to specifically refute some errors in fact in their characterization of how and why the Army After Next (AAN) Wargames were reengineered to the Army Transformation Wargame series. In the article, the authors suggest that the AAN wargame was restructured into the Army Transformation Wargame as a result of "opposition from the senior Army leadership." As the US Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) Futures Director during the transition from AAN to Army Transformation, I can say from firsthand experience that is an inaccurate statement.

The AAN Study Project operated from FY96 to FY99 with the mission to "conduct broad studies of warfare to about the year 2025, frame issues vital to the development of the US Army after about 2010, and provide issues to senior Army leadership in a format suitable for integration into TRADOC combat development programs." Its function, therefore, was to explore the future through study, wargaming, and analysis, as a leading-edge effort ahead of the main body of the Army's leadership. In this context, AAN worked with the research, development, and acquisition (RD&A) community and industry to identify the art of the technologically possible while maintaining a focus on future geopolitical realities, the future of military art, and human and organizational behavior. The AAN study produced three annual reports to the Army Chief of Staff, as well as numerous analytical products from the work of its own Integrated Idea Teams, other study organizations like the TRADOC Analysis Center and RAND, and science and technology exploration by the RD&A community. Throughout this process, AAN had the support of the Chief of Staff, who initiated the effort, as well as leadership and funding from two TRADOC commanders charged with implementing the study.

In the summer and fall of 1999, General Eric Shinseki ushered in Army Transformation. This effort differed from AAN in several significant respects. First, it was a decision to change the Army, not just study the possibility of change. Second, Army Transformation was directed from the top as a priority Army effort involving the entire Army staff and numerous major commands, rather than a study led from outside the Pentagon. Third, Army Transformation was governed by The Army Vision and an evolving Transformation Campaign Plan; AAN had developed its own visualization of the future.

The AAN game series switched to Army Transformation Wargames as part of the larger context of TRADOC's support to Army Transformation. The TRADOC commander directed that AAN reengineer its effort to support Army Transformation, specifically focused on the Objective Force beyond 2010 (the timeframe that AAN had been working in already). We did this throughout the summer and fall of 1999 in parallel with the department's efforts to frame Army Transformation. Given the early decision to shift our efforts to support transformation, we were able by the spring of FY00 to execute the 1st Army Transformation Wargame, fully consistent with The Army Vision and the key elements of the Transformation Campaign Plan. TRADOC's study funding and personnel allocation continued, allowing us to leverage virtually the entire previous body of work directly against the concepts and capabilities of the Objective Force.

The decision to reengineer rather than kill AAN made sense in several respects. We had a body of experts around the Army that were already examining the far-term future. We had the best Army wargame available for use in FY00. And we were fully connected to the concepts and capabilities under development at TRADOC to support the Objective Force (our subject-matter experts were writing some of these as part of our support to TRADOC). Simply put, when the Army decided to comprehensively change, those of us concerned about its future had no logical choice but to

refocus on how to support that change. AAN's reengineering to support Army Transformation was the only approach that could have allowed us to use our insights and experts for the continued good of the service.

I appreciate this opportunity to clarify this matter.

Colonel Daniel Bourgoine  
Fort Monroe, Virginia

### **The Authors Reply:**

We appreciate Colonel Bourgoine's explanation of the shift from the Army After Next (AAN) wargame to Army Transformation Wargames (ATWG) and understand how someone inside the TRADOC staff would see that transition as a more subtle response to the changed views of new Army leadership than we might have implied. We suspect that those at or working with TRADOC who saw a body of work somewhat abandoned by the replacement of AAN with ATWG feel it was more than just a "reengineering" effort, but Colonel Bourgoine's letter helps explain the process of how changes at the top can direct wargaming to support the service's agenda. His explanation, however, only reinforces a point we were trying to make, that structuring wargames to support current doctrine and acquisition plans might become a losing strategy in the long run.

We have participated in, but are certainly not experts on, AAN and ATWG, but our sense from speaking with others who have been involved in both is that AAN more closely approximated the model of a wargame that can help shape a service's vision, rather than one used to justify a service's present. AAN captured our imagination, and that of others in Washington, because it attempted to use rigor and empiricism to look into the future, not just to support Army programs. In doing so, it also seemed to be approaching levels of strategic agreement among joint warfighting commands that we have not seen elsewhere. For example, AAN was the first set of Title 10 games that employed Air Force B-2 bombers for strategic but non-nuclear targeting, and also first employed the Navy's converted ballistic missile submarine, the SSGN, in a land attack role. Moreover, although AAN sought to avoid specific force structure recommendations, its emerging emphasis on Army aviation (to provide operational maneuver at survivable speeds on future battlefields), and consideration of the value of armed UAVs (now being pursued by the Air Force and the Navy), are no longer evident within the ATWG context.

It is also clear that ATWG and the current work being done on the Future Combat System profited mightily from the intellectual work resulting from AAN. But by "reengineering" AAN and structuring the successor transformation studies to match program and budget agendas, the Army may be missing an opportunity to explore the longer-range future through relatively free-play, open-ended wargaming. Such an approach would allow the Army to focus more on joint operations, stretch the force to failure, and strengthen the link between gaming and experimentation. In doing so, these wargames will have more to offer Colonel Bourgoine and his joint colleagues in support of their services' vision.

We hope Colonel Bourgoine's "body of experts" within the Army continues to examine an unconstrained future. As this response was being penned, the tragedy of the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon occurred, dramatically underscoring the vital importance of wargaming symmetric and asymmetric threats to the United States. As we have been so sadly reminded, war is not a game.

Colonel Robert P. Haffa, Jr., USAF Ret.  
Captain James H. Patton, Jr., USN Ret.

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Reviewed 20 November 2001. Please send comments or corrections to [carl.Parameters@conus.army.mil](mailto:carl.Parameters@conus.army.mil)