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Welcome to the Spring 2023 issue of Parameters. This issue consists of an In Focus special commentary and the SRAD Director’s Corner focused on Afghanistan, three forums, and two Reviews and Replies.

When I was initially assigned to the Strategic Studies Institute two decades ago, one of my first projects was an analysis of the Army’s reaction to defeat in Southeast Asia. Entitled Avoiding Vietnam, the study found that the Army as an institution tried to purge Vietnam from its memory while turning to the 1973 Arab-Israeli War for lessons (the monograph can be downloaded at: https://press.armywarcollege.edu/monographs/814/). The only Army forum featuring thoughtful analysis of the Vietnam experience was in the pages of Parameters. Again, I see an institution ignoring detailed inspection of its defeat in Afghanistan while focusing instead on large-scale combat operations in Ukraine. And so, I intend to provide a forum in Parameters to fill that analytical gap.

In our single In Focus essay, “Defeat in Afghanistan: An Autopsy,” Joseph J. Collins rejects the claim that the United States’ nation-building effort was a major factor in its defeat. He argues that the factors contributing to the US failure include the historical difficulty in governing Afghanistan, the Afghan republic’s two inefficient and corrupt governments, an ineffective US strategy, operational shortcomings by US forces, an inadequate Afghan military, Pakistan’s duplicitous policy, and the strength and determination of the Taliban.

The issue’s first forum, Military and Civilians, includes two articles exploring the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) framework and the Department of Defense’s new Civilian Harm Mitigation and Response Action Plan. In “Enhancing US Global Competitiveness through Women, Peace, and Security,” Brenda Oppermann argues that the Department of Defense could significantly improve its success along the competition continuum by leveraging the WPS global policy framework, supporting gender equality, and embracing the value of women’s diverse roles in global security. In “Factoring Gender into Kinetic Operations,” Jody M. Prescott illustrates how US military practice fails to consider the gendered effects of kinetic actions when planning or executing operations
and argues that the implementation of the Department of Defense’s new Civilian Harm Mitigation and Response Action Plan provides an opportunity to close this gap.

Our second forum, Strategy, features two essays providing different perspectives on how to address strategic problems. In “Climate Change: An Opportunity for INDOPACOM,” Catherine A. B. Reppert contends that US Indo-Pacific Command should plan for climate change, asserting it supports the primary objective of countering China, operationalizes climate change response for US commanders, and offers a less threatening means to develop partnerships. In “Daoism and Design: Mapping the Conflict in Syria,” Ned Beechinor Marsh and Heather S. Gregg combine the fundamentals of Dao De Jing philosophy with the US military design process to offer a new perspective for analyzing complex security problems, devising management strategies, and planning military operations. They contend this approach provides insights for dealing with the seemingly intractable situation in Syria.

The third forum, Future Force, includes two articles exploring personnel considerations for US leadership as they assess the effectiveness of the military. In “The Case for an Army Stability Professional,” Andrew B. Colvin challenges the US Army to reevaluate the professional education provided to active-duty officers working in military government and stability operations and proposes the Army develop a new functional area for officers assigned to this field. In “Minotaurs, Not Centaurs: The Future of Manned-Unmanned Teaming,” Robert J. Sparrow and Adam Henschke contest Paul Scharre’s vision of “centaur warfighting” and the idea that autonomous weapon systems will replace human warfighters. They argue that the manned-unmanned teams of the future are likely to be “minotaurs,” teams of humans under the control, supervision, or command of artificial intelligence, and explore the ethical issues raised by “minotaur warfighting.”

In the fifth installment of the SRAD Director’s Corner, “Afghanistan: The Logic of Failing, Fast and Slow,” George Shatzer focuses on the failure of the US-led war and reconstruction campaign in Afghanistan. He reviews The Forty-year War in Afghanistan: A Chronicle Foretold by Tariq Ali and The Fifth Act: America’s End in Afghanistan by Elliot Ackerman. He brings personal experience to bear in his review, painting a picture of why the United States failed in Afghanistan and posing these failures as lessons that must be learned before the next war. The books also provide insights for strategists attempting to plan for security in the region. ~CCC
Defeat in Afghanistan: An Autopsy

Joseph J. Collins  
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ABSTRACT: Policy initiatives in the Trump administration and the Biden-Harris administration significantly accelerated the Taliban’s victory in Afghanistan. This article supports the conclusion that the major factors in this defeat were the historical difficulty in governing Afghanistan, the Afghan republic’s two inefficient and corrupt governments, an ineffective US strategy, operational shortcomings by US forces, an ineffective Afghan military, Pakistan’s duplicitous policy, and the strength and determination of the Taliban. This article rejects the claim that the United States’ nation-building effort was a major factor in its defeat and concludes with a discussion of lessons encountered.

Keywords: Afghanistan, Taliban, al-Qaeda, intervention, US strategy, irregular conflict

After two decades of costly struggle, Afghanistan and its partners suffered a military defeat, a catastrophic regime collapse, and a chaotic evacuation in August 2021. The United States failed to accomplish its objectives, whether judged in terms of counterterrorism, counterinsurgency, or nation building. This outcome represents a significant unforced error in American national security policy.

With $88 billion in US security assistance, Afghanistan led the fight for the last seven years, losing 66,000 uniformed personnel, more than the United States lost in Vietnam. Experts believe nearly 50,000 Afghan civilians perished in that time, the majority at the hands of the Taliban. The American toll was considerable; of the 800,000 Americans who served in Afghanistan, 2,461 servicemembers died, over 20,695 were wounded, and, in the words of Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Mark A. Milley, “countless others suffer the invisible wounds of war.” In total, the United States spent about $2 trillion on its Afghanistan effort.1

In the end, Afghan security forces and the Kabul government collapsed under Taliban pressure and the specter of US abandonment. While the army and the government of Afghanistan failed dramatically in the last few months of their existence, it took 20 years of fighting, political half steps, missed opportunities, and mistakes to create the tragedy that unfolded in the summer of 2021. The first two parts of this essay will review key events from 2001 to 2021.² The third part will mine the narrative for the most critical factors that brought about the coalition's defeat and the collapse of the Kabul government. The essay will conclude with a section on lessons grounded in theory and best practices.

The Bush and Obama Years

After al-Qaeda’s attack on September 11, 2001, President George W. Bush sent CIA paramilitary elements and air, ground, and special operations forces to Afghanistan “to destroy al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and remove the Taliban from power.”³ The capture of Osama bin Laden was not a stated military objective but was a clear aspiration, especially for the Central Intelligence Agency. Bush had no long-range plan for post-conflict Afghanistan, and few in 2001 expected a long-term troop presence there.

By fall’s end, the United States and anti-Taliban forces had achieved a quick but indecisive victory, scattering al-Qaeda forces and ousting their Taliban protectors. In Afghanistan, the Bush administration initially focused on counterterrorism and al-Qaeda but quickly realized establishing a secure and functioning Afghan state was key to that mission. Bush later explained his thoughts:

[A]fter 9/11, I changed my mind. Afghanistan was the ultimate nation building mission. We had liberated the country from a primitive dictatorship, and we had a moral obligation to leave behind something better. We also had a strategic interest in helping the Afghan people build a free society. The terrorists took refuge in places of chaos, despair, and repression. A democratic Afghanistan would be a hopeful alternative to the vision of the extremists.⁴

Bush added nation building to the counterterrorism mission. Yet, many at the Pentagon wanted to keep a small footprint in Afghanistan, especially as the higher priority effort in Iraq began in 2003 and persisted over eight years. The Pentagon initially resisted classifying operations in Afghanistan as a counterinsurgency, which would have required more resources, even in the face of growing guerrilla warfare there.

Bush cannot be faulted for changing his mind. When I visited Afghanistan as a deputy assistant secretary of defense in February 2002, it was on the edge of a humanitarian disaster. The country had been at war since 1978, and, by 1996, the United Nations scored Afghanistan in the bottom five countries in the world on its Human Development Index. Five years of drought and Taliban mismanagement followed. Less than 30 percent of adults were literate, and 80 percent of schools were destroyed in two decades of fighting. By 2001, the under-five child mortality rate in Afghanistan was one in four, and only 9 percent of the population had reasonable access to health care. Even in the best areas of Kabul, underfed people and starving work animals were evident.5

Much of the early nation-building effort was humanitarian assistance. Larger projects followed, notably, the reconstruction of the ring road connecting many of the major cities. Critics later noted that many projects were inefficient and stimulated corruption. Money for reconstruction found its way to warlords, criminals, and even the Taliban, which was mainly funded by the growth of the Afghan narcotics industry and donations from abroad.6 Still, much good work helping Afghanistan began under Bush and continued with the help of the US Agency for International Development (USAID), thousands of Afghans, nongovernmental organizations, and international organizations. By the end of the Bush administration, USAID reported that 2,700 kilometers of road had been repaired or built, 670 health clinics opened, 10,500 health workers trained, 680 schools built or refurbished, and 60 million textbooks distributed. The Obama administration stepped up many of these costly efforts.7 In my opinion, these efforts did in fact help

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6. For additional information on corruption in and around reconstruction, see SIGAR, What We Need to Learn, vii–xiii.
the people, facilitate security operations, and further the strategic interests of the United States, if only to a modest degree.

The first three years of US presence were relatively quiet. The Afghan government was legitimized by a loya jirga, a national assembly of tribal and provincial leaders. A new, more inclusive and democratic version of the 1964 version of the Afghan constitution was ratified, with the president assuming many of the duties of the former king. With help from NATO Allies, the Bush administration began to build the Afghan National Army with the modest target of 70,000 soldiers. Other nations initially led the rebuilding of the police and the judiciary with mixed results. There was a significant expansion of human rights for Afghans, especially women and girls, during this period. Elections followed, as did a new parliament. While the Afghans embraced the concept of democracy, they could not translate their enthusiasm into practice, much less an effective modern state.

Ultimately, the Bush administration failed to match the growth of Taliban power or to follow through on its initial pressure on Pakistan. The Taliban rearmed and reorganized. Afghan suicide bombing, inspired by al-Qaeda, rose in 2004. With Pakistan’s help, the Taliban began in 2005 to fight more aggressively. In May 2006, retired General Barry McCaffrey, a distinguished combat commander and strategist, toured Afghanistan at the behest of the Pentagon. He concluded that the well-armed Taliban was on the march and the military situation was “deteriorating.” The Taliban was “very aggressive and smart in their tactics” and would “soon adopt a strategy of waiting us out.”

Concurrently, NATO’s International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) broadened its control over most military functions to help the United States as it struggled in Iraq and to facilitate coalition management. In short order, the commander of US forces also became the ISAF commander.

According to our senior commanders, security incidents—clashes between the Taliban and coalition forces or other attacks in Afghanistan—went from a weekly high of 100 in 2004 to a weekly high of 350 across the nation in 2008. In 2009, the weekly high would top 900 incidents. Counting only enemy-initiated attacks, the Defense

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Intelligence Agency calculated that Taliban attacks more than doubled between 2005 and 2006 and again between 2006 and 2008.\(^9\)

In the eyes of many Afghans, the Taliban’s attacks established the members as valiant fighters against a foreign occupier and its puppet, the Kabul government. Carter Malkasian, a historian who also served as a US official in Afghanistan, wrote that admiration for the Taliban and growing resentment at coalition air strikes doomed the allied effort. He observed, “A series of US surveys showed favorable views among all Afghans toward the United States fell steadily from 88 percent in 2006 to 52 percent in 2010. After that it never recovered.”\(^10\)

On October 2, 2008, former UK ambassador Sherard Cowper-Coles was quoted in the *London Times* as having said, “the security situation is getting worse; so is corruption and the Government has lost all trust. . . . The foreign forces are ensuring the survival of a regime which would collapse without them.”\(^11\)

By 2008, with considerable progress in the Iraq surge and ominous reports about Afghanistan, Bush readdressed Afghanistan. He sent Lieutenant General Douglas Lute, his National Security Council coordinator for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, for a firsthand look. Lute found a strategic muddle and deteriorating battlefield conditions. The Afghan Army and National Police were often ineffective and being built too slowly, and the Afghan Air Force was still an infant industry. Possible remedies included more reinforcements for the 30,000 US troops already there and a more focused counterinsurgency effort—however, the Bush administration was out of time. It modestly increased forces in Afghanistan and passed its study to the Obama administration, which had campaigned hard on Afghanistan as the “good war.”\(^12\)

President Barack Obama increased the US forces in Afghanistan in two increments to 100,000. He also increased direct US expenditures in and for Afghanistan to over $100 billion per year. The five-month decision process for Obama’s second reinforcement in Afghanistan, commonly referred to simply as “the surge,” was fraught with tension between Obama and his advisers. The president felt boxed in and ill-served by his military advisers, who were often backed by the secretaries of state and defense. That uncomfortable situation was compounded first by the leak

of General Stanley McChrystal’s classified assessment, then by McChrystal’s relief for a breach of military decorum just as the surge began.\(^\text{13}\)

Obama described a comprehensive formulation of objectives in Afghanistan in his December 1, 2009, speech to West Point:

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\ldots \text{[T]}o \text{ disrupt, dismantle and defeat al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and to prevent its capacity to threaten America and our allies in the future . . . . [w]}e \text{ must deny al-Qaeda a safe haven . . . reverse the Taliban’s momentum and deny it the ability to overthrow the government. And we must strengthen the capacity of Afghanistan’s security forces and government so they can take lead responsibility for Afghanistan’s future.}
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Despite this clarity, the president demonstrated ambivalence toward the new US strategy with the startling revelation that the surge would only continue for 18 months, a fact not lost on Pakistani and Taliban leaders.\(^\text{14}\)

The Afghanistan surge was not as operationally successful as the Iraq surge had been. The Taliban held its own in the east after being pummeled in the south. The Afghan Army and National Police expanded rapidly in both numbers and equipment. After a little more than a year, General David Petraeus, the outgoing commander, tried to get an extension of the surge. The president stuck to his original decision and refused to grant one. Malkasian explained the outcome of the surge:

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\begin{align*}
\text{[The surge] was a tactical success but a strategic failure.}\quad \\
\text{Brilliant minds and great generals, brave soldiers, marines, Green Berets, and SEALs could only get so far. The resolve of the Taliban fighter was difficult to overcome. The costs had been too great. They signaled to Obama not only the unsustainability of the surge but the unsustainability of the whole Afghan endeavor. The strategic discourse reoriented to withdrawal. That shift in direction is the true strategic significance of the surge.}\quad &\text{15}
\end{align*}
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\(^\text{15.}\) Malkasian, \textit{American War in Afghanistan}, 304–5.
Pakistan was a key factor in the Taliban’s vigorous resistance. Admiral Michael G. Mullen, the then chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, tried harder than anyone in government to bring Pakistan around. In 2011, after a series of attacks, Mullen angrily testified to the Senate Armed Services Committee that “the Quetta Shura and the Haqqani Network operate from Pakistan with impunity” and called the Haqqani Network a “strategic arm of Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence Agency,” adding that it was “responsible for the September 13th attacks against the U.S. Embassy in Kabul.”

In 2014, Afghan security forces took the lead in the fight against the Taliban. The rapid growth of the Afghan Army and National Police to over 300,000 personnel was among the most important accomplishments of the surge years. Around the same time, an attempt to negotiate with Taliban leaders bore little fruit. The Taliban was able, however, to establish a quasi-diplomatic office in Doha, Qatar, which enabled it to increase its international status and contacts. At the same time, relations between Kabul and Washington soured after undiplomatic behavior by both allies. Hamid Karzai, the then Afghan president, had become permanently irascible, and Ashraf Ghani, his successor, was tied down by infighting. In the end, Obama’s intention to leave Afghanistan altogether was thwarted by Taliban progress on the battlefield. Despite Taliban gains, Obama continued to reduce US forces over the next five years from nearly 100,000 to 8,400 troops.

The Trump and Biden Years

For the first 16 years of the American presence in Afghanistan, despite tremendous spending and effort, the United States and its coalition partners were muddling through, presiding over a deteriorating battlefield situation. In contrast, Presidents Donald J. Trump and Joseph R. Biden favored full military withdrawal and slowly severed the link between battlefield conditions and the strength of coalition efforts on the ground. In their singular pursuit of complete withdrawal, they broke faith with our Afghan allies, demoralized Afghan forces in the field, and opened the door for the final Taliban offensive.

For his part, Trump was skeptical of the cost and future of the Afghanistan commitment, but Lieutenant General H. R. McMaster,
his national security adviser, and General John W. “Mick” Nicholson, theater commander, urged the president to step up US efforts. Trump briefly increased US troop strength, but in his first major speech on Afghanistan policy, he warned that “the American people are weary of war without victory” and that he had been skeptical about the war before he became president. He stated clearly that the consequences of a rapid exit would be unacceptable. He said that his strategy would be “conditions based.” Trump promised a new, robust approach: “We will fight to win. From now on, victory will have a clear definition: attacking our enemies, obliterating ISIS, crushing al-Qaeda, preventing the Taliban from taking over Afghanistan, and stopping mass terror attacks against America before they emerge.”

A year later, Trump pushed aside our allies to negotiate directly with Taliban leaders, who refused to hold discussions or negotiate with the Kabul government. The United States agreed in February 2020—without a cease-fire or significant Taliban concessions—to withdraw all US forces by May 2021. For a date certain of US withdrawal, the Taliban made a few promises and pledged not to target US personnel during the withdrawal. The Trump administration also pushed then President Ghani to release 5,000 Taliban prisoners, many of whom participated in the final offensive against the Kabul government. From February 29, 2020, the date of the Doha Agreement, to the start of the Biden–Harris administration in January 2021, the United States drew down its forces to 3,500 personnel. Contractors supporting the war effort declined from 9,700 to 6,300 during the same period. Despite the Doha Agreement, Trump tried to withdraw all US forces before the Biden inauguration. According to Milley, after subsequent discussions about risks, the “order was rescinded.”

In mid-April 2021, the Biden–Harris administration began to plan a complete US withdrawal, sliding the final date to August. For its part, the Taliban hastened its battlefield progress, and by February 2021, it controlled 78 of Afghanistan’s 419 military districts. By mid-June, it controlled 100 districts, and, by July 2021, over 200 districts, roughly half the total. Many of the Taliban victories happened with little or no fighting. The Afghan Army was coming apart as the United States

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was assembling forces to conduct a large-scale but single point evacuation of a country the size of Texas.

Afghan national security officials advised Ghani that further resistance was futile. To avoid more bloodshed, he left the country on August 15, and the Taliban fighters walked into Kabul with little opposition. Malignant fortune and inadequate planning found US and coalition forces conducting the evacuation from the Hamid Karzai International Airport in Kabul, whose adjacent streets the Taliban controlled.

The final collapse of Afghanistan did not take 11 days; it began with the Doha Agreement and accelerated during the early months of the Biden-Harris administration. Washington’s declarations of unending support to Kabul rang false as General Austin “Scott” Miller, the US commander, departed and our massive embassy lowered its flag. In early July, US forces stealthily abandoned the enormous Bagram Air Base, once synonymous with US strength and its lasting commitment to democracy and the Afghan people. The United States seemed blind to the degree to which its withdrawal scheme affected the Afghans. Afghan General Sami Sadat indicated in the New York Times: “It’s true that the Afghan Army lost its will to fight. But that’s because of the growing sense of abandonment by our American partners and the disrespect and disloyalty reflected in Mr. Biden’s tone and words over the past few months.”

Directly negotiating with the Taliban and making the top US priority a complete withdrawal eroded the will of our Afghan allies. During the evacuation, valiant action by US diplomats and US men and women in uniform allowed for the evacuation of 6,000 Americans, 3,000 foreign nationals, and 111,000 Afghan partners by August 31. In the process, 13 servicemembers and over 170 Afghans were killed by an Islamic State Khorasan (ISIS-K) suicide bomber. To prevent further losses, the United States conducted


a drone strike in residential Kabul, which killed an aid worker and his family.\textsuperscript{22}

According to George Packer’s reporting in the \textit{Atlantic}, 90 percent of the Afghan special immigrant visa holders or applicants closely associated with American forces were left behind. Reaching all or most of the thousands of special immigrant visa holders and applicants spread across the country was impossible. United States Marine Corps General Kenneth F. “Frank” McKenzie, the Central Command commander, told National Public Radio a year later that leaving so many behind “haunts him to this day.” According to the \textit{Washington Post}, over 70,000 of our Afghan allies and visa program participants remained in Afghanistan, subject to Taliban reprisals.\textsuperscript{23}

\textbf{Factors in the Defeat}

From 2001 to 2021, the United States and its partners pursued a number of objectives in Afghanistan. United States and allied operations prevented attacks on our respective homelands and eliminated al-Qaeda leaders Osama bin Laden, and later, Ayman al-Zawahiri—however, al-Qaeda and now ISIS-K remain robust forces in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Our counterinsurgency effort blocked a Taliban takeover, but Afghan forces could not sustain it. Those efforts evaporated in the final weeks with the virtual disintegration of Afghan forces. Similarly, our nation-building efforts were productive but inefficient. In the end, we conducted a chaotic evacuation in Kabul at the forbearance of Taliban forces that had taken the capital without resistance. The chairman of the Joint Chiefs assessed the withdrawal as “a logistical success but a strategic failure.” Later he noted, “Strategically, the war was lost.”\textsuperscript{24}


The major factors that brought about the victory of the Taliban over Afghanistan and its partners are complex but few. First, Afghanistan has always been difficult, but not impossible, to govern. Compounding its poverty, ethnic divisions, and underdevelopment, its fractious politics produced an environment where most of its twentieth-century rulers were killed in office or forced into exile. Only the period from the early 1930s until 1978—during the reign of Mohammed Zahir Shah, the last king of Afghanistan, and then the brief tenure of Mohammed Daoud Khan, his cousin and deposer—was stable and relatively peaceful. More than 40 years of conflict followed. The royals, and Presidents Karzai and Ghani, all favored centralized rule. There were 34 provinces subordinate to Kabul and its rulers. Local interests had no elected governors to handle daily governance. Furthermore, the Afghan parliament was riven by factional fighting and not up to the tasks of a modern legislature.

Presidents Karzai and Ghani pursued centralization because of power, patronage, and the evils of warlordism. At the same time, they had to contend with “fragmentary tendencies in Afghanistan’s ethnolinguistic, geographical, and ethnic makeup.” In the twentieth century, the modernizers also had to contend with unsavory actors on Afghanistan’s borders. Foreign financial support and interference across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were constants in the modern history of Afghanistan. Religious zealotry increased from the late 1960s onward, further complicating ethnic and tribal rivalries.

Afghanistan in 2021 was not a lost cause. Better outcomes were possible, even if the US government wanted a full withdrawal. Nothing in the Afghan experience suggests that a chaotic withdrawal was a necessary ending to the US and coalition experience. The historical difficulty of governing Afghanistan only provided part of the context for the Afghan government and its partners, who also had to deal with foreign interference, an emerging insurgency, and the reconstruction of a poor nation devastated by decades of war.

Second, the Afghan government under Presidents Karzai and Ghani seldom rose above ineffectiveness and corruption. The more the United States and its coalition partners pumped resources into the country,
the more money flowed to corrupt entities. Karzai’s family was implicated in the looting of the Kabul Bank in 2010. Losses in the bank scandal numbered in the hundreds of millions of dollars. The coalition’s inability to control narcotics production yielded at least half a billion dollars to the Taliban annually. Similar amounts of ill-gotten gains went to Kabul officials or, reportedly, to Wali Karzai, President Karzai’s brother in Kandahar. Even the Army was steeped in corruption and cronyism. Local commanders routinely pocketed money from fuel, supplies, and pay for “ghost soldiers” on their rosters.

Karzai and Ghani also had their personal shortcomings. Karzai was inexperienced and not an institutionalist, but he was adept at dealing with regional and ethnic politics. He was also temperamental and increasingly criticized the United States. He stepped down in 2014 but remained a discordant voice in the capital. Ghani was a technocrat, an academic expert in state building, and an impressive minister of finance, but not a natural politician. His elections were widely considered fraudulent. After the first controversial election, the United States forced a political marriage between Karzai and former Foreign Minister Abdullah Abdullah, his electoral rival, to prevent a total split among friendly factions. It may have been necessary, but it slowed executive and personnel decisions. Neither Afghan president was able to create the institutions needed for a functioning country at war.

Third, though plans and programs abounded, the United States failed to develop and execute an effective strategy to unite all coalition efforts and chart a course to success. Operations in Iraq were considered higher priority and took critical manpower and equipment that could have been used in the Afghan fight. More importantly, Iraq dominated the minds and decision time of US leaders from 2003 to 2008. During most of that period, problems in Iraq dwarfed those in Afghanistan, but it was also the time when conditions in Afghanistan went from satisfactory to turbulent.

On key strategic matters, there was never consistent follow-through. Pakistan supported the Taliban and played the United States like a fiddle. Only in the Obama administration did the United States and its allies put enough troops in country for effective counterinsurgency, but that $100 billion-per-year effort lasted less than 18 months. In the end, the United States did not exercise the power and persistence needed
to prevail in Afghanistan. Pakistan and the Taliban had far fewer
distractions and greater long-term stakes in the Hindu Kush.

Trump and Biden broke faith with our hard-pressed Afghan allies
and negotiated directly with the enemy. They downplayed battlefield
conditions and focused on withdrawal. During negotiations, the Trump
administration failed to use its leverage to force the Taliban to conduct
a nationwide cease-fire and negotiate in good faith with the Kabul
government. Both presidents failed to see that our immediate withdrawal
policy had devalued the US pledge to continue long-term support for the
Kabul government and the Afghan people. Ultimately, the US government
created a sense of abandonment that contributed mightily to the
disintegration of Afghan forces and government. While Bush and Obama
did not succeed in Afghanistan, Trump and Biden undercut long-term
US strategy and bear special responsibility for the final defeat
in Afghanistan.

Fourth, the US Armed Forces owns a significant share of the blame
for how the war was fought. It was slow to adapt and lost situational
awareness with one-year or six-month tours for units in the field.
As was often said, our rotation policy created the impression that
we were not in Afghanistan for 20 years but for one year, 20 times.
We could have lessened this problem by repetitive unit deployments
to the same geographic areas but rarely did so.

Command tenure was a related problem. In Afghanistan, up to 2015,
even our senior-most commanders averaged 13 months on station.
Our last few commanders there, Generals John F. Campbell, Nicholson,
and Miller—all multi-tour veterans of Afghan combat—put an end to the
norm of short-tenure, new-to-theater commanders.

American forces showed brilliance in logistics and tactics but less skill
in operational and strategic planning. US military advice in Washington
was often inadequate and unimaginative, and civilian national security
leaders were habitually more interested in not losing than in succeeding
in Afghanistan. Counterterrorist and counterinsurgency operations in the
field were run separately. Lack of coordination and information sharing was
a particular sore point, a bitter memory for many conventional force officers
who found their relations with the local people disrupted by counterterrorism raids they could not explain.

Our management of the military chain of command in Afghanistan was problematic even a decade after we entered Afghanistan. How the principle of unity of command applied to the fiercely independent special operations forces and Marines was never clear. Counterterrorism and counterinsurgency operations were compatible but required careful coordination and information sharing, which were not always present. Compounding the problem with special operations forces, NATO officers at ISAF headquarters marveled at Marine independence in Helmand in the surge years. They jokingly referred to the Marine area of operations in Helmand Province as “Marineistan.” They were part of the allied effort, but their operational commander was their stateside Central Command component commander. Although the Marines fought well and earned their unit citations, higher commanders might have used all or some of them to greater effect in Kandahar or the eastern provinces.

Fifth, the United States and its coalition partners developed an Afghan army and police force in the American mold. They were ill-suited to their missions and required significant logistical support. The United States slow rolled the development of the Afghan Air Force, and Afghan ground forces relied heavily on US air strikes, which were great force multipliers but risked mass casualties. They alienated Afghans, including Karzai. Our attempt to develop the Afghan Air Force never rose above inadequacy. Despite many valiant Afghan airmen, when the United States pulled out its maintenance contractors in the final months, the utility of the Afghan Air Force’s 200 aircraft became limited. While a few pilots fought to the end, many flew their aircraft to neighboring countries. The remaining aircraft are now the Taliban Air Force.

On the ground, Afghan battlefield performance was spotty, except for the Afghan commando units, trained and advised by coalition special operators. After our chaotic evacuation, Secretary of Defense

Lloyd J. Austin III added an update to complaints about the high command of the Afghan Army:

We need to consider some uncomfortable truths: that we did not fully comprehend the depth of corruption and poor leadership in their [Afghan] senior ranks, that we did not grasp the damaging effect of frequent and unexplained rotations by President Ghani of his commanders, that we did not anticipate the snowball effects caused by the deals that Taliban commanders struck with local leaders in the wake of the Doha agreement, that the Doha agreement itself had a demoralizing effect on Afghan soldiers, and that we failed to grasp that there was only so much for which—and for whom—many of the Afghan forces would fight.⁴⁰

Sixth, Pakistani policy was a major element in the coalition’s defeat. To protect its western frontier from Indian influence and to exert control over its neighbor, Pakistan created the Taliban in the early 1990s, advised it, nurtured it, brought it back to life after its 2001 defeat, and provided a secure sanctuary for Taliban leaders and their families. Pakistani support for the Taliban made effective counterinsurgency extremely difficult.⁴¹

Exploiting its status as a nuclear power essential to our supply lines to Afghanistan, the Pakistani generals successfully played a double game. Pakistan supported the Taliban while posing as our ally in the war on terrorism, listing its considerable losses to homegrown jihadists as Pakistan’s sacrifice in the global war on terrorism. It was telling that Osama bin Laden lived for years within the shadow of Pakistan’s version of West Point until his death in May 2011 in a US special operations forces raid. The Taliban’s victory was a triumph of Pakistani duplicity.

As a postscript to the Taliban-Pakistani triumph, in August 2021, Sirajuddin Haqqani, a senior Taliban leader, head of the Haqqani Network,

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and a US- and UN-designated terrorist, was appointed as Afghanistan’s interior minister. In the end, the Taliban’s main link to Pakistan’s Inter-services Intelligence took charge of the police and intelligence in Afghanistan.

Finally, the Kabul government faced strong opposition from the Taliban. Animated by Islamist fervor and Afghan xenophobia, the various Taliban groups fought well and were less corrupt than the local government. They were quintessentially Afghan in the tradition of valiant, anti-foreign Afghan warriors of old. As in many other insurgencies, government forces rarely matched the morale and esprit de corps of the Taliban insurgents, who were well supported by the narcotics trade, other criminal activities, donations from the Islamic world, and many forms of assistance from Pakistan. The Taliban’s message, closely tied to local conditions and backed by swift justice, won the day. In the end, the old saying proved true: we had all the watches, but the Taliban had all the time—and more motivation as well. Those attributes and Pakistani support put them over the goal line.

Lessons Encountered

We should identify lessons encountered so future national security leaders can use them judiciously in future operations. Here, in my view, are a few lessons to begin the discussion.

Where possible, the United States must avoid being a third party in a major insurgency where the insurgents have safe havens nearby and high levels of support from foreign powers. Vietnam had support from China and the USSR, but in Afghanistan the makeweight was Pakistan. If operations in such locations cannot be avoided, the disruption of safe havens must a top priority. The elimination of safe havens, however, carries the risk of escalation, which may adversely affect future plans.

The US military operations in Afghanistan (and Iraq) did not begin as a counterinsurgency operation but evolved relatively quickly from conventional operations to nationwide insurgencies. This observation may not be a lesson, but it is a warning to all those now focused on conventional conflict against great powers. The character of a war can change quickly, and forces on the ground must be prepared to adapt.

In estimating costs, even relatively small wars fought by volunteer forces will be incredibly expensive over the long term. Iraq and

Afghanistan each demanded direct expenditures of over $1 trillion dollars. The Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs at Brown University estimates real costs in Afghanistan—including indirect costs to the Pentagon, current veterans’ expenditures, and other indirect costs—at over $2 trillion.\(^{33}\)

Prudence and strategic priorities favor short-term troop presence, but the character of many conflicts requires years of costly presence and concerted diplomatic efforts. In the Republic of Korea, a long-term US presence paid off magnificently, albeit in a markedly different situation. A lengthy presence worked less well in Vietnam and Afghanistan. Iraq’s future is still in question, but, even with its considerable problems, Iraq is doing better than Afghanistan.

In the future, US leaders should realize the critical decision is whether to enter a conflict on the ground. Air and sea operations have great utility but significant limitations. Raiding or punitive in-and-out operations seldom produce lasting results. Boots on the ground may well be necessary to achieve long-lasting effects, but the prolonged presence of ground troops significantly ups the ante. Withdrawal is difficult and costs grow daily. Planning exit strategies helps, but, in the end, as in Iraq and Afghanistan, US exit strategies quickly become more about exit timetables than about the greater strategy.

All opportunities to use force abroad require prudence and careful decision making. Sadly, US national security leaders often do not have the historical knowledge base to offer a comparative perspective on military interventions. Senior military officers and defense policy officials must bring that background knowledge into interagency deliberations.

In great-power interventions, the hallmark of wisdom is knowing when and how to commit the nation. In many instances, the use of advisory efforts with troubled allies (also known as the by, with, and through experience) can be a useful halfway option relative to the use of full-scale expeditionary forces. In any case, one must be skeptical of quick fixes to complex problems.\(^{34}\)

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Policy inertia and sunk cost issues tend to keep us deployed longer than anticipated. In Afghanistan, the events marking the ideal time to leave vary from observer to observer. For example, some scholars speculate that we could have brought the Taliban into the 2001 Bonn Conference. From my perch in the third row of Pentagon leadership, this idea was, and still is, problematic; US officials were dizzy with success over their good fortune in defeating the Taliban and al-Qaeda. Giving the Taliban who protected al-Qaeda a seat at the table was not a priority for US leaders still affected by the deaths of nearly 3,000 people at the Pentagon, in New York City, and in Shanksville, Pennsylvania. Other analysts see missed opportunities to make peace during the Obama administration or note that leaving in 2011 after taking out Osama bin Laden would have been timely and closely related to the reason for which we intervened in the first place.

All speculation aside, one should be skeptical of any scenario that assumes the Taliban would adopt democratic practices, become a loyal opposition in a coalition government, or abandon their pursuit of an emirate. The Taliban is filled with authoritarian theocrats. They could have been defeated, but they would not long stand for being partnered with officials of a typical civil government. They were also clever negotiators and readily abandoned agreements, including, as Milley notes, six out of their seven pledges in the Doha accords.

Finally, one should avoid blaming the demise of the Afghan republic and the defeat of the United States and its coalition partners on nation building. On the economic, health, and education fronts, the coalition could not have ignored the perilous state of Afghanistan. There is little evidence that US or Afghan forces were frequently diverted from combat to perform humanitarian assistance or economic reconstruction tasks or to provide support for Afghan civil governance, the key elements of nation building. The vast security assistance program in Afghanistan could be characterized as nation building, but it was also a fundamental part of US strategy to enable the eventual safe withdrawal of coalition forces.

The notion that we could have saved money and troop strength by ignoring nation building and counterinsurgency and by simply using Afghanistan as a counterterrorism (CT) platform is attractive. It would have made little sense, however, for hard-pressed Afghan leaders, who needed to help their suffering nation and work to create a society

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35. For example, see Malkasian, *American War in Afghanistan*, 99–101.
where radicalism was less likely to flourish. Moreover, a CT-only posture would have ignored the close relationship between the Taliban and al-Qaeda. You could not have fought al-Qaeda and ignored the Taliban, or vice versa. Without a troop presence on the ground, it would also have been difficult to gain local intelligence on the terrorists. A CT-only military strategy remains an idea in search of successful historical cases. While Western forces at the headquarters level worked closely with USAID and its partners, it is difficult to see where these actions inhibited military operations.

We can be sure from the many excellent reports of the special inspector general for Afghanistan reconstruction that many of our nation-building efforts were ineffective or inefficient. They fed corruption, wasted millions of taxpayer dollars, and left much to be desired. None of the corruption or waste, however, made the perils and problems of nation building a principal cause of our defeat in Afghanistan. While shortcomings emphasize the difficulty of conducting humanitarian assistance or economic development projects during an armed conflict, the sad condition of Afghanistan dictated that we try to help.

**Conclusion**

In the end, the United States sought to prevent Afghanistan from once again becoming a terrorist safe haven that could threaten our homeland. That goal required robust counterterrorist operations, a long-term counterinsurgency effort, some degree of nation building, security assistance, and an attempt at forming a stable government in Kabul. We had many successes, but the overall enterprise failed. After two decades of significant effort, the United States and its partners left behind a country that has an ISIS-K problem and as many as 500 al-Qaeda members closely allied with the Taliban.37 The country is tense, economically depressed, full of modern military equipment, and a human rights nightmare.

Today, the tentacles of the Haqqani Network and the Taliban’s ignorance are much in evidence. The Taliban has few well-developed government policies. The Taliban has again blocked university and high school

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attendance for Afghan women and girls. Vile, physical punishments are back in vogue, and those who aided the coalition are being hunted down. Coalition-sponsored advances in education, health care, and human rights are in extreme jeopardy. The economy, never in good shape, is now cut off from many sources of outside aid. Foreign donors are looking for ways to help the people while avoiding cooperation with the Taliban regime.

At the same time, the Taliban will learn that the nation they conquered in 2021 is not the same one they fled in 2001. Half the population is under 25 years of age. By 2020, due to effective Afghan government efforts under President Karzai and Finance Minister Ghani, 18 million Afghans-half the population-gained access to cell phones. The urban youth have been weaned on television, Western and Indian music, and the Internet. They do not remember the first Taliban regime, and they may well become a resistant element to rule by the Taliban’s harsh version of sharia law. The remnants of the Northern Alliance have been put down, but they are not out. In the north, we have not seen the last of former (or new) Tajik, Uzbek, and Hazara warlords. ISIS-K is still a vibrant threat to Afghanistan and Pakistan. One must be skeptical about whether so much strife can be confined within the borders of Afghanistan.

Afghanistan will likely be another case that proves Carl von Clausewitz’s sad observation: the results of war are never final. Without a doubt, Afghanistan and its people will pay a high price for this tragic defeat and the collapse of the republic that existed from 2002 to 2021. Sadly, Afghanistan’s future is as clouded today as it was before the US intervention in October 2001.

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Select Bibliography


Enhancing US Global Competitiveness through Women, Peace, and Security

Brenda Oppermann

ABSTRACT: Global powers, regional hegemons, and non-state actors engaged in a perennial state of competition dominate today's security environment. In response, the Department of Defense has adopted the competition continuum model of cooperation, competition below armed conflict, and armed conflict. The military could significantly improve its efforts to compete along this continuum and achieve national security objectives by leveraging the Women, Peace, and Security global policy framework that supports gender equality and values women's diverse roles in global security.

Keywords: security, competition, gender, women, economy

Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) is a global policy framework that supports gender equality and values women's diverse roles in conflict and security. Women, Peace, and Security is a critical national security issue: more than 15 years of research shows countries with greater gender equality are less prone to violent conflict and are more secure and stable.¹ Based on United Nations (UN) Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (2000) and nine follow-on resolutions, the WPS framework is implemented through country-level or regional national action plans.² The United States is an exception to this implementation, having passed the WPS Act in 2017, which codified this framework into law. The WPS Act requires the Department of Defense (DoD) to develop an implementation plan, which it did when it issued the

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Women, Peace, and Security Strategic Framework and Implementation Plan in 2020.³

Department of Defense awareness continues to grow as its implementation plan efforts increase. In fiscal year 2021, the Department deployed its first gender advisory workforce to the eight US-based military installations hosting Afghan evacuees during Operation Allies Welcome. It also assessed the conduct of assorted security cooperation activities with partner nations, addressing barriers and opportunities to women’s recruitment and retention in partner-nation armed forces. Finally, it trained approximately 400 DoD personnel to serve as gender focal points and qualified 30 personnel to serve as gender advisers.⁴

Most importantly, Women, Peace, and Security improves military operational effectiveness. By drawing attention to the range of women’s security-related activities on the global stage—such as participating in combat and peace-building and providing early warning signs of conflict—Women, Peace, and Security helps reveal the often overlooked impact of women in conflict-affected areas. For example, the US Army’s recognition of the role of Afghan women in supporting insurgents prompted a change in tactics, techniques, and procedures that reaped significant benefits.

Instead of sending only male soldiers on raids, the Army began to include female soldiers, since only women could approach Afghan women directly. When conducting a security search of Afghan women during a 2011 raid on a compound in Kandahar province, a female American soldier discovered a hollowed-out Quran containing cell phones with the names and numbers of insurgents, handwritten lists of names, and other incriminating documents tucked into swaddling clothes.⁵ This discovery improved counterinsurgency efforts directly. Acknowledging the active role of Afghan women in the insurgency also helped the US Army enhance its intelligence preparation of the battlefield, which prompted commanders to expand their understanding of the local context by overcoming a biased perception of violent conflict as a male domain.

Likewise, Women, Peace, and Security increases military operational effectiveness by highlighting another factor commonly unobserved in the global security equation: gender. This critically important concept of socially constructed roles, responsibilities, and behaviors associated with being a woman or a man helps deepen the understanding of the operating environment within the context of local protocols and traditions. Conducting an analysis of gender reveals the role it plays in global security, exposing a complex world of power dynamics and strategic, operational, and tactical decisions driven by gender norms.6

Although the Department of Defense recognizes the importance of Women, Peace, and Security to military operations, it would reap greater benefits by acknowledging Women, Peace, and Security as a tool that could enhance US competitiveness worldwide. This article demonstrates how Women, Peace, and Security can help operationalize the new concept of global competition, that is, the competition continuum as defined in the Joint Concept for Integrated Campaigning (JCIC).7 The competition continuum comprises cooperation, competition below armed conflict, and armed conflict. This article also highlights the benefits of leveraging Women, Peace, and Security as a global network and a conceptual framework to enhance US competition through examples of strategically important US partners and adversaries, namely, Syria, North Korea, and China.

A Modern Three-part Continuum

The Joint Concept for Integrated Campaigning (JCIC) serves as a North Star for the Department of Defense as it adapts to the changing security environment and provides the Joint Force an intellectual framework to conceptualize the evolving nature of global security. Its foundational idea “to enable an expanded view of the operating environment by proposing the notion of a competition continuum” offers an alternative to the obsolete peace-and-war binary with a new, three-part model of cooperation, competition below armed conflict, and armed conflict.8

In practice, the competition continuum is not new; the Ottomans used it to expand their empire in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and the United States engaged in all elements of the continuum

8. JCS, JCIC, vi, 1.
during World War II. Now, the activities comprising the continuum occur more rapidly and in more varied ways due to evolving technologies and new alliances and partnerships.\textsuperscript{9}

\begin{figure}[h]
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\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{competition_continuum.png}
\caption{The competition continuum}
\textit{(Source: 2018 Joint Concept for Integrated Campaigning, 8.)}
\end{figure}

When it comes to conceptualizing this continuum, the Department of Defense should leverage Women, Peace, and Security. Its principles affect each element of the continuum and compel DoD personnel to think more deeply, to analyze each element through a gender lens, and to identify new opportunities for competition.

\textbf{Tapping into the WPS Global Network}

The Department of Defense could improve its engagement in armed conflict, competition below armed conflict, or cooperation by becoming more involved with the WPS global network. This relationship-rich asset and worldwide alliance includes international, regional, national, and local entities (including many current US partners and allies) that officially subscribe to WPS principles through national action plans and other policies and mechanisms. Tapping into this network of 100 nations, 11 regional organizations (including the European Union, Economic Community of West African States, League of Arab States, and NATO), and more than 100 municipalities, cities, and towns would enable the Department

of Defense to advance US global influence and hone its competitive edge through bilateral partnerships and network-affiliated activities.10

### Competing through Armed Conflict by Leveraging Gender Equality in Syria

Armed conflict is one dimension of the competition continuum where Women, Peace, and Security can be readily observed. The implementation of Women, Peace, and Security in counterinsurgency initiatives in Afghanistan provides one such example, and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) provides another key illustration in which the application of a WPS framework improves combat effectiveness and, moreover, ensures “the maintenance of hard-won gains.”11

According to the JCIC, “translating military success into the aims of policy is the ultimate purpose of armed conflict.”12 Since there is no guarantee that military victories will translate into achieving strategic objectives, ensuring that policy goals are met and maintained calls for ongoing coordination of all elements of the competition continuum. The JCIC stresses the importance of “‘follow through’ to ensure the maintenance of desired policy aims” as a common imperative linking these elements.13 When it comes to armed conflict, follow-through is especially salient, as evidenced by US combat experiences over the past 20 years that demonstrate unequivocally that winning a battle does not equate to winning the war. Acknowledging the essential role of follow-through in the context of armed conflict is also important because it obliges us to think about what comes next and particularly about what needs to happen to secure the national security policy objectives temporarily achieved through combat success.

Implementing Women, Peace, and Security enhances combat operations by leveraging the talent, knowledge, and abilities of women and men in security forces and facilitating the design of appropriate and effective follow-through. A first-rate example of follow-through is the US military support of the People’s Protection Units (YPG), the homegrown defense forces of the Kurdish area of Syria that formed the backbone of the Syrian Democratic Forces. Working together, the United States, the Syrian

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11. JCS, JCIC, 2.
12. JCS, JCIC, 2.
13. JCS, JCIC, vi.
Democratic Forces, and the counter-ISIS coalition conducted combat operations against ISIS, eventually defeating the group’s attempt to control the area. This victory was due to the efforts of the People’s Protection Units, especially its all-female People’s Protection Force (YPJ).14

The Kurds in Syria have a unique approach to gender equality; the women’s fighting force is separate from the men’s, though the two comprise a coherent whole. Female soldiers are responsible for their decisions and defense. They decided—and the men of the People’s Protection Units agreed—that women could and would lead men in battle but that women would be led exclusively by an all-female command structure.15 Effectively partnering with the People’s Protection Units and People’s Protection Force required American military advisers to accept this situation, since having women and men on equal footing was integral to the YPG command structure. When discussing what Special Forces should expect when operating in northern Syria, Jack Murphy, a former senior weapons sergeant with the 5th Special Forces Group, stressed this point, stating, “American Special Forces advisors should be prepared to accept the Kurdish notion of gender equality, which differs substantially from what currently exists in the US military.”16

Experienced female Syrian Kurdish fighters proved a key asset to the United States and Syrian Democratic Forces. They participated in many battles before the People’s Protection Force was officially established in 2013, including fighting the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and other Islamist groups, like Nusra in northeastern Syria, and retaking the border town of Yaroubiya near Iraq in 2013, which gave the People’s Protection Units control of the Syria-Iraq crossing.17 The People’s Protection Force also fought in the Battle of Kobani in 2015, playing a fundamental role in liberating the city and heralding the Islamic State’s territorial end. Despite media coverage concerning the People’s Protection Force’s combat experience, American Special Forces advisers were not convinced of the women’s combat ability. They did not know if the Syrian-Kurdish women’s

15. Lemmon, Daughters of Kobani, 25.
17. Lemmon, Daughters of Kobani, 27.
role in the fight constituted window dressing for naive foreigners or a truly significant part of the Syrian Kurdish force. Their Kurdish hosts in Kobani, however, made it clear to the advisers that the People’s Protection Force played a vital role in winning the fight.\textsuperscript{18}

In fact, the combat effectiveness, discipline, and exceptional leadership displayed by female Kurdish soldiers were the reasons the People’s Protection Force led the critical attack on Manbij in 2016. Located on the border with Türkiye, Manbij was the locus of the Islamic State’s foreign-fighter and external-plotting network. It was the crossroads through which internationals joining ISIS passed to drop off their families and passports before heading to the front.\textsuperscript{19} As a vital hub and territorial connection to the outside world, Manbij was strategically significant to ISIS, making it a crucial target of the Syrian Democratic Forces.\textsuperscript{20} The Manbij offensive, an already complicated operation involving US Special Forces advisers, the Syrian Democratic Forces, and the newly established Manbij Military Council, was further complicated by a substantial tactical challenge the People’s Protection Units had never conducted: a water crossing. The demanding and risky night crossing of the Euphrates River was executed first by the female Kurdish fighters, followed by their fellow SDF forces, including Arab and other non-Kurdish fighters. The Syrian Democratic Forces captured Manbij from ISIS in August 2016. The People’s Protection Forces went on to play a decisive role in the battle to defeat the Islamic State at their capital, Raqqa.

While partnering with the Syrian Democratic Forces helped the United States succeed in “competing through armed conflict” by defeating the Islamic State militarily and disrupting the spread of global terrorism, this partnership also enabled crucially important follow-through that would help translate combat success into longer-term policy goals, a key feature of the competition continuum. In the context of Syria, US objectives included promoting stability and realizing the Syrian people’s “call for freedom and a representative government.”\textsuperscript{21} The People’s Protection Units and People’s Protection Forces were crucial partners in combat and were thus promising partners in governance and a primary

\textsuperscript{18} Lemmon, Daughters of Kobani, 124.
\textsuperscript{19} Global Efforts to Defeat ISIS: Hearing before the Committee on Foreign Relations, 114th Cong. (2016), https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-114shrg28676/html/CHRG-114shrg28676.htm; and Lemmon, Daughters of Kobani, 47.
\textsuperscript{20} Lemmon, Daughters of Kobani, 132–38.
means to advance stability and democratic values and secure US policy objectives over time.

The People’s Protection Units and People’s Protection Forces revealed themselves to be secular and democratic, following a political philosophy called *democratic confederalism*, which emphasizes gender equality and grassroots democracy. Consequently, their officers are elected by troops, and equality—regardless of gender, religion, and ethnicity—is guaranteed. Likewise, the Syrian Democratic Council, their political arm, ensures the fulfillment of democratic rights for all Syrians. It bases its governance model on a wide range of democratic principles that acknowledge Syria’s communal diversity, including embracing a multilingual, multiethnic, and interfaith homeland with a national spirit based on attachment to land, ecology, and progress, without sexism and racism.

Viewed through the lens of Women, Peace, and Security, the connection between the YPG and YPJ mission at the level of armed conflict and the realization of their broader policy goals through democratic governance is a clear example of follow-through in the competition continuum. Indeed, the importance of governance as one way to consolidate gains achieved through armed conflict and to facilitate the transition to long-term stability cannot be overstated. Senator Robert P. “Bob” Corker made this importance clear during a Senate Committee on Foreign Relations hearing on “Global Efforts to Defeat ISIS” when he asked, “And even if we continue to take back territory from ISIS, are those gains backed by political progress necessary to sustain them?” In the case of the People’s Protection Units and People’s Protection Forces, the answer is yes. The Syrian Democratic Council had a political plan that leveraged the YPG and YPJ armed combat success to attain its policy aim of establishing

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25. *Global Efforts to Defeat ISIS.*
a democratic government, constituting the sort of follow-through necessary to compete effectively in armed conflict.  

### North Korea: Women, Peace, and Security and Competition below Armed Conflict

Competing below the threshold of armed conflict presents a complex landscape where a multitude of challenges “might be addressed through a mixture of diplomatic, informational, military and economic activities.” Because this type of competition is complex and enduring, relevant literature will help establish a solid understanding of what *competition below armed conflict* means and how the United States might best engage in it. Applying the WPS framework to North Korea can help the Department of Defense gain a comprehensive understanding of the operational environment in North Korea and, in turn, identify relevant opportunities to compete below armed conflict.

According to Joint Doctrine Note 1-19, *Competition Continuum*:

> . . . [C]ompetition below armed conflict involves operating below a threshold that invokes a direct military response from an adversary while retaining the capability to escalate to more conventional armed conflict. . . . An inherently constrained and measured approach, competition below armed conflict tends to occur over extended periods of time, frequently consisting of indirect actions.

Effectively competing below armed conflict requires situational awareness of the human dimension. In their article concerning great-power competition, Kevin Bilms and Christopher Costa underscore this point, noting it is essential to “emphasize the human element before hostilities occur.” Likewise, the publication *Special Operations Forces within the Competition Continuum* stresses the importance of the human aspects of competing below armed conflict, highlighting that successful action in this context

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provides an “understanding of how relevant actors will perceive action or situations.”

Given that “gains in competition below armed conflict typically take the form of modifications in people’s behavior rather than control of territory,” it is critically important to develop a mindset attuned to behavior and actions that influence behavior. US Air Force General Paul Selva highlights this when discussing the importance of the information environment. He observes that “achieving the desired influence [calls for] . . . a mindset based on a greater understanding of the environment, relevant actors, and how . . . to apply the information.”

Since behavior can change quickly, competition below armed conflict also requires different ways of thinking about escalation and deterrence. The JCIC reinforces this idea by pointing out that “early recognition of an impending change in an adversary’s behavior provides the best opportunity for deterrence.” Gender analysis is a key tool in the WPS arsenal, capable of heightening situational awareness and paving the way for improved deterrence. Gender analysis involves assessing the different implications of any action for men and women based on the distinctive roles, responsibilities, and opportunities ascribed to each group through social constructs.

Examining the socioeconomic changes in North Korea over the past 30 years demonstrates the value of analyzing a situation through the lens of gender. When the Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc collapsed in the late twentieth century, North Korea’s “industrial economy began to implode due to the withdrawal of subsidies from the Soviet Union, Russia and then China” and the country’s “misguided pursuit of a strategy of self-sufficiency.” A devastating famine also occurred during this period. These events wreaked havoc on the country’s economy and impacted men and women very differently. One result of the crumbling economy was a proliferation of unofficial markets known as the jangmadang. These informal markets, combined with the influence of gender norms, created significant, lasting changes in behavior. For example, many North

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Korean women left their official jobs to engage in peddling and trade to buy food for their families while men shied away from these activities, which were often looked down upon. Further, housing and other necessities were tied to men's state jobs, so men were unable to leave their jobs despite receiving insufficient pay to maintain a family.\footnote{35}

While North Korean women became more active in the jangmadang, the government loosened its control on freedom of movement, which increased the procurement of supplies from China to trade in North Korean informal markets. Thousands of North Korean women developed black-market businesses, filling the void left by the bankrupt and incapacitated state, emerging as a new entrepreneurial class, driving the spread of markets, feeding the country, and dominating an informal market estimated to contribute more than 70 percent of the country's household income.\footnote{36}

Significant changes in North Korean society flowed from the combined effects of increased cross-border movement and the improved economic status of women. As North Korean traders traveled to China, they saw their neighbors' relative prosperity. They also received information about the Republic of Korea that was vastly different from the official propaganda.\footnote{37} The increasing economic influence of female business owners—some of whom became donju, "masters of money"—also improved the overall status of women in society.\footnote{38} At the same time, however, women remained subject to intense societal and familial pressure to get married early. Once married, strict gender norms dictated how women behaved and obligated them to "fulfill three roles—caretaker, housekeeper and, increasingly, breadwinner."\footnote{39} North Korean women's growing economic power, increased awareness about life outside of North Korea, and desire to escape burdensome gender norms have resulted in high numbers

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\item 39. Cheon and Noh, “Women Who Flee North Korea.”
\end{thebibliography}
of female refugees. Over 70 percent of approximately 33,000 North Koreans who escaped to South Korea in the past several decades have been female.  

When competing below the threshold of armed conflict, it helps to remember how past conflicts with formidable adversaries have played out. During the Cold War, the United States spent significant time, effort, and resources preparing for armed conflict with the Soviet Union, however, the deepest causes of Soviet collapse were the decline of communist ideology and the failure of the Soviet economy. Indeed, changing gender norms are driving significant economic and ideological changes in North Korea, revealing strategic vulnerabilities that could foreshadow political transformation. By analyzing North Korea’s conduct through the lens of gender, we can understand its response to the drastic changes brought on by the end of the Cold War and the catastrophic famine of the 1990s. A gender analysis of this era could reveal opportunities to influence North Korea’s increasingly powerful private sector and, in doing so, mitigate the country’s adversarial behavior.

North Korean women might represent the prospects of their society. Their emerging high level of agency, power, and influence could enable the United States to assist with economic development and social transformation should the North Korean regime open up its market and society through the process of denuclearization. This idea aligns with Joint Doctrine Note 1-19’s emphasis on applying all national instruments of power to achieve national security objectives, noting that competition below armed conflict might be “addressed [effectively] through a mixture of diplomatic, informational, military, and economic activities.”

The Department of Defense is well-positioned to support this approach, given civil affairs forces’ responsibility for collecting civil-military information as part of civil reconnaissance operations. Discussing the role of civil affairs forces when competing below the level of armed conflict, Emily Mushen highlights the importance of reconnaissance operations. She observes that insights gained from mapping civil institutions, gathering and tracking information on key players, and monitoring for changes over time help

44. JSC, JDN 1-19, 3.
US forces achieve their objectives. Ensuring that this type of information includes a gender perspective would improve the DoD's understanding of the operational environment and present additional opportunities to influence it.

**China: Cooperation with Adversarial Partners**

One of the chief aims of the Department of Defense vis-à-vis the competition continuum is to avoid armed conflict. By decreasing tensions or deterring an adversary's calculated escalation of oppositional tactics, cooperation can mitigate adversarial tendencies. The Department's WPS goal of advancing women by increasing their meaningful participation in security institutions and processes could enhance cooperation efforts with allies and partners whose “overall relationship with the US is . . . adversarial.”

China is considered a major competitor and adversarial partner, and its stance on women in defense represents a constructive point for cooperation between the Department of Defense and China's armed forces. China began deploying UN peacekeepers more than 30 years ago but sent its first female peacekeepers to South Sudan in April 2015, where they served as the first female infantry squad. Since then, more than 1,000 female peacekeepers serving in mixed-sex battalions have deployed to Lebanon, Liberia, Mali, South Sudan, and other countries. They have worked as medical support, liaison officers, and military observers and have conducted demining, explosive ordnance disposal, protection of civilians, and gender-equality activities.

Although China has conducted extensive training through its specialized peacekeeping institution and engaged in numerous peacekeeping activities with countries and regional organizations, it has not targeted female peacekeepers as a specific subgroup in these efforts. The Department of Defense could take advantage of the situation by developing a female peacekeepers security cooperation initiative in partnership with China as a form of military diplomacy. Just as current US-Chinese military

46. JCS, JDN 1-19, vi.
49. State Council Information Office, “China’s Armed Forces.”
diplomacy activities like counterpiracy patrols and bilateral exercises focusing on humanitarian assistance and disaster relief strengthen cooperation, a WPS-focused security cooperation initiative could achieve the same goal. To entice China, the Department of Defense could include partner nations China currently influences and seeks to influence, creating a WPS security cooperation alliance.

For example, the Department of Defense should invite Ghana to join this alliance, given that Ghana's long-standing, almost 60-year relationship with China has grown more important over the past 15 years, establishing Ghana as a key country in China's expanding sphere of influence in Africa. As a significant provider of development aid, China supported Ghana in the form of grants, interest-free loans, and concessional loans used in a variety of sectors, including infrastructure, economic development, and health. The discovery of oil in the Gulf of Guinea in 2007 made Ghana an oil-rich nation, and, thus, the nature of China's relationship with Ghana has shifted from that of an aid donor to that of an investor. While China provides technical expertise and funding for the development of energy infrastructure within Ghana, it is also an international competitor for Ghana's oil resources. Ghana's Ministry of Environment and Science highlighted the importance of the latter, noting that “China needs a lot of oil for its massive population... China needs Ghana's oil.”

While China's vested interest in Ghana as an oil supplier underscores Ghana's suitability as a partner in a WPS security cooperation initiative, so does Ghana's robust efforts to enhance the role of women peacekeepers. Men and women serving in the Ghana Armed Forces have participated in more than a dozen UN peacekeeping operations and missions since the early 1970s. Ghana is the third-largest troop- and police-contributing country in Africa. Of the top 10 troop- and police-contributing countries, it deploys the highest proportion of women (averaging 15 percent) and continues to increase and improve women servicemembers' participation.

in peacekeeping operations, as evidenced by a Measuring Opportunities for Women in Peace Operations Assessment conducted in 2020.\textsuperscript{55}

China’s extensive involvement in peacekeeping operations and its robust relationship with Ghana illustrate the intersection of security and economic interests in the context of the competition continuum. Certainly, a WPS security cooperation initiative represents a strategically informed effort to cooperate effectively with China and other important US partners and promote national security over the long term. The Department of Defense can realize this concept by leveraging the WPS global network and the WPS know-how of the US Army War College’s Peacekeeping and Stability Operations Institute.\textsuperscript{56} An ideal partner to liaise, train, and cooperate with China—and US partner nations targeted by China—this institute can bring to bear its peacekeeping and WPS experience along with the growing body of WPS expertise within the Department of Defense.

Tailoring the peacekeeping institute’s efforts to enhance the capabilities of women peacekeepers and increase their numbers through a WPS security cooperation initiative would provide many benefits. In addition to improving peacekeeping operations and thereby promoting peace and stability over the long term, this alliance would facilitate the creation of new relationships among China’s military members, their US counterparts, and DoD partners and allies. The alliance would enable more channels to engage in military diplomacy, precluding potential conflicts through discussion. This initiative would also strengthen US ties with China and provide a concrete, nontraditional security activity designed primarily to address issues of mutual interest. Finally, cooperating with China in this manner might encourage Beijing to develop a WPS national action plan, further strengthening investment in the multilateral system and promoting global stability by improving the status of women in China.\textsuperscript{57}


Conclusion

As a practical and conceptual framework, Women, Peace, and Security is a value proposition that will enhance the Department of Defense’s ability to envision the competition continuum and operationalize it effectively. Drawing attention to women’s active involvement in all elements of the continuum—armed conflict, competing below the threshold of armed conflict, and cooperation—Women, Peace, and Security, like the notion of the competition continuum, expands one’s view of the operational environment. Concretely, leveraging the WPS global network allows the Department of Defense to strengthen existing partnerships, expand its network of potential allies, and create more opportunities to compete through cooperation. Likewise, it also provides opportunities to expand the US sphere of influence through cooperation with adversarial partners. By highlighting women's roles in armed combat, Women, Peace, and Security assists in ascertaining and overcoming gender biases and capitalizing fully on the skills and abilities of all military members regardless of sex, begetting efficiencies that translate into effectiveness.

Finally, Women, Peace, and Security reveals how gender norms can impede or enable efforts to compete along the competition continuum. Appreciating the impact of societal gender norms encourages inquiry beyond superficial impressions—for example, that men hold all the power in North Korea or that Middle Eastern women have little agency or influence—enabling the Department of Defense to discover a more comprehensive and nuanced operational environment. In sum, as a conceptual and practical framework, Women, Peace, and Security helps shape the Department of Defense’s collective mindset, preparing it to operate more effectively in the exceedingly complex and contested space of the competition continuum and to achieve national security objectives along the way.

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Select Bibliography


ABSTRACT: US military practice neither considers the gendered effects of kinetic actions in planning and executing operations nor tracks and measures them. The Department of Defense’s implementation of the Women, Peace, and Security Act of 2017 instead focuses on the role of women in preventing armed conflict and resolving it. The implementation of the Department of Defense’s new Civilian Harm Mitigation and Response Action Plan provides an opportunity to close this gap in an operationally relevant way.

Keywords: Women, Peace, and Security (WPS), civilian harm and mitigation response (CHMR), gender, targeting, operational relevance

Protecting civilians during armed conflict has become an area of increasing focus for the United States, NATO, and non-NATO US allies such as Australia. Russia’s widespread and often indiscriminate attacks against Ukrainian civilians and infrastructure have heightened this focus. The US Army is the designated joint proponent for the new Department of Defense (DoD) Civilian Harm Mitigation and Response (CHMR) Action Plan, which establishes the protection of civilians in US military operations as a strategic and moral requirement. It takes an expanded view of harm to civilians beyond counting casualties and looks at impacts to the “civilian environment,” including “the personnel, organizations, resources, infrastructure, essential services, and systems on which civilian life depends.” Although expansive, this list does not

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4. DoD, CHMR-AP, 1.
account for important social factors, such as gender inequality, that could place certain portions of the civilian population at disparate levels of risk to the effects of a military action.

Gender inequality is a significant driver of some of the more severe effects of armed conflict inflicted upon women and girls. For example, even before the Taliban regained control of Afghanistan in 2021, Afghan women and girls experienced extreme gender inequality, particularly in rural areas. Not only are they largely confined to their home compounds, but they also rely upon this modest infrastructure in their everyday lives. It provides basic resources for the domestic work and family care to which they are relegated, and it protects them from sexual violence from men outside their families.

Thus, an airstrike against an insurgent’s family compound would disproportionately affect the female occupants, who would lose the utility and safety it provided. The immediate security threat the insurgent posed to the operation would be resolved, but at the cost of destabilizing the civil society the strike was intended to protect. Failing to consider gender in civilian-centric operations threatens the mission’s long-term success. The CHMR Action Plan could address this if the US Army were to include gender among the civilian environment factors it recognizes in operational areas.

Before looking at the action plan in detail from the perspective of gender, this article first identifies a troubling gap between the lines of effort established by the DoD implementation of the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) Act of 2017 and effectively addressing gender in the context of the lethal parts of kinetic operations. Next, while the CHMR Action Plan contains no reference to gendered harm itself, it has features in its implementation that are promising points of entry for the inclusion of gender considerations. This article then assesses the degree to which US doctrine and guidance have already factored in the protection of civilians and operational gender considerations.

Existing US doctrine and guidance provide a platform the US Army could use to include gender considerations in the implementation of the action plan. The doctrine and guidance do not, however, provide an obvious entry point to factor in gendered harms from kinetic actions before the harms would occur. Further, in combined and joint targeting, efforts more fully addressing gendered harms to civilians would likely impinge on positions the United States has already staked out consistent with the DoD Women, Peace, and Security implementation plan.

**Women, Peace, and Security Strategy and Implementation Plan**

The UN Security Council’s passage of Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security in 2000 resulted in many nations adopting action plans institutionalizing greater protections for women and girls in armed conflicts. It also urged nations to make full use of international human rights law and the law of armed conflict.\(^9\) The United States is unique in dealing with WPS issues because, rather than just creating a national action plan, it passed legislation to formalize its approach to gender issues and security through the Women, Peace, and Security Act of 2017. The law’s statement of US policy, “to promote the meaningful participation of women in all aspects of overseas conflict prevention, management, and resolution, and post-conflict relief and recovery efforts,” is less comprehensive than the scope of UN Security Resolution 1325.

The tasks the law assigned to the Department of Defense reflect the law’s approach. These tasks include training DoD personnel on the importance of including women in conflict prevention and resolution processes, considering gender in international law, preventing human trafficking, and “[e]ffective strategies and best practices for ensuring meaningful participation for women.”\(^10\) The national WPS strategy in 2019 amplified this statutory avoidance of gender in the context of armed conflict by aiming to promote “the meaningful inclusion of women in processes to prevent, mediate, resolve, and recover from deadly conflict or disaster.”\(^11\) The DoD *Women, Peace, and Security Strategic Framework Implementation Plan* provides intermediate objectives to accomplish the national strategy,

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10. WPS Act of 2017, § 6(b)(1), (2), and (3).
with measurable effects, but it too avoids bringing gender considerations into deadly armed conflict.\textsuperscript{12}

The Department of Defense has made progress incorporating gender considerations into high-level planning and other military activities. Significant numbers of US military personnel have now received training to work as gender advisers, and combatant commands and other organizational elements now have gender advisers and staff.\textsuperscript{13} This is important work—however, the remit of these personnel is not gender considerations in the application of kinetic force in armed conflict, but instead security cooperation and the like.\textsuperscript{14}

Many factors contribute to the gap between current WPS efforts and dealing meaningfully with gender considerations in the conduct of armed conflict. These factors include the lack of institutionalization within the US military of relevant lessons learned from gender-aware efforts during the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, such as Female Engagement Teams and Special Operational Forces Cultural Support Teams.\textsuperscript{15} In addition, gender-consideration proponents have not articulated an overarching theory of gender’s operational relevance that works consistently across the planning, training, and execution phases of all missions.\textsuperscript{16} Given these factors, it likely made more sense for the WPS program to steer around the gendered effects of kinetic actions than to work with them incompletely.

Thus, the WPS program cannot be the primary driver for addressing gender considerations in US actions that harm civilians or the civilian environment in kinetic operations. Instead, if gender considerations are


to be addressed, the implementation of the *CHMR Action Plan* needs to include them.

**Civilian Harm Mitigation and Response Action Plan**

Like the WPS Act of 2017, the *CHMR Action Plan* does not directly address the problem of gender blindness in planning and conducting kinetic operations. Four lines of effort within the action plan, however, provide opportunities to include gender considerations in assessing harm to civilians and the civilian environment. These lines of effort include prioritizing information collection for mission accomplishment, including the discriminate use of force; supporting commanders with resources for civilian protection; integrating civilian protection into mission objectives from the beginning of operations; and prioritizing the protection and restoration of the civilian environment, circumstances permitting.\(^{17}\)

These mutually reinforcing lines of effort present opportunities to factor gender into operational planning, which ultimately supports the action plan’s overall goal of responding to and mitigating civilian harm. Although ambitious, the first three lines of effort are largely within the DoD’s capacity to realize. The effective implementation of the fourth line of effort (the protection and restoration of the civilian environment) would likely face significant obstacles in the field.

**Informed Excellence**

The body of the *CHMR Action Plan* describes these lines of effort in greater detail and sets out 11 specific objectives to be accomplished in phases through fiscal year 2025.\(^ {18}\) The information-collection line of effort is fundamental to practicable implementation of the action plan and the accomplishment of these objectives. None of the other lines of effort will succeed without the creation of a reliable and detailed base of data encompassing the features and trends in any given civilian environment. Creating this base of data is important from a gender perspective because informed analysis on the potential impacts of gender inequality requires gathering sex- and gender-disaggregated data at a granular level.\(^ {19}\)

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17. DoD, *CHMR-AP*, I.
Informed analysis is crucial for accomplishing both the second and the third lines of effort and to ensure the incorporation of guidance on addressing civilian harm into strategy, doctrine, professional military education, training, and exercises.\textsuperscript{20} For credibility with military audiences, this guidance must be based on robust data sets that can be used to develop closely reasoned and transparent analysis. Given the gender-differentiated human-security impacts of armed conflict in situations of underlying gender inequality, collection and inclusion of data related to these gender-based harms will form more complete operational pictures for commanders and planners.\textsuperscript{21} Here, the second line of effort in the \textit{CHMR Action Plan}, the establishment of the Civilian Protection Center of Excellence, comes into play.

The \textit{CHMR Action Plan} recognizes that supporting commanders with the proper resources to address civilian harm in mission areas is crucial to the plan’s success in the field. The establishment of a Civilian Protection Center of Excellence is intended to develop and “institutionalize the advancement of knowledge, practices, and tools” quickly to address civilian harm. The action plan anticipates that the center will require an initial core staff of 30 full-time personnel, which would increase to between 50 and 70 once it becomes fully operational. This endeavor would be no small investment. It would be necessary to support the center’s efforts to provide direct support to operational commands; develop policy, doctrine, and the Joint Force regarding civilian protection; and monitor and perform innovative analyses of civilian-harm data to inform DoD leaders of critical trends. The \textit{CHMR Action Plan} expects the center to provide services across all phases of an operation and to include a broad range of administrative and operational activities, such as helping to develop command policies, standard operating procedures and tools, and exercise support and capturing lessons learned.\textsuperscript{22}

The focus on standard operating procedures is among the objectives that lend themselves to the inclusion of gender considerations. Per the earlier example of the significance of home compounds to the human-security needs of women and girls in Afghanistan, standard operating procedures that factor these needs into the employment of artillery or air-dropped munitions could be one way to appropriately address gender in the context of kinetic operations.\textsuperscript{23} To make this work, the establishment of the pattern of life at or around the home compounds would be important, which poses

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{20} DoD, \textit{CHMR-AP}, 9–11.
\item \textsuperscript{21} Prescott, “Moving from Gender Analysis,” 8–11.
\item \textsuperscript{22} DoD, \textit{CHMR-AP}, I, 6. 8.
\item \textsuperscript{23} Prescott, “Principle of Proportionality,” 86–87.
\end{itemize}
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resource issues, such as the availability of drones to provide real-time data and the availability of sex- and gender-disaggregated data related to the target area in general.

The Civilian Protection Center of Excellence will also help ensure the third line of effort and the integration of civilian protection, including awareness of gender factors, into mission objectives from the beginning of operations. This integration does not begin at the stage of mission planning but with the creation of policy and doctrine that support the development of the Joint Force. Importantly, Joint Force development applies to intellectual capital and to Joint Force members. Accordingly, the center will create professional pathways and certification processes for essential personnel and functions.24

**Protection and Restoration of the Civilian Environment**

The development of the Joint Force will be fundamental in addressing the final line of effort in the *CHMR Action Plan* that lends itself to the productive inclusion of gender considerations in addressing civilian harm: the protection and restoration of the civilian environment.25 Although the other lines of effort are ambitious from a technical and resource perspective, they are largely within DoD control to implement and regulate. This line of effort is quite broad and only partially within DoD’s capability to execute. Further, it would appear to call for the concerted use of multidisciplinary skill sets in very challenging operational settings, perhaps similar to the Provincial Reconstruction Teams and the Agriculture Development Teams used by US forces in Afghanistan.26

The monetary component of mitigating and responding to civilian harm illustrates the scope of the challenges personnel working on these cases might face. Before the wars that followed the al-Qaeda attacks on 9/11, the claims process used by US forces to handle damage claims did not normally cover combat injuries to people or damages to things that would fall in the civilian environment. In Afghanistan and Iraq, the need to maintain civilian support during intense insurgencies provided alternate sources of compensation for damages, including Commanders’ Emergency Response Programs, to make so-called ex gratia payments. These payments were not ordinarily authorized by US law and therefore were not based on a recognized legal obligation.27

In 2005, Congress began to appropriate funds to pay for claims resulting from kinetic actions, so there is now a sound legal basis upon which these claims could be paid.\(^2\) Under the \textit{CHMR Action Plan}, in fiscal year 2024 the Department of Defense will comprehensively address the policies applicable to these payments, so there should soon be practicable standards in place to adjudicate these claims.\(^3\) The larger problem will then likely be the logistics of making payments, given there will be many claimants who live far from US military units and there may be problems in finding reliable interpreters.\(^4\)

Although the action plan positions the center of excellence as a primary source for creating doctrine, policy, and procedures to support its full implementation, the center would not be writing on a blank slate regarding the doctrinal treatment of gender in operations specifically or on the larger issue of protection of civilians in general. Thus, it is important to assess where US doctrine already addresses gender, how it handles the relationship between gender and the protection of civilians, and where it is lacking because this information would affect the consideration of gendered civilian harms in the implementation of the action plan.

### Gender in US Doctrine

Work over the last decade has included operational treatments of gender in US doctrine.\(^5\) The treatment of gender in joint and US Army doctrine is uneven, however. In some cases, US doctrine addresses gender considerations in detail, including the existing US Army doctrine and guidance on protection of civilians. Other doctrine (such as civil-military operations doctrine, which focuses on the civilian environment) is gender blind.\(^6\) To appreciate fully the scope of work that the Civilian Protection Center of Excellence would face to incorporate gender considerations into doctrine for civilian protection, it is important to first establish where the relevant doctrine already includes treatments of operational gender considerations, then to identify the essentially gender-blind doctrine, and finally to examine the doctrine that the \textit{CHMR Action Plan} identifies

\(^3\) DoD, \textit{CHMR-AP}, 26.
\(^4\) Gluck, “U.S. Military Payments”; and Captain Dimitri Faracos (US Army), former claims officer, Afghanistan, interview with author, June 20, 2016.
as requiring modification. This examination is necessary because
operational planning should begin with a foundation in doctrine;
thus, inclusion of operational gender considerations in kinetic operations
must first assess where doctrine does not consider these factors,
where it does and to what depth.

**Gender-aware Doctrine**

The choice of the US Army as the joint proponent for implementing
the *CHMR Action Plan* was likely premised in part upon the work already
done by the Peacekeeping and Stability Operations Institute at the
US Army War College. The Peacekeeping and Stability Operations Institute
was the preparing agency for *Protection of Civilians, Army Techniques
Publication* (ATP) 3-07.6. Given this work, selection of the US Army
as the joint proponent makes sense.

*Protection of Civilians* contains an extensive discussion of gender issues
in operations throughout, devoting a section specifically to the protection
of women and girls. It describes gender issues as falling along two
primary dimensions, “protective” and “participatory.” The protective
dimension does not mean increasing the protection of women and girls
from the kinetic effects of operations. Instead, it focuses on mitigating
“harm, exploitation, discrimination, abuse, conflict-related sexual violence,
and human trafficking”; providing access to humanitarian assistance; and
safeguarding women and girls’ human rights.

In 2018, the Peacekeeping and Stability Operations Institute published
a revised version of its *Protection of Civilians Military Reference Guide*,
which it intended to serve as supplemental guidance to existing doctrine
and policy and as a textbook for the protection of civilians. Like *Protection
of Civilians*, the guide also contains an extensive and detailed discussion
of the role of gender considerations in providing greater protection
to civilians. Although the well-developed chapter on risks civilians face
in operations includes some gender-differentiated risks faced by women
and girls, it does not address the impacts of kinetic operations upon
them. The guide notes that US forces support the protection of civilians
in two general ways: avoiding civilian harm by operating in conformance
with the law of armed conflict and by conducting “offensive, defensive,

33. Headquarters, Department of the Army (HQDA), *Protection of Civilians, Army Techniques
Publication* (ATP) 3-07.6 (Washington, DC: HQDA, 2015), iii.
34. HQDA, *Protection of Civilians*, 4-4-4-7.
and stability activities expressly intended to mitigate harm to civilians . . . “

This description of protection of civilians operations does not provide an easy entry point for including the gender-differentiated effects of kinetic operations in the implementation of the action plan.

The US military’s understanding of the law of armed conflict (LOAC) does not consider the impact of secondary effects on civilians from using armed force in a commander’s analysis when assessing whether an engagement is proportional. Instead, traditional US formulations of the principle of proportionality focus on direct impacts to civilians (such as immediate injury, death, or loss of property). The United States is not an outlier in this regard. Internationally accepted understandings of proportionality also do not differentiate between civilians in terms of considering gendered impacts of kinetic operations.

Further, the activities discussed in the reference guide mitigate gendered harm caused by others. For example, it discusses having units conduct patrols along routes civilian women and girls use to draw water and gather firewood to discourage acts of sexual violence against them by unlawful elements. Rather than addressing kinetic military activities in which civilian women and girls might suffer significant and foreseeable secondary harm, these understandings of the law of armed conflict and the protection of civilians have the effect of sidestepping them regarding US forces’ actions. The absence of gender considerations in civil-military operations—the most civilian-centric doctrine—compounds this limited perspective.

**Gender-blind Doctrine**

In addition to including gender considerations, *Protection of Civilians* recognizes the substantial role civil-military operations could play in managing a civilian protection program. It observes that civil-military operations representatives are the primary staff officers tasked with ensuring the inclusion of civil considerations into planning and that this could involve maintaining “civil information databases, the civil reconnaissance plan, or the making of amends.” Further, *Protection of Civilians* specifically addresses the role civil-military operations centers could play in providing military units a better understanding of the civilian situation in an area of operations and in facilitating “remedial action regarding civilian

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These civilian-centric functions and capabilities may lend themselves to the implementation of the action plan, given its emphasis on civilians and the civilian environment.

Unfortunately, civil-military operations doctrine does not meaningfully address gender. At the joint level, for example, *Civil Military Operations*, Joint Publication (JP) 3-57, mentions women only three times—and only in the context of planning. For example, *Civil Military Operations* advises planners to consider additional logistical support that might be required “outside military logistics, such as support to the civilian populace (for example, women, children, and the elderly).” This document fails to recognize that roughly half of any given civilian population in a mission area is female and that the women and girls could have different security needs than their male family members. This approach is not gender-neutral, it is instead male normative and blind to gender considerations.

In the field, there is no doubt that US Army Civil Affairs units recognize the operational relevance of gender in their work and effectively incorporate these considerations into their activities and missions. In service-level civil-military operations doctrine, however, the situation is scarcely better than the joint doctrine with regard to gender. *Civil Affairs Operations*, Field Manual 3-57, does not mention gender specifically, but it notes that when providing humanitarian assistance in the context of population control, women along with children, the elderly, and the disabled may be in the category of “vulnerable” persons who have greater needs than others. Similarly, subordinate civil-military operations doctrine such as *Civil Affairs Support to Populace and Resources Control*, ATP 3-57.10, and *Civil Affairs Planning*, ATP 3-57.60, note only that the gender of host-nation persons who might be helpful to the mission should be included in their descriptions in reports “if applicable.” Other service-level civil-military operations doctrine relevant to foreign humanitarian assistance and running civil-military operations centers makes no mention of women, girls, or gender. Mindful of this absence of gender considerations in what should be the most civilian-centric

40. HQDA, *Protection of Civilians*, 3-3, 4-2–4-3.
43. Prescott, “Gender Blindness,” 23.
of US doctrine, it is useful to assess the doctrinal modifications the CHMR Action Plan itself contemplates.

**Doctrine Identified in the Action Plan**

Although the CHMR Action Plan identifies specific joint doctrine that will be updated in fiscal year 2023, civil-military operations doctrine does not make this list. Doctrine it does identify includes Joint Planning, JP 5-0, which provides a broad definition of the civilian environment akin to the doctrinal definition of the information environment in the context of the larger operational environment. Next, Joint Intelligence, JP 2-0, will be updated to ensure holistic analysis of the civilian environment, by establishing who is responsible for this analysis and how they will conduct it and the “relevant intelligence estimates and products with detailed analysis of the civilian environment.” These doctrinal revisions will be important and useful, but it is difficult to see how these revisions achieve holism without changes in civil-military operations doctrine.\(^47\)

On the operations side, Joint Operations, JP 3-0, will now include a description of the civilian environment as a necessary part of the operational environment. Both Joint Operations and Joint Task Force Headquarters, JP 3-33, will integrate “CHMR considerations across combatant command functions” and make sure that joint task forces consider the staffing requirements that implementing the action plan entails. Similarly, updates to Multinational Operations, JP 3-16, will provide guidance to US forces on developing a common operational picture of the civilian environment in operations with allies and partners. Joint Targeting, JP 3-60, will be updated to factor in the new organizational elements outlined in the action plan and their work, including the use of Civilian Environment Teams in current joint targeting processes and information and analysis developed as part of civilian protection efforts.\(^48\)

Revising this amount of fundamental and interrelated joint doctrine so quickly to address civilian harm mitigation and response effectively is a bold objective. The need to look at the operational aspects of civilian harm both holistically and cohesively to address the gender-differentiated harms that women and girls could suffer in military actions will likely complicate these efforts. Important doctrine that works to harmonize operations does not

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\(^47\) DoD, CHMR-AP, 9–10.

\(^48\) DoD, CHMR-AP, 10, 13.
factor in gender considerations. For example, *Multinational Operations*, JP 3–16, currently contains nothing regarding gender.49

On the other hand, some of these documents already include operational gender considerations, which at first glance appear to provide potential hooks for more extensive treatment of gender in the revisions the action plan requires. For example, *Joint Planning* notes that the operational environment includes intangible factors, such as gender considerations.50 Further, it includes the commander’s gender adviser among the staff officers able to provide expertise in joint planning and describes the gender adviser’s role in developing a gender analysis.51

These potential linkage points might be of limited value, however. The interrelationships between these different doctrines highlight particular challenges in effectively implementing the action plan to include operationally relevant gender considerations. An example of this is coordinating joint targeting in multinational operations, which the most recent update to NATO *Allied Joint Doctrine for Joint Targeting*, Allied Joint Publication (AJP) 3.9, shows. It defines joint targeting as “taking actions in one or more of the operational domains, using all capabilities available, against a target, in order to create an effect in one or more of the physical, virtual, or cognitive dimensions.”52 These effects could, therefore, be lethal or nonlethal. In the target development phase of the joint targeting process, *Allied Joint Doctrine for Joint Targeting* has gender advisers provide a gender analysis of the target, noting that the “integration of a Gender perspective contributes to the orchestration of fighting power.”53 This statement appears to carve out a very meaningful role for the gender adviser in bringing gender considerations to bear in the targeting process.

Unless it were based on specific and granular sex- and gender-disaggregated data applicable to particular targets, the value a gender adviser’s analysis would bring to the combined and joint targeting process is arguable. Aside from that, however, what is especially important regarding the NATO joint targeting process is the phrasing of the American reservation to the use of the gender adviser:

Reservation 10. The United States does not endorse the requirement for targets to be reviewed by a Gender Advisor

(GENAD) prior to target validation. The US will follow joint doctrine which requires intelligence (J2), operations (J3), and legal advisor (LEGAD) review of targets to ensure they meet military objectives and the Law of War (LOW). The US has no similar role or function of a GENAD during target development and validation.  

The reservation precludes the ordinary NATO proponent of gender considerations in operational planning, the gender adviser, from having a role in the targeting process. This is not surprising; the DoD implementation of the WPS Act of 2017 avoids dealing with gender considerations in the kinetic parts of kinetic operations—the US gender adviser currently has no explicitly established role here. It is ironic that addressing the gender-differentiated harms suffered by civilian women and girls because of kinetic operations as part of the CHMR Action Plan could potentially be stymied by the application of US law and policy specifically designed to protect women and girls in the non-kinetic parts of military activities.

Conclusion

The war in Ukraine has brought global attention to the need for increased civilian protection during armed conflict. From the perspective of human security, NATO’s new strategic concept establishes the protection of civilians and civilian harm mitigation as central to its approach to crisis prevention and management. Practical work is occurring within the Alliance and with its partners to operationalize this requirement. This work includes the development of operational doctrine that factors in human security considerations beyond the traditional formulations regarding civilians. These developments are most evident in the recent publication of the NATO ACO handbook on the protection of civilians and in the training the Finnish Defence International Centre provides on the protection of civilians. These efforts include operational gender considerations, and it should be considered in the implementation of the action plan.

Although the CHMR Action Plan contains no specific mention of gender considerations, this topic must be addressed in the context of existing US civilian protection doctrine and guidance that deal

54. NATO, Joint Targeting, vii.
with gender’s operational relevance. Consonant with the action plan’s intent to go beyond LOAC requirements to reduce civilian harm, and the expansive definition of the civilian environment to be protected from harm, the gender-differentiated harms suffered by women and girls in armed conflict are suitable for inclusion in the action plan’s implementation.\footnote{DoD, CHMR-AP, 3 n.1.}

The \textit{CHMR Action Plan} is not merely policy now. With the passage of the James M. Inhofe National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2023, Congress established the Civilian Protection Center of Excellence as a matter of law.\footnote{James M. Inhofe National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2023, Pub. L. No 117-263, § 1082, 136 Stat. 2395.} Further, the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2023 provides $25 million to support implementation of the action plan.\footnote{Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023, Pub. L. 117-328, 136 Stat. 4459, 4570.} With this support, headquarters units could be guided in learning how to collect sex- and gender-disaggregated data in the field most effectively and then use that information to provide actionable intelligence relevant to the gendered effects of kinetic actions to commanders and planners. The results of these efforts could then be collected and fed into doctrine to institutionalize and normalize operational gender considerations as merely another factor to work within civilian-centric environments. This foundation will be necessary to accomplish fully the ambitious path set out by the action plan and should be addressed in the DoD instruction on civilian harm and mitigation response expected in the first quarter of 2023.\footnote{Marc Garlasco and Andrew Hyde, “Civilian Harm Mitigation: An Opportunity for Values-based U.S. Leadership at NATO,” \textit{Lawfare} (blog), February 2, 2023, https://www.lawfareblog.com/civilian-harm-mitigation-opportunity-values-based-us-leadership-nato.}

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Climate Change: An Opportunity for INDOPACOM

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ABSTRACT: US Indo-Pacific Command should actively plan for operations to respond to and combat climate change because it will grow US influence in the region and provide a compelling alternative to China’s influence. Combating climate change supports the primary objective of countering China, operationalizes climate change response for US commanders, and offers a less threatening means to develop partnerships. Through qualitative analysis of threats to US security, current policy analysis, and select case studies of humanitarian assistance and disaster-relief missions to operationalize climate change as a US military mission, this article will assist US military and policy practitioners in planning for climate change in Southeast Asia and future exercises in the region.

Keywords: climate change, Southeast Asia, China, INDOPACOM, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HA/DR)

Flash points between the United States and China include territorial acquisition in the South China Sea; military modernization; US technology and intellectual property theft; currency manipulation; the Uyghur genocide; and steel, aluminum, electronics, and clothing tariffs. Add to this list climate change—an emerging area for competition. Over the last two decades, the impact of climate change has become a key concern of Southeast Asian nations that must deal with the effects of rising sea levels, increasingly powerful typhoons, decreasing fish stocks, and escalating climatological variability.

Often perceived as an asymmetric threat by military powers, climate change and response to climatological, meteorological, agricultural, and human effects of climate change offer opportunities for competition and the wielding of US national power against China. US Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM) should view climate change planning and response as a valid lever of soft power and use it as a means of increasing interoperability throughout Southeast Asia. Specifically, US Indo-Pacific Command can leverage climate change as an opportunity to increase joint exercises in foreign humanitarian assistance and foreign disaster relief, which have significant warfighting
applicability—mainly by building the architecture for interoperability, command-and-control structures, communications platforms, logistics networks, and trust.\(^1\) Humanitarian assistance and disaster relief exercises have lower barriers to entry and pose less risk of disrupting existing economic and trade relationships with China or challenging the status quo while offering many of the same benefits of combat-focused multinational exercises.

**Climate Change as a Nontraditional Threat**

Traditional conceptions of national security, including the primacy of territorial sovereignty, threats from nuclear and ballistic missiles, and defense of natural resources, have shifted over the previous two decades to include threats to the population. Defense against terrorism and insurgency is now widely accepted as a valid use of military power, and policymakers are seeing a range of new threats from cyberattacks, viruses, online propaganda, shifting supply chains, and carbon emissions. How to think about and respond to these threats is unclear.\(^2\) Climate change and its national security implications are some of the new threats planners and policymakers must consider.

More and more frequently, official government reports refer to climate change as a nontraditional threat to US national security. Beginning in the early 2000s, climate change and climate variability caused by man-made carbon emissions began appearing in national security documents as a destabilizing factor. In 2007, the Center for Naval Analyses Military Advisory Board released a report arguing climate change is a threat multiplier for instability in some of the most volatile regions of the world, exacerbating risks to national and regional US security interests. Subsequently, climate change was included in the 2008 Quadrennial Defense Review as a “direct outgrowth” of the Naval Analyses report.\(^3\) As worldwide climatological variability increases, storms get stronger, waves get higher, droughts become more severe, fish stocks become less stable, oceans acidify, and seas rise. As the inspector general of the Department of Defense noted in his report on the top management challenges of 2021, the changing climate and resulting extreme weather events can aggravate

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geopolitical unrest as stresses on natural resources undermine the capacity of nations to govern themselves and increase the chance of conflicts. The results of climate change cause “forced migration, food insecurity, and the failure of governments to provide for basic needs,” which make populations “far more susceptible to extremism, political uprising, and wide-scale destabilization.”

Climate Change and Southeast Asian Nations

In the contested waters of the South China Sea (SCS) and throughout Southeast Asia, climate-change hazards and security risks are particularly apparent. From more powerful typhoons to ocean acidification, sea-level rise, and coral-reef bleaching with a resulting decrease in fishing stocks, climate change requires attention from navies operating in the region and civilian policymakers and diplomats. In the 2022 survey of the Association of Southeast Asia Nations (ASEAN) members, climate change ranked among the top three concerns of the region. The effects of climate change are projected to increase. The sixth assessment report of the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change documented the outsized impacts of climate change on the Asia-Pacific region: extreme coastal flooding, land erosion, decreased crop yields, and sea-level rise.

Southeast Asia’s vast economic opportunities and critical international waterways make it a significant arena for US and Chinese great-power competition. Chinese military expansion has exacerbated tensions with SCS claimants Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan, and Vietnam. The United States views China’s claims as a threat to freedom of navigation, the rule of law, and the US ability to operate safely in the region. While the South China Sea is a particular flash point in the American-Chinese relationship, broader Southeast Asia encompasses the SCS claimants and is subject to the same climate stresses and American-Chinese competition dynamic. Southeast Asia is the primary arena for American-Chinese competition. As the US Navy continues to focus on freedom of navigation within the South China Sea, security in broader Southeast Asia remains of critical strategic importance to

the United States. Climate change response is integral to the region’s security environment.

Barriers to Cooperation

American policymakers are taking a more confrontational approach to Chinese actions in Southeast Asia. Beginning in summer 2020, Michael R. “Mike” Pompeo, the then US secretary of state, began calling for enforcing a harder line toward China. He declared Chinese island-building illegal and highlighted the importance of INDOPACOM activities, including freedom of navigation patrols, naval exercises, and continued persistent presence operations. Such hard-line rhetoric, and even open postulation about Chinese plans for invading Taiwan, has increased in the wake of China’s support for the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This posturing invites binary side-taking and forces ASEAN nations to choose between the United States and China. Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi expressed as much, stating, “ASEAN must always cooperate to maintain our regional peace and stability and not be dragged into the storm of geopolitical tension or be forced to choose sides.” Similarly, Malaysian Minister of Foreign Affairs Hishammuddin Hussein asserted that Malaysia must ensure it is not “dragged and trapped” in a political tug-of-war between great powers.

Given China’s economic strength, military power, physical proximity, and increasing cultural sway, it is likely many Southeast Asian nations would ally with China if pressed. American hard-line diplomacy risks alienating Southeast Asian countries and weakening US influence in the region. Another gentler, and perhaps more persuasive, approach that may be more flexible than defense arrangements is to use the tools of soft power to influence and forge closer ties with nations. An as yet undeveloped


tool for soft-power diplomacy is climate change response. Nations eager to maintain neutrality in the great-power competition between the United States and China may see engagement on the global threat of climate change as an opportunity to avoid taking a side and bypass thorny regional dilemmas.

Polling indicates most Southeast Asian nations do not care about the US-Chinese rivalry as much as they do about climate change, economic inequality, and societal recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.9 As the competition between the United States and China plays out, Southeast Asian nations may be wary of taking a side. The United States would gain more trust in the region by advancing objectives that are “complementary without commitment.”10 By advancing goals that support regional interests in combating climate change without demanding a commitment, the United States could engender partnerships without overturning the delicate regional power dynamics.

**American-Chinese Competition**

American-Chinese competition is multipronged. As Kevin Rudd, China expert and former prime minister of Australia, notes, the United States and China compete in nearly every domain:

Washington and Beijing continue to compete for strategic and economic influence across the various regions of the world. They keep seeking reciprocal access to each other’s markets and still take retaliatory measures when such access is denied. They still compete in foreign investment markets, technology markets, capital markets, and currency markets. And they likely carry out a global contest for hearts and minds, with Washington stressing the importance of democracy, open economies, and human rights and Beijing highlighting its approach to authoritarian capitalism and what it calls “the China development model.”11

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Given the extent of this competition, finding ways to increase cooperation with Southeast Asian nations and counter China’s narrative of ownership of the South China Sea is of strategic importance to military planners.

One significant means US Indo-Pacific Command uses to counter Chinese influence is enhanced partner relationships in the region. As Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee Representative Adam Smith noted in a March 2021 hearing on national security challenges and US military activities in the Indo-Pacific, “the most important thing we can do in the region is build partnerships.”

Under the Indo-Pacific Maritime Security Initiative (started in 2015 and expanded in 2019), the United States hopes to improve the ability of the Philippines, Vietnam, and other Southeast Asian countries to maintain maritime domain awareness and patrol their exclusive economic zones. In support of this effort, the United States has “stepped up security cooperation with Japan, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Vietnam; undertaken joint patrols in the South China Sea with other partners, including Japan, India, and Australia; and expressed support for other multilateral actions in the region.” This approach attempts to counter the strong economic ties China is developing in the region through the Belt and Road Initiative—an uphill battle, since two-thirds of countries trade more with China than with the United States.

How can the United States build resilient partnerships when nations are reluctant to choose between the United States and China and are not interested in the broader great-power competition? Given that climate change poses a global threat and is a top concern for ASEAN nations, the United States should reframe climate change as a primary mission. Nesting climate change within the framework of competing for influence in the region provides opportunities for engagement with countries.

reticent about closer military cooperation and sets competition with China in a positive and affirmative vision for the future.\textsuperscript{15}

**HA/DR Exercises versus Operations**

In practice, nesting climate change within the framework of regional objectives means the United States should enhance response mechanisms to the effects of climate change. Foreign humanitarian assistance and foreign disaster relief are the military mission sets most closely aligned with climate change response.\textsuperscript{16} Humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations are already an important component of the INDOPACOM workload.\textsuperscript{17} In many cases, the military is the only organization capable of quick response to more-frequent natural disasters on the scale necessary.\textsuperscript{18} As host nations and the United Nations build their response networks in the initial stages of disasters, they request the support of INDOPACOM transportation and logistics capabilities. The US Department of State and the Office of US Foreign Disaster Assistance within the US Agency for International Development (USAID) are the designated US government leads for the coordination of foreign disaster response. American military participation in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief is limited in scope and duration and designed to supplement or complement host-nation efforts.\textsuperscript{19}

Although limited in scope, military airlift often plays a necessary role at the outset of HA/DR operations, as the first few days of response are critical in saving lives. The military provides the vital capabilities of delivering aid and personnel, transporting rescue teams, and providing airborne reconnaissance—specifically airborne intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance and imagery products. Airlift, one of the easiest means by which a country can support HA/DR efforts, requires a low level of commitment, as sustainment requirements are limited and the footprint of forces minimal.\textsuperscript{20} Given the importance of rapid transport of supplies and personnel, US Air Force assets are the most requested resource,
followed by rotary lift sea-based assets from a large-deck capability.\textsuperscript{21} A study conducted in 2011 observed the most common requests for HA/DR missions were cargo capacity, personnel transfer, freshwater production, search and rescue, and medical support.\textsuperscript{22} While the US military is not and should not be responsible for long-term rebuilding and disaster assistance, the military can and has provided critical, life-saving supplies, equipment, and resources in the early stages of disasters. The provision of this type of support, and training to conduct humanitarian assistance and disaster relief in the future, will build trust with regional partners.

Given its resources and suitability for the HA/DR role, Indo-Pacific Command should frame its HA/DR actions as competing for influence in the region and operationalizing the challenge of climate change. Humanitarian assistance and disaster relief is not a new mission for Indo-Pacific Command and does not ask it to take on more than its resources can support. Between 1991 and 2018, Indo-Pacific Command conducted 29 regional HA/DR missions, including the Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami (2004), the earthquake and tsunami in Japan (2011), and Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines (2013). Of the 29 missions, 8 were in the Philippines, the single largest recipient of US military humanitarian and disaster relief. Earthquakes, tsunamis, and tropical cyclones accounted for the majority of responses, followed by widespread flooding, which accounted for three HA/DR missions.\textsuperscript{23} In the future, Indo-Pacific Command can expect HA/DR missions to entail a greater portion of actual operations due to increasing climate variability. Analysts at the Center for Naval Analyses estimate that even with more intense and frequent storms, floods, droughts, and other weather events, current INDOPACOM resources and capabilities for supporting HA/DR missions will likely be sufficient.\textsuperscript{24}

It is important to note the difference between HA/DR missions and HA/DR exercises, and planners and policymakers must take pains to avoid negative public perceptions of aid as foreign intervention. In research conducted by the RAND Corporation on the Indo-Pacific disaster response missions from 2008 to 2011, analysts found Indonesia,

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{21} For additional information on ship capabilities to support humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, see Moroney et al., \textit{Disaster Relief Efforts}, 127.
  \item \textsuperscript{24} Espach et al., “Impact of Climate Change,” 110.
\end{itemize}
Japan, Myanmar, and Pakistan faced potential internal and external political repercussions from foreign humanitarian assistance missions and were sensitive to humanitarian assistance and disaster relief as a form of foreign intervention.\textsuperscript{25} Foreign aid must always support and consider the affected country’s effort. Additionally, the United States can expect partner countries with their own capabilities to seek targeted, rather than large-scale, assistance to fill capacity gaps. This concern with foreign humanitarian assistance strengthens the case for INDOPACOM planning and conducting HA/DR exercises to train partner militaries to conduct their own response efforts while building networks and connections that enable targeted responses. Conducting these focused exercises could cast a wider net for participation with fewer barriers to cooperation. These exercises are nonthreatening as they do not have an overt military mission. Analysts for the Center for Naval Analyses note:

\begin{quote}
Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief response is a relatively uncontroversial way to develop bilateral ties with regional countries and participate in regional institutions. It is also an area where other governments and organizations can work with the United States without drawing the ire of certain domestic constituencies. In countries such as Indonesia and Malaysia, for example, where domestic currents are critical of the United States for a variety of reasons, there is appreciation for America’s ability and willingness to assist in the case of natural disasters and other humanitarian needs.\textsuperscript{26}
\end{quote}

In addition to developing nonthreatening bilateral ties, exercises focused on HA/DR strengthen regional institutions (namely, the Association of Southeast Asia Nations) and offer a counterpoint to Chinese influence. Specifically, “for Indonesia and Malaysia, founding members of ASEAN, the ability of that institution to offer public goods (such as HA/DR) is one way of demonstrating the ‘centrality’ of ASEAN to regional affairs and, by extension, enhancing their own influence.”\textsuperscript{27}

\begin{enumerate}
\item Moroney et al., \textit{Disaster Relief Efforts}, 118–19.
\item Espach et al., “Impact of Climate Change,” 107.
\item Espach et al., “Impact of Climate Change,” 107.
\end{enumerate}
Benefits of Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief for Indo-Pacific Command

The US Indo-Pacific Command would benefit in at least two ways from supporting and encouraging climate change response efforts in Southeast Asia. First, HA/DR exercises would increase soft power by building trust and expanding access. Second, they would build the necessary architecture for interoperability during a conflict since they require command-and-control structures, planning processes, communications platforms, logistics networks, and a whole-of-government approach.

The Typhoon Haiyan response in 2013 illustrates how humanitarian assistance and disaster relief can build trust and interoperability. During that response, Indo-Pacific Command collected and shared information with the Philippine government, foreign militaries, and nongovernmental organizations participating in the response effort. The typhoon hit the Philippines with sustained wind speeds up to 195 miles per hour and affected 14 million people across nine regions, with more than 6,000 lives lost and 28,000 people injured. The US military response, Operation Damayan, focused on large-scale transportation and logistics operations. Eight days after the storm made landfall, a joint team of the Department of Defense, US Agency for International Development, and UN International Children's Emergency Fund helped rebuild Tacloban’s municipal water system, restoring water service to 250,000 people. United States military aircraft personnel also performed needs and damage assessments with USAID and Office of US Foreign Disaster Assistance staff. Indo-Pacific Command increased situational awareness by sharing information through All Partners Access Network, a centralized data network that provided responders immediate updates on events and reduced duplication of efforts.

The US Embassy in the Philippines noted the “fast bilateral teamwork between the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the US military was due to the Visiting Forces Agreement between the two countries. While other countries wanted to respond quickly to the disaster, many had to wait for legal agreements to be worked out.

for their troops to work in the Philippines.”

Existing relationships built through concerted engagement, exercises, and security cooperation resulted in increased interoperability and facilitated effective response. For the people of the Philippines, the US military’s rapid response reinforced the perception of the United States as a long-standing and trustworthy partner. Moreover, countries throughout the region noted the US military, “in addition to being an unmatched fighting force, also brings unmatched logistical capabilities.” Such perceptions and partnerships are vital to advancing US goals in the region.

**China and Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief**

According to the INDOPACOM Center for Excellence in Disaster Management and Humanitarian Assistance, China has also recognized the soft-power potential of humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. From 2002 to 2019, China conducted 13 HA/DR missions in the Indo-Pacific, compared to 29 missions conducted by the United States (see tables 1 and 2). In July 2019, China published a white paper, “China’s National Defense in the New Era,” which outlined a global defense strategy, enumerated China’s military contributions in domestic HA/DR missions, and highlighted key foreign disaster-assistance missions since Typhoon Haiyan in 2013. According to China, since 2012, it has deployed approximately 950,000 soldiers, 1,410,000 militia, 190,000 vehicles and other types of equipment and sortied 26,000 vessels and 820 aircraft in response to domestic disasters. The paper “outlines China’s intention to create an expeditionary combat force that can conduct ‘far seas protection’ and ‘strategic projection’ and highlights its future intentions for the armed forces to be active participants in global humanitarian and disaster relief missions.”

China’s emerging HA/DR capability can be observed best in the two HA/DR exercises China conducted in 2019: “Peace Train” with Laos and “Mosi” with Russia and South Africa. According to the US secretary of defense’s annual report on China, while only 2 of China’s 19 military

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31. Aoki, *Foreign Disaster Response.*
33. *Typhoon Yolanda/Haiyan.*
exercises were HA/DR-oriented, the People’s Liberation Army Navy considers humanitarian assistance and disaster relief an area for future expansion. The US Army conducts an annual small-scale disaster management exchange with China. This confidence-building event, which began in 2005, features disaster management–focused discussions, a tabletop exchange, and, sometimes, a limited practical field exercise.

Table 1: INDOPACOM HA/DR missions, 1991–2019
(Table from Chris Zimmer, “Climate Security in Oceania: Perspectives on Chinese and American HADR in the Indo-Pac,” University of Texas at Austin, March 8, 2020, http://sites.utexas.edu/climatesecurity/2020/03/08/perspectives-on-chinese-and-american-hadr-in-the-indo-pacific-region/, using data from the Center for Excellence in Disaster Management and Humanitarian Assistance, a direct reporting unit to the US Indo-Pacific Command and principal agency to promote disaster preparedness and societal resiliency in the Asia-Pacific region.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
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<th>Reason</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>2006</td>
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<td>2007</td>
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<td>Myanmar</td>
<td>2007</td>
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<td>Typhoon</td>
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<th>Country</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Reason</th>
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<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
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<td>Thailand</td>
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<td>Philippines</td>
<td>2012</td>
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<td>2013</td>
<td>Typhoon</td>
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<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>2014</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Myanmar</td>
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<td>Sri Lanka</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
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<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>Tsunami</td>
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Table 2: Chinese HA/DR response missions 2002–19. Of the 16 missions China conducted, 13 were within the Indo-Pacific. The United States conducted 29 HA/DR missions in the same period. (Table from Zimmer, “Chinese and American HADR.”)

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<tr>
<th>Country</th>
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<td>Iran</td>
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<td>Thailand</td>
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<td>Japan</td>
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<td>2014</td>
<td>Water Shortages</td>
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<td>2014</td>
<td>Aircraft Disappearance</td>
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<td>Nepal</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>Earthquake</td>
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The US-China Disaster Management Exchange is evidence that engagement through HA/DR response is a low-risk means for nations to coordinate and communicate. It also illustrates the limited opportunity climate change may offer for cooperation between the United States and China.

China is an astute observer of American actions, and US goodwill diplomacy through humanitarian assistance and disaster relief will not go unnoticed. Given China’s growing capacity to conduct these missions and the Chinese Communist Party’s desire to be seen as a responsible power and an alternative to the United States, we should expect Chinese involvement and increasing presence in disaster-response missions.38

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38. Gassert and Burke, “UPTEMPO”; and Zimmer, “Chinese and American HADR.”
Humanitarian assistance and disaster relief is another area for competition and cooperation in the region. It is time we recognize it as such and prioritize it accordingly.

**Recommendations for the Indo-Pacific Command**

Indo-Pacific Command must be an efficient and trusted HA/DR provider and partner. It should focus on SCS claimants who are nonparticipants in bilateral and multilateral exercises and on strengthening regional coordination and response mechanisms, namely, the Association of Southeast Asia Nations. Remaining mindful of unwanted foreign intervention, the dilemmas posed by side-taking, and the primacy of improving host-nation response capabilities, Indo-Pacific Command should focus on increasing its efficiency as an HA/DR provider, encouraging international and interagency coordination and aligning security cooperation activities with regional climate change response and HA/DR initiatives.

As recommended in a larger study by RAND Corporation of the Department of Defense’s disaster relief efforts, there are several personnel-specific efforts the US military can make to improve the quality of HA/DR exercise outcomes. Ensuring HA/DR exercise leaders have experience in previous HA/DR missions is key to improving partnerships, developing trust, and increasing interoperability with partner nations. While Indo-Pacific Command already has a robust HA/DR network and resources, exercises are often conducted with assets that may be unfamiliar with the mission rotating into theater. The USAID Joint Humanitarian Operations Course presents an excellent opportunity for HA/DR training for senior military leaders. Additionally, it is important to keep track of HA/DR expertise. The Department of Defense should ensure that officers going to billets in which they are expected to conduct humanitarian assistance and disaster relief have the appropriate additional qualification description code and have current and relevant training for the job rather than ad hoc or on-the-job training. The US Naval War College’s Humanitarian Response Program offers multiple courses and events ranging from lectures and simulations for flag-level courses to workshops and tailored courses for US Navy Fleet headquarters and Carrier and Expeditionary Strike Group staffs to plan, execute, and assess
or act as liaison elements for HA/DR operations. These excellent programs are often overlooked in favor of more typical training for war.

Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief exercises in Indo-Pacific Command should encourage coordination with the United Nations and nongovernmental organizations, be interagency, and—most importantly—be based on demand signals from the host nation. Exercises should stand up coordination centers and practice reporting, tracking, and oversight on both military-military and civil-military channels. Exercises need not be expansive in scope. Some nations may be resource-constrained or reluctant to stage larger-scale exercises with the United States. Shorter two- to three-day events may have the added benefit of incorporating resource-constrained partners and stretched nongovernmental organizations.

Security cooperation improves disaster response.\(^\text{39}\) It is an excellent way to enhance interoperability and facilitate future HA/DR cooperation. Dialogue with Southeast Asian nations should include details of HA/DR assets, logistics networks, airlift options, and communications platforms. All nations have an interest in safeguarding the well-being of their citizens and strengthening crisis response capabilities. Security cooperation is an excellent means to build goodwill and is a precursor to trust and partnership.

**Conclusion**

Climate change offers the United States a unique opportunity to flex soft power in Southeast Asia. By incorporating climate change resilience and response into its operations with partner nations via HA/DR exercises, the United States can counter China’s grip, increase US validity in the region, and strengthen regional organizations. To counter China’s influence and grow US influence in the region, Indo-Pacific Command should actively plan for operations to respond to and combat climate change. Actions to engage in combating climate change are not just political offshoots secondary to primary objectives. These efforts support the primary objective of countering China, have broad support from Southeast Asian nations, and provide a nonthreatening way to develop partner capability. In addition, envisioning climate change within the framework of competing for influence in the region provides opportunities for engagement

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with nations reticent about closer military cooperation and leverages US-Chinese competition for the betterment of the world.

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ABSTRACT: In contemporary military operations, some problems are so complex they do not give way to linear solutions but require problem management instead. Combining the fundamentals of Dao De Jing philosophy with the US military design process offers a new perspective to analyze complex security problems, devise management strategies, and plan military operations. Applying this new approach to the complex security environment in Syria allows for a nonlinear mapping of long-term goals and a new perspective on relationships between key actors, environmental factors that restrict changes in the security environment, and where planners should focus their attention.

Keywords: design thinking, military planning, Dao, Syria, ISIS

The Dao De Jing philosophy provides a unique and useful worldview for analyzing complex security problems that do not have immediate or realistic solutions. Whereas Western thinking stresses linear progression with definitive conclusions, Daoism emphasizes the continuous, cyclical nature of being and a state of impermanence. On the surface, Daoism does not naturally fit with the linear, objective-based US Joint Force Planning Process, which seeks decisive end-states—the epitome of which is prescribed through a strategy framework of ends, ways, and means. Some security challenges are so complex, however, that they do not give way to linear, objective-based solutions but instead require problem management. In such cases, combining the fundamentals of Daoist philosophy with the US military design process can offer a new perspective for analyzing complex security problems, devising problem management strategies, and planning military operations.

Using Daoism and design thinking to analyze complex security environments contributes insights for planning that Daoism or design thinking alone cannot. Specifically, it provides five key insights: a nonlinear

mapping of long-term goals, more nuanced understandings of relationships between key actors, environmental factors that restrict changes in the security environment, what can be influenced and what cannot, and where planners should focus their attention.

Applying Daoism and design thinking to the complex security environment in Syria reveals constrictions on conditions for ending the civil war and stabilizing the country: Russian and Iranian external support sustaining the Assad regime, Iran’s campaign to undermine the United States and its allies in Iraq and throughout the Middle East, and the inability of the Syrian Democratic Committee and Syrian Democratic Forces (SDC/SDF) and Türkiye to reach a settlement. Rather than forcing solutions to these problems, planners should focus on what they can affect, including preventing the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and other extremist organizations from regrouping and staging attacks outside Syria. Within this immediate goal, planners should strengthen and support partners and alliances while fostering the conditions for future action when conditions are more favorable.

This article begins by presenting an approach that merges philosophical elements of the Dao De Jing with the US Army design process. It then uses this approach to “map the mess” in Syria and build a shared understanding of the problem by applying Daoism and design thinking to analyze the conflict in Syria. Ultimately, this article demonstrates how the alternative perspective provided by Dao thinking can help planners analyze and develop methods of managing complex, unsolvable, near-term problems.

**Daoism and Design**

The philosophy of the Dao De Jing offers an alternate perspective to the Western mindset, which generally sees life as linear, objective-based, and a realm of direct cause and effect. Daoism views life as a constant flow of events with some things in our control but most that are not. A simple summary of the Dao is that we should worry about things we can control and not worry about things we cannot. Put another way, when an obstacle gets in our path, we should not beat ourselves against it but instead flow around it. Ultimately, Daoism develops one’s mind and being to leverage and manage the unique events that comprise life experience.

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There are four fundamentals of the Dao: impermanence, emergence, subjectivity, and agency. Impermanence maintains that reality is a stream of interactive situations with no beginning or end. However, patterns of repetitious events occur within that flow. Emergence refers to the never-ending interactions of events resulting in new experiences and creating new context. Every unique phenomenon is continuous with every other phenomenon within one’s field of experience. Emergence limits the utility of linearity, cause and effect, and prediction. The Dao asserts fundamental subjectivity; in other words, “We see things not as they are but as we are.” There is no external or decontextualized view. We are the water flowing in the river, not the observer on the riverbank. The fourth fundamental, agency, describes how we fit into reality; our path is not predetermined, and our actions shape the future. We can influence our environment and manage some interactions. The Dao is clear, however, that to influence situations we must understand our immediate environment and the context. Ultimately, Daoism directs us to recognize our agency and limitations, to understand the context of our situation, and to influence circumstances and create opportunities when and where we can.

The structureless philosophical nature of Dao thinking makes its real-world application difficult. Merging Daoism with the more structured methodology of design thinking can produce a more practical approach. Design thinking helps us realize a vision, understand the factors in a given problem, and recognize how to achieve a desired outcome. Design thinking also helps us cope with the challenges of complexity and interdependence by employing holistic understanding, iteration, and problem solving to produce a strategy and a method of action.

The US Army defines design as “a methodology for applying critical and creative thinking to understand, visualize, and describe unfamiliar problems and approaches to solving them.” The Army’s design method has four dynamic framing processes. The first is framing the operational environment, including the present and the desired future. Second, planners frame the problem. Third, planners must also frame solutions, or develop the operational approach to contend with the problems preventing them
from achieving their desired future. Fourth, the method calls for assessing and reframing. The steps of design thinking are intended to be conducted in a continuous and iterative method. However, in reality, they are often done once and sequentially. Furthermore, the Joint and Army methods frequently produce linear operational approaches with lines of operation and effort, specific objectives, a definitive definition of victory, and an express military end-state, all of which are problematic for understanding complex security problems.

Dao thinking, when applied throughout the military design process, offers useful insights for addressing complex security problems with no clear solutions or end states. First, Daoism and the military design process both emphasize the importance of planners understanding the strategic environment by “mapping the mess,” as organizational theorist Jamshid Gharajedaghi describes it, to understand both present conditions and desired future conditions. The Dao suggests, however, that we must continuously seek an understanding of our environment because time is ceaseless and context constantly shifts. In the Dao, this is called form wu-hua, the concept of constant change, that we cannot pursue any permanent status.

The merging of Daoism and design thinking emphasizes how planners should balance the requirement to understand the present and desired future with the reality of our limited perspective on the environment. It is impossible to know everything; Dao form wu-zhi is no-knowledge of properties, particularly values and virtue. Yet, we can still create certain properties, even if we do not exactly understand what created them. Due to the nature of time, which has no beginning or end, timelines and timeframes should be lesser concerns. Planners must play the long game, have patience, and wait for the right conditions to manifest. The ideas and theories related to protracted war apply to this mindset. On the flipside of the time factor, our adversaries will try to waste our time, energy, and concern on things we cannot control. This is a strategy of erosion, often linked to asymmetric strategies and irregular warfare.

15. DA, Army Design Methodology, 1-3–1-5.
17. Gharajedaghi, Systems Thinking, 159–79.
18. Laozi, Dao De Jing, 42–43.
19. Laozi, Dao De Jing, 40–42.
In the Dao, because time has no beginning and no end, policy should not seek objective-based end-states in complex security problems. Similarly, military planners should avoid specific military end-state traps.\textsuperscript{22} Instead, they should seek to manifest success by setting conditions that foster the emergence of our desired future. It is not necessary to coerce your goal into being if you can manifest it by managing other interactions instead. Form \textit{wu-yu} is objectless desire, not to seek certain objectives but instead to flow through reality as it comes.\textsuperscript{23} Additionally, Daoism emphasizes that when thinking about the problem, planners should work to recognize what is in their control and what is not. Planners should be realistic about where, what, and when they can or cannot influence a situation.\textsuperscript{24} We have limited influence, and we need to spend it where it may improve our condition.

Finally, some problems are so great or complicated they are unsolvable, at least in their current time or state. These cases require problem management, not problem solving. This mindset should also play into framing the solution and developing the operational approach. Action must be balanced with Dao form \textit{wu-wei}, non-action. Sometimes non-action is the best approach.\textsuperscript{25} Within this observation, a strategic approach should manage multiple distinctive strategies into an integrated holistic strategy that works in concert with national power applied through statecraft.\textsuperscript{26} If concepts of control are an illusion, then agility and flexibility are required. Planners should pursue the creation of opportunities and be prepared to take advantage of opportunities when they arise.\textsuperscript{27}

Ultimately, planners cannot predict the future. They must be prepared to deal with events as they occur. Furthermore, strategy must account for unpredictability. As Sun Tzu notes, “The able commander does not resist the rhythm of change, but, finding its pulse, translates defining conditions into correlative terms as a means of controlling the situation.”\textsuperscript{28}

\section*{Mapping the Mess in Syria}

The civil war in Syria is a complex geopolitical conflict. It is a deeply intertwined problem of politics, culture, economics, information, geography, religion, and time. It includes proxy irregular warfare, civil war,
periods of conventional war of movement, and competition below the level of war between global nuclear powers. It involves state actors, non-state actors, and actors that lie somewhere in between, such as private military companies. The conflict fluctuates between dynamic, fluid periods and stagnant, morass ones.

Under the Biden-Harris administration, Brett H. McGurk, the US national security council coordinator for the Middle East and North Africa, has stated three broad US policy goals in Syria. First, the United States must pursue cease-fires and reduce violence. This objective implies a US commitment to the 2015 United Nations Security Council Resolution 2254, which encourages an inclusive and Syrian-led political process to reach a negotiated settlement and end the conflict. Second, the United States aims to address the humanitarian crisis in Syria. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees estimates there are approximately 6.7 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Syria, with an additional 6.6 million Syrian refugees worldwide. These roughly 13 million people have often been directly affected by violence and are food- and water-insecure. Addressing the crisis means finding ways to provide critical access to safe and secure shelter, food, water, and medicine. As the environment stabilizes, the international community must facilitate the return, reintegration, or resettlement of Syrian refugees. The third US goal is to “[maintain] pressure on the ISIS and al-Qaeda networks with a sustained US military commitment in eastern Syria.” This goal mutually contributes to the regional stability of Iraq, Jordan, and Israel. Within these three broad goals, the United States must also contend with US and Russian competition in Syria and with Iran. Preventing ISIS, al-Qaeda, and other violent extremists from regrouping and using Syria as a base of operations to plan and execute attacks is perhaps the most important and immediate goal and requires, at least in part, a military response.

Devising strategies for realizing these policy goals in Syria first requires “mapping the mess.” In Syria, all major actors share the principal goal

of *security control*, defined here as having power and influence over the security environment. Security control protects social communities, tribes, ethnic groups, political parties, and religious groups against violence, provides food and water security, drives economics, and is a fundamental consideration for all social development. In Syria, President Bashar al-Assad needs control for survival, Russia needs control for regional operations and global influence, the United States needs control to protect Iraq’s stability, ISIS needs control to build the caliphate, Iran needs it for its influence and access, and Türkiye needs control for domestic stability and protection against terrorism. This competition for security control creates interdependence between all the actors. Thus, their relationships with one another can be categorized as acting in either conflict, cooperation, or a mixture of the two.

Beyond displaying the high number of interrelated actors, mapping the mess identifies other factors in the security environment. First, it reveals a clear set of core actors seeking security control, in this case, the Assad regime, ISIS, and the Syrian Democratic Council and its Syrian Democratic Forces. The core group connects to strong second and third layers of actors, including Türkiye, Russia, the United States and Combined Joint Task Force Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF-OIR) coalition nations,

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35. DA, *Army Design Methodology*, 5-5.
Iran, Iraq, and other geographic neighbors. These second- and third-layer actors and their connections to the core ensure that the Syrian civil war cannot be separated from the context of greater geopolitics. Finally, the map depicts the isolation of ISIS, which has no overt geopolitical supporters beyond its relationship with other terrorist organizations, franchises, followers, individual donors, and social media platforms.

The three actors comprising the core of the Syrian conflict—ISIS, the Assad regime, and the Syrian Democratic Council/Syrian Democratic Forces—require further delineation to understand the security environment. For the Islamic State, Syria was intrinsically linked to the realization of its three broad goals as a transnational Islamist organization: the creation of an Islamic superstate defined by religion rather than race or nationality, perpetual offensive jihad and the replacement of al-Qaeda as the flagship for global jihad, and the foundation of a state ruled by perfect and complete sharia and Prophetic methodology, which requires both a physical caliphate and a caliph governing it. Furthermore, the Islamic State aimed to drive the United States out of the Middle East, followed by dividing Iraq, undermining Saudi Arabia and Egypt, and destroying Israel.\textsuperscript{36}

Defeat of the Islamic State has thrown ISIS’s narrative and organizational objectives into question, but ISIS remains capable of waging an insurgency, despite severe disruption of its leadership.\textsuperscript{37} The February 2022 battle to release ISIS prisoners held by the Syrian Democratic Council/Syrian Democratic Forces in Hasakah demonstrates that ISIS maintains the ability to manifest coordinated and sophisticated operations.\textsuperscript{38} Furthermore, ISIS continues to grow the next generation, namely, the so-called “Cubs of the Caliphate,” inside Syrian IDP camps.\textsuperscript{39} Finally, ISIS maintains global jihad as an organizational objective, and it seeks to recruit for, expand, franchise, and sell the ISIS brand. Thus, the facilitation and execution of external attack operations

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inside Western nations’ homelands remains an important goal that demonstrates the organization’s credibility and resiliency.\textsuperscript{40}

The Syrian regime in Damascus, led by Bashar al-Assad, has relatively straightforward reasons why security control is central to its interests. Assad’s objectives first include the survival of the regime. Second, the regime seeks to recapture Syria’s lost sovereign territory, including the contested northwest, the northeast held by the Syrian Democratic Council/Syrian Democratic Forces, and the northern border area occupied by Türkiye.\textsuperscript{41} Third, Assad wants to normalize international relations regionally and globally, including building economic ties with neighbors and gaining international legitimacy, which would create the conditions necessary for international sanctions to be lifted and for reconstruction to begin.\textsuperscript{42} Finally, Assad wants to nurture and maintain his internal patronage network and the external lifelines that have sustained his regime throughout the conflict. For his external supporters, primarily Russia and Iran, Assad provides economic and security privileges in return for their assistance, including government contracts for oil and military basing, access, and control for logistical and operational purposes.\textsuperscript{43}

The last core actor is the Syrian Democratic Council/Syrian Democratic Forces, a Kurdish-dominated confederation of multiethnic political parties; it is the political leadership of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria, and it maintains control and security with the Syrian Democratic Forces. The Syrian Democratic Council/Syrian Democratic Forces balances between and hedges against the agendas of the Assad regime, Russia, Türkiye, and the United States and maintains a complicated agenda, including preparedness to negotiate a resolution to the conflict.\textsuperscript{44} Its survival is contingent upon external support, including international recognition and legitimacy.\textsuperscript{45}

The Syrian Democratic Council/Syrian Democratic Forces has communicated five goals: peace and security; a constitutional democracy and ethnic plurality in government; a pluralistic society that empowers local autonomy; security from all foreign fighters, including Turkish military

\textsuperscript{40} ODNI, \textit{Annual Threat Assessment}, 23.
\textsuperscript{43} Khatib, “Hollow Victory.”
\textsuperscript{45} Stein and Burchfield, “Future of Northeast Syria.”
forces, and extremists; and the ability to receive humanitarian assistance from international aid organizations and for internally displaced persons and refugees to return safely.  

Türkiye, Iran, and Russia make up the next ring in the conflict. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has tethered Türkiye’s policy on Syria to Türkiye’s domestic policy. Türkiye’s actions in Syria are part of a broader conflict against Kurdish militants, with the goals of destroying the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) and reducing Türkiye’s internal instability from Kurdish ethnic separatists and terrorists. Along the northern Syrian border, Türkiye aims to maintain a 300-mile-long, 20-mile-deep buffer under Turkish military control, free from Kurdish forces, where Erdoğan seeks to deport roughly 3.6 million Syrian refugees. Türkiye’s Operation Peace Spring, which coincided with the US withdrawal from the Manbij, Kobani, and Raqqa areas in October 2019, began to secure this buffer zone. Türkiye is working with the Assad regime and Russia and has directed its Islamic Turkish-supported opposition groups against Kurdish forces in Syria.

The Turkish-Kurdish relationship is one of the most intractable issues in the Syrian conflict. Türkiye, a NATO ally, views the Syrian Democratic Forces as synonymous with the Kurdistan Workers’ Party, an internationally recognized terrorist organization. Türkiye claims the organization is an existential threat, and the government conducts daily operations in Türkiye, Iraq, and Syria in a war against Kurdish militants, including the Kurdistan Workers’ Party. Therefore, Türkiye is unlikely to negotiate with the Syrian Democratic Council/Syrian Democratic Forces.

Iran’s goals in Syria directly support its regime objectives of “anti-imperialism, Shiite sectarianism, and Iranian nationalism.” These objectives underlie its strategy to: establish regional hegemony under Shia leadership; expel the United States and Western influence from the region; and turn Israel into a Palestinian state. Iran’s strategy

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involves spreading its influence through proxies and cultivating armed groups, such as Iranian-aligned Shia militia groups in Iraq, Hezbollah in Lebanon, and Houthi rebels in Yemen. In Syria, Iran pursues the survival of Assad’s regime in Damascus and uses that partnership to maintain influence in and a regional connection with Hezbollah in Lebanon, its proxy force for conflicts with Israel and Saudi Arabia, and through Shia militias in Iraq. It also uses the partnership in Syria to pressure the United States, despite having ISIS and al-Qaeda as mutual enemies.\(^5\)

In 2015, Russia intervened in Syria and saved the Assad regime from collapse, its first post–Cold War military expedition outside former Soviet territory.\(^5\) Russia has three broad goals in Syria. First, it wants to demonstrate its influence and gain global recognition as a great power capable of competing with the United States. Second, the Russian military presence in Syria intends to establish a permanent foothold in the eastern Mediterranean Sea, including seaports and airfields, to put pressure on NATO’s southern flank and support Russia’s Black Sea, Crimean, Ukrainian and Libyan operations.\(^5\) Third, Russia wants to use Syria to improve its expeditionary operations and create a “battle lab” where the Russian military can train personnel and leaders, gain experience, and test equipment, systems, and doctrine. Russia will most likely continue to pursue these goals in Syria moving forward.

**Applying Daoism and Design to Syria**

With this shared context from mapping the mess, strategist can apply principles of Daoism and design thinking to the Syrian problem. Long-term, it is logical to assume the United States would like the Syrian civil war to end, for a constitutional democracy to govern Syria, and for its government to be aligned with the United States and its partners and eschew US adversaries, particularly Russia and Iran. These conditions would support the United States’ broader regional strategy by reducing instability exported from Syria.

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Based on mapping the mess, at least three interdependent problems hinder movement toward this long-term goal. First, the Assad regime will likely continue to survive on external support from Russia, given Russia’s interests. Second, Iranian support for Assad in Syria, combined with Iran’s campaign to undermine the United States and its allies in Iraq and throughout the Middle East, constricts US action. Finally, the United States has been unable to help the Syrian Democratic Council/Syrian Democratic Forces establish a dominant position that would force a negotiated settlement with Türkiye because Türkiye is a NATO ally with steadfastly anti-SDC/SDF interests.

According to the Dao, planners should recognize what they can control or influence and what they cannot. The United States cannot solve the Turkish-Kurdish dilemma. Thus, it should not waste energy or time trying to solve this problem but should rather try to influence it through its alliance with Türkiye and its partnership with the Kurds in Syria and Iraq. Overall, these challenges require a mindset of problem management rather than problem solving.

The United States also cannot solve its adversarial relationship with Russia in Syria, nor can it coerce Russia out of Syria. Again, Daoist principles require a mindset of problem management rather than problem solving with respect to Russia’s presence in Syria and could include an approach that focuses on containment and coercion rather than the expectation of Russia’s complete withdrawal. Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in 2022 may provide emergent opportunities for change in Syria, including changes to Russia’s military footprint in Syria and a possible reduction in commitment to the Assad regime. For now, the US military could use Russia’s presence in Syria as an opportunity to collect intelligence, observe Russian military forces in operation, learn from Russia’s actions, and when the timing is right, use this information to put pressure on Russia’s presence in Syria and possibly elsewhere. Overall, the United States could use a balanced strategy of action and non-action (wu-wei), practice patience, and should remember Russia is only one actor in a complex environment.

Finally, the United States will not solve the problem of Iran’s presence and influence in Syria. There is room, however, to influence and manage the problem as part of a broader regional strategy, including countering Iranian influence in the US-occupied Eastern Syria Security Area through its SDC/SDF security partnership.

A realistic vision for a near-future Syria is a state that has limited ability to export instability to neighboring countries. In developing this vision, planners should keep the framing aspects of the Dao in mind. First is the concept of constant change (wu-hua), that nothing is permanent. The United States should recognize “. . . success [is] not a one-time proposition; it has to be reproduced continuously.”\(^{55}\) Whatever policies the US government enacts in Syria will have to be managed and resourced continuously. Next, planners should keep in mind the concept of no-knowledge (wu-zhi), our ability to manifest success despite limited understanding.\(^{56}\) This idea balances understanding and risk management with the reality that control is an illusion.\(^{57}\) Crisis points and challenges in Syria will continue to manifest despite the United States’ best efforts. To deal with these challenges requires a mindset of flexibility and agility. Planners should seek to create opportunities and take advantage of them as they arise.

The nature of time as an endless, continuous stream of interactive moments intertwines with these two concepts. Planners should consciously avoid time-sensitive, military end-state traps and view the lack of a foreseeable or time-sensitive end state in Syria as an opportunity because there is less pressure to force an unrealistic solution. American planners should play the long game; through a mindset of patience, planners will create an opportunity that makes time available to develop a strategy that fosters success based on emergence, or the favorable changes in circumstances. The stable stalemate recognized by the US government will provide the time necessary for the development of a long-term problem-management strategy. By avoiding a linear, objective military end-state, planners will be free to accept the realities of where the US government can balance action with non-action (wu-wei).

In Daoism, problems and context are inseparable. The US problem in Syria is interdependent with the problems associated with the greater Middle East, Europe, and global geopolitics. Due to this interdependence, the US government can foster emergence in Syria by managing the interaction among the elements of an integrated strategy in the Middle East. Specifically, McGurk advocates for getting back to the basics of partnerships, alliances, patience, and aligning ends and means. This approach includes managing hard and soft US power, presence, and resources across time and throughout the Middle East to reinforce mutual goals. McGurk stresses

\(^{55}\) Gharajedaghi, *Systems Thinking*, 46.
\(^{56}\) Laozi, *Dao De Jing*, 40–42.
\(^{57}\) Gharajedaghi, *Systems Thinking*, 34–35.
that the US government should operate within the ideals of humility, introspection, commitment, and understanding while avoiding grandiose maximalist aims.\textsuperscript{58} Critically, the US government must use its strategic position to manifest success in strengthening relationships with partners and allies around the region. Given that regional allies are best situated to understand what to do, the United States should endeavor to enable them to lead the removal of restrictions, provision of resources, and facilitation of allied and partner operations that seek mutual goals when addressing the Syria problem.

The US government should also continue to maintain significant support to the Syrian Democratic Council/Syrian Democratic Forces to ensure the enduring defeat of ISIS through Combined Joint Task Force – Operation Inherent Resolve. Enabling the Syrian Democratic Council/Syrian Democratic Forces, however, would require balancing support to Türkiye. The United States could assist both actors where and when it is possible and otherwise “flow” around the problem.

For Iran, the US government could support counter-Iranian operations led by allies and partners to isolate its activities from Syria. Any US strategy to counter Iran in Syria should be developed within the context of a broader Middle East strategy. Possible options in Syria include greater integration with a regional irregular warfare campaign below the threshold of war to degrade Iranian capacity and capability. The United States should weigh these options, however, against the risks of escalation, increased instability, and human suffering.

Finally, within the complex security environment in Syria and the Middle East, the United States must consider how other strategic competitors are exploiting the war. In January 2022, China and Syria signed a memorandum of understanding that included increased trade between the two countries and China’s promise for humanitarian assistance, effectively bringing Syria into China’s Belt and Road Initiative.\textsuperscript{59} China’s increased presence and influence in Syria may present another layer of complexity not only to the Syrian civil war, but also to how China’s increased involvement affects the region and to what actions the United States should take. As with all developments, planners should keep in mind the framing concept of constant change (\textit{wu-hua}).

\textsuperscript{58} McGurk, “United States Remarks.”
Conclusion

Merging the philosophical elements of the Dao with design thinking offers an alternative perspective for considering options in a complex security environment that does not give way to linear, objective-based solutions. Specifically, this approach provides five key insights for planners. First, it permits nonlinear mapping of long-term goals, which allows for a greater visualization and inclusion of complexity and a better understanding of the factors inhibiting solutions. Second, it facilitates more nuanced comprehension of relationships between key actors, which, in turn, reveals how actors may be restricting pathways to solutions. Third, it better reveals environmental factors that restrict changes in the security environment and recognizes which ones can be changed and which cannot and their relationships to one another. Fourth, Daoism and design thinking more clearly delineates what can be influenced and what cannot, by providing a different mindset toward relationships and environmental factors. Finally, it helps direct planners’ attention by better identifying what can be changed and what cannot.

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The Case for an Army Stability Professional

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ABSTRACT: The US Army is unprepared to occupy and stabilize territory because it does not adequately educate active-duty officers to do so. One way to professionalize the Army’s ability to carry out military government and stability operations is to develop active-duty functional area officers who can advise commanders and integrate staff planning for these operations. This article analyzes case studies, doctrine, and commentary to envision specialized staff officers with foreign language proficiency, cultural skills, advanced academic abilities, and a strong professional ethic. These officers would enhance the Army’s competence in stabilizing territory to achieve American policy objectives.

Keywords: stability, civil affairs, military government, professional studies, foreign language

Governing people and territory during and after large-scale combat is as important to the Army’s mission as defeating enemies on the battlefield. At times, a commander may be directed to impose military government, exercising “executive, legislative, and judicial authority over a foreign territory,” as was the case in Germany and Japan after World War II.¹ In other cases, the Army may be the only organization in a conflict zone able to provide security and stability by performing government functions, as in Sicily, Italy, and France during major campaigns of World War II.

The Army has attempted to advance American policy goals through military government and stability operations throughout its history. Its doctrine, organization, training, leadership, education, and personnel structure, however, have seldom been adequate for the task. As one example, during their first occupation of Germany during and after World War I, Americans faced the threat of renewed hostilities with a major land power, risks of insurgency, a pandemic, and social unrest inflamed by food scarcity, economic volatility, and Russian political influence.² A report of this experience observed that it “is extremely unfortunate” officers

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are not trained to administer civilians before they are required to do so in wartime, calling it a “lesson [that] has seemingly not been learned.”

The Army should establish an active-duty officer career field that can provide stability expertise to conventional forces at the brigade, division, and corps levels, as well as at higher echelons. These officers would use critical foreign language skills, advanced academic knowledge, and unique military experience to enable the Army to win wars and sustain peace.

Background

Many of the Army's occupations and stability operations have been characterized by poor planning, insufficient training, and unfounded expectations of spontaneous success. The Army's first attempt, the occupation of Montreal in 1775, was an “unmitigated disaster” due largely to the ineptitude, cultural ignorance, and religious bigotry of American officers and the unruliness of American soldiers. During the Mexican-American War, General Winfield Scott (who had practiced law in civilian life) set a precedent of restoring civil order after combat through the respectful treatment of civilians and military-adjudicated punishment for crimes committed by local civilians and occupying soldiers. In 1863, President Abraham Lincoln issued “General Orders No. 100: Instructions for the Government of the Armies of the United States in the Field” (known as the Lieber Code after its main author, Francis Lieber) to guide the conduct of Union soldiers toward combatants and noncombatants during the American Civil War.

The occupation of the Southern states during Reconstruction was unique, as “never before or since have large numbers of Americans been forced to endure the stigma of defeat and submit to military occupation and government.” In all these cases, “no special training or indoctrination was considered necessary” for civil administration. The Army benefited from officers with civilian skills acquired prior to their service but made no coordinated effort to develop, organize, or apply these skills to military problems.

3. Hunt, American Military Government, 64.
7. Sandler, Glad to See Them Come, 67.
The Army was also America’s first and most robust nation-building institution. Charged with expanding the government’s influence westward for most of the nineteenth century, the Army implemented the nation’s policy of the destruction, removal, and forced assimilation of people deemed incompatible with the so-called American way of life. It explored territory and established frontier posts to defend commercial enterprises and settlements. Army officials interfaced with, and at times governed, Indian communities. The Army built infrastructure and managed natural resources—roles the US Army Corps of Engineers retains to this day. Indeed, the Army “made a major contribution to continental consolidation,” paving the way West for the “white Americans [who] in greater numbers and with greater energy than before resumed the quest for land, gold, commerce, and adventure” after the Civil War.\footnote{CMH, “Winning the West: The Army in the Indian Wars, 1865–1890,” in American Military History, American Historical Series (Washington, DC: CMH, 1989), 300, https://history.army.mil/books/AMH/AMH-14.htm.}

As the West was won, the War Department’s Indian government functions were transferred to other government agencies.\footnote{US Department of the Interior, “Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA),” Indian Affairs (website), n.d., accessed September 3, 2022, https://www.bia.gov/bia.} This restructuring eliminated much of the Army’s institutional memory of the stability-like operations it had conducted domestically for nearly 100 years.

The United States began to fill a new global role in the early twentieth century, requiring the Army to administer people and territory of increasing physical and cultural distance from home, such as the Philippines and various Caribbean nations. Eventually, World War I led to an unprecedented deployment of American land forces across an ocean to help allies defeat a common enemy in large-scale combat. American soldiers then carried out an equally unprecedented military government in Germany.\footnote{Hunt, American Military Government, v.} This occupation was the “true beginning” of what is now called Civil Affairs.\footnote{Headquarters, Department of the Army (HQDA), Civil Affairs Operations, Field Manual (FM) 3-57 (Washington, DC: HQDA 2021), A-1.}

Army units in Europe were reorganized to occupy a portion of Germany, leading Army officers to perform a range of government functions in lieu of, or in addition to, their routine military duties.\footnote{Hunt, American Military Government, 63–87.} They had no training or education in civilian administration and little information about Germany’s government. As a result, Colonel Irvin L. Hunt, the Officer in Charge of Civil Affairs during the occupation, observed that the Army “lacked both training
and organization to guide the destinies of the nearly 1,000,000 civilians” for which it was suddenly responsible.  

Guided by the report that came to bear his name, Hunt and like-minded officers refined doctrine, organization, and training for Civil Affairs and Military Government in the interwar years, leading to a fairly successful program in World War II. Recruits with applicable civilian skills were selected for language and government training at universities or specialized training centers before being organized into units to support operations in the European and Pacific Theaters. In liberated allied countries, the transition to civilian authority was facilitated by local factions sympathetic to the Allies. In enemy countries, military government required a stricter arrangement. Here, the Army recognized its “duty . . . to give the vanquished people a new government adequate to the protection of their personal and property rights . . . [and] to establish a strong and just government such as will preserve order and . . . pacify the inhabitants.” Likewise, Marine Corps doctrine at the time viewed the “arrival . . . [of] the armed forces of the United States” in a foreign country as an assumption of responsibility for the “life and property of all the inhabitants.” Principles such as these guided the postwar military governments of Germany, Japan, and other enemy territories. Subsequent American wars might have turned out differently had the military been as clear-eyed about its stability and government duties as it apparently was in World War II.

The Civil Affairs and Military Government program was saved from elimination after the Korean War by the lobbying of influential former Civil Affairs and Military Government officers. As a compromise, the program was placed in the Army Reserves in 1955, where most of its capabilities still reside. In the Vietnam War, Civil Affairs forces bolstered the legitimacy of South Vietnam through medical, agricultural, and economic development activities, marking the program’s first use in a protracted stability-intensive conflict. Civil Affairs training was relocated to Fort Bragg, North Carolina, and aligned with special operations during this period, even as most active-duty Civil Affairs units were

15. HQDA, Civil Affairs Operations, A-1.
17. Coles and Weinberg, Soldiers Become Governors, 147.
dissolved as the war drew to a close. Civil Affairs remained primarily a reserve capability for the next three decades.

An active-duty Civil Affairs branch was established in 2006 in response to the demands of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Active-duty and reserve Civil Affairs forces were employed in various ways to attempt to legitimize the governments of Afghanistan and Iraq. The creation of an active-duty branch parallel to an existing reserve structure established overly complicated command relationships, which led to a “divorce” between active-duty and reserve Civil Affairs that caused major manning, funding, training, and organizational culture issues. Force reductions after the end of major combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan left few active-duty Civil Affairs officers supporting conventional forces. Unfortunately, this problem cannot be solved simply by increasing the number of active-duty Civil Affairs officers. Their training and career development do not impart the language skills, academic knowledge, or military education needed to support conventional force staffs during stability and military government operations.

The Stability Professional

Professionalizing the Army’s ability to perform military government and stability operations requires active-duty functional area officers, or stability professionals, who can advise commanders and integrate staff planning. They would be educated broadly in the Army’s six stability operations tasks: (1) civil security, (2) security cooperation, (3) civil control, (4) essential services, (5) governance support, and (6) economic stabilization and infrastructure, while possessing academic depth in at least one of these areas. Their military experience would enable them to manage a staff and advise commanders while applying their knowledge to stability problems. The stability professional concept unifies ideas currently

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fragmented across commands, components, and doctrine by placing unique expertise with the units and commands conducting stability operations.

The term *stability professional* serves several functions in this article. First, using *stability professional* instead of *Civil Affairs* or *Military Government* mitigates confusion with existing career fields and the vague concepts associated with these terms. Second, while *stability operations* and *military government* are not doctrinally the same, an officer prepared to conduct stability operations would be reasonably prepared for military government. Finally, the stability professional would be a new asset. The Army has never invested adequately in officers who could direct successful stability operations—certainly not before a conflict required it.

Stability officers need professional knowledge, but the Army’s definition of professional expertise is too broad to evaluate the skill requirements of officer career fields. The Army views itself as a “profession of arms . . . composed of experts certified in the ethical application of land combat power,” implying that all soldiers are professionals, regardless of their skill or experience. In a stricter sense, professionals devote their lives to something difficult for the good of others by answering a call “requiring specialized knowledge and often long and intensive academic preparation” (emphasis added).

Army doctrine says officers leading stability operations “require a unique combination of knowledge and understanding, the ability to achieve unity of effort, and cultural awareness.” This description implies there are three domains of a stability professional’s knowledge: regional and foreign language proficiency, knowledge of disciplines relevant to stability operations, and military competence. To develop these competencies, a stability functional area officer’s initial training should include a year of intensive study in a foreign language, graduate study in a relevant field, and grade-appropriate professional military education.

**Regional and Foreign Language Proficiency**

Stability professionals need significant regional knowledge and the ability to communicate across cultural and language barriers to earn trust, discuss complex problems, and negotiate. They should be regional experts with an understanding of foreign areas derived from “a combination

of education, military experience, area studies courses, in-country assignments, travel, mentoring, and specialized professional experience,” as well as foreign language abilities and cultural capabilities.\textsuperscript{29} On the Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) scale used by the Department of Defense for foreign language assessment, this language competence level is “General Professional Proficiency,” or ILR 3.\textsuperscript{30}

To achieve general professional proficiency, personnel trained at the Defense Language Institute should continue to apply their foreign language abilities in graduate school programs. This continued education is especially important for stability officers because language ratings directly correspond to capability in the field. For example, at the lower end of the proficiency spectrum, the language standard for Army Special Operations Forces is “elementary plus” (ILR 1+).\textsuperscript{31} Interagency Language Roundtable 1+ speakers struggle to form coherent sentences, and a native speaker listening to someone at this level must “strain . . . to understand even some simple speech.” By contrast, ILR 3 speakers “participate effectively” in complex conversations while making “errors [that] virtually never interfere with [a native speaker’s] understanding.”\textsuperscript{32} Interagency Language Roundtable 3 foreign language proficiency is clearly much more valuable to a stability officer’s mission than lower proficiency ratings.

Achieving general professional language proficiency requires significant time and effort. Most students of Spanish should attain ILR 3 proficiency in 24 weeks. Officers learning Chinese or Arabic would need 88 weeks—almost four times as much instruction—to achieve the same proficiency.\textsuperscript{33} Language assignments and allocations should be determined by a periodic analysis of the Department of Defense’s strategic priorities; stability professionals should learn languages relevant to the places the Army is most likely to perform stability operations. Arabic, Chinese, French, Korean, Russian, and Spanish are enduring priority languages. Future requirements, however, may call for proficiency in other languages. Enough officers should be trained to fill staff positions at the brigade, division, corps, theater, and combatant command levels while aligning language and regional skills to operational requirements and

\textsuperscript{29} DoD, \textit{Management of the Defense Language, Regional Regional Expertise, and Culture (LREC) Program}, DoD Instruction (DoDI) 5160.70 (Washington, DC, 2016), 28.
\textsuperscript{31} HQDA, \textit{Army Foreign Language Program}, Army Regulation (AR) 11-6 (Washington, DC: HQDA, 2022), 25.
\textsuperscript{32} ILR, “Skill Level Descriptions – Speaking.”
force-generating activities. As with other language professionals, officers would maintain their language proficiency with support from their command language program in accordance with Army Regulation 11-6.

**Academic Preparation**

Officers providing expert advice to commanders on stability and military government need specialized knowledge that cannot be acquired from Army institutions. To develop an understanding of the development, implementation, and management of government functions and policy in foreign countries, officers should attend rigorous, full-time civilian graduate school programs aligned with one of the six stability operations tasks. These officers belong in a specialized career field (functional area) that would facilitate professional growth and increase their impact on the Army's prosecution of land warfare. After successful tours in a basic branch, functional area officers are prepared for specialized duties with “unique education, training, and experience” usually attained through civilian graduate school, advanced military training, and specialized assignments. They become proven leaders who can apply advanced academic knowledge in a military context, often informing the decisions of their generalist counterparts who typically have greater command authority. Although Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations functional areas have existed in the past, the approach proposed here differs significantly in training, scale, and employment.

Stability officers should attend civilian graduate school for three reasons. First, graduate school provides an intellectual and institutional foundation. Exposure to different ways of thinking has inherent value for future Army leaders who must understand the “civil component of the operational environment.” Graduate students apply many methods, tools, and disciplines to develop research, analytical, and problem-solving abilities. Universities also provide unique opportunities to refine foreign language skills. Select officers could pursue a doctorate later in their careers to further enhance the depth and breadth of stability knowledge available to the Army.

A second benefit is the ability to engage with public- and private-sector leaders and policymakers, world-class faculty, and peers in similar fields. These important connections will broaden officers’

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34. HQDA, Officer Professional Development, 11.
36. HQDA, Civil Affairs Operations, 1-1.
perspectives, build important relationships, and help the Army achieve unified action among nonmilitary partners.\textsuperscript{37}

Finally, the Army will find it difficult and costly to attract and retain the faculty required to administer its own military government and stability operations education program. The unique opportunities for learning and growth the right civilian institutions could provide will also be lost. In World War II, the Army partnered with civilian schools to develop and administer education programs for officers who would assume government functions in occupied and liberated territories.\textsuperscript{38} These programs began prior to the liberation of Europe and the Pacific, building a competent Civil Affairs and Military Government capability before it was needed in these theaters.

Two models for a partnership between the Army and civilian universities are possible. First, Advanced Civil Schooling could be used to send stability officers to graduate schools, creating a diverse stability corps but limiting the Army’s ability to oversee academic development. Second, the Army could adopt a center of excellence model to provide regionally focused academic experiences by establishing long-term partnerships with schools of government at leading institutions. This approach would provide a common experience and allow Army stakeholders (such as the Peacekeeping and Stability Operations Institute) to interface with civilian schools to curate and refine academic preparation. Unfortunately, recent proposals to close the Peacekeeping and Stability Operations Institute demonstrate the low priority the Department of Defense has given stability operations.\textsuperscript{39}

**Professional Military Education**

It is vital stability officers receive professional military education, given how important governing people and territory is to the success of combat operations on land. Periodic, grade-specific professional military education would prepare these officers to integrate their civilian professional knowledge into military operations. Newly selected stability officers should complete a short functional area indoctrination course to learn the history and doctrine of military government and stability operations and the fundamentals of interagency cooperation.


\textsuperscript{38} Sandler, *Glad to See Them Come*, 170.

This instruction should be driven by rigorous analysis of case studies that develop the ability to think clearly, speak confidently, and write effectively. Most importantly, this training should reinforce the ethic of a “professional force [that] understands how [its] tasks collectively serve a greater social good.”

Prominent American military leaders in World War II exemplified the ethic required for successful occupation and stability operations. General Lucius D. Clay, military governor of postwar Germany, was so moved by the suffering he witnessed that he resolved “never to forget that we were responsible for the government of human beings.” Similarly, Brigadier General Crawford F. Sams believed his purpose in his roles supervising public health in Japan and Korea was to show people that “literally, their lives are worth saving.” These officers acted on a belief in the military’s ultimate responsibility to restore peace and dignity. While all officers should be trained to emulate this compassionate diligence, none would be better positioned to guide the Army to act on it than the stability professional.

Following the indoctrination course and to benefit the Army and Joint Force, stability officers should complete various common-core intermediate-level education or equivalent courses in any Army-approved program or resident, satellite, and sister-service intermediate-level programs. As officers advance, they should attend senior service colleges to further refine their ability to contribute to operational- and strategic-level planning.

**Stability Professionals Employed**

Stability professionals should be assigned to billets that position them to participate in and contribute meaningfully and consistently to their supported commands’ training and operations. The G-9 staff officer advises the commander on the use of “Army forces to establish or reestablish civil government” and also “evaluates civil considerations,” “prepares the groundwork for transitioning the area of operations from military to civilian control,” and “[enhances] the relationship between Army forces and the civil authorities and people in the area of operations.” Duties of the G-9 include assessing and analyzing complex civil problems, leading and influencing staff sections, and coordinating between military and civilian organizations.

and activities. A stability professional should serve a key developmental assignment as an assistant chief of staff for a brigade or group (as a major/O-4/S-9), for a division (as a lieutenant colonel/O-5/G-9), and for a corps (as a colonel/O-6/G-9). Additional assignments could facilitate career paths for general officers who could advise at the highest levels of military commands and policy.

Broadening assignments should enable officers to use their unique experiences and education to make significant contributions to military operations and national security policy, including serving at theater and combatant commands, the Joint Staff, the Office of the Secretary of Defense, and professional military education centers (such as the Peacekeeping and Stability Operations Institute). Stability officers should also exchange knowledge through interagency programs. For example, in the Department of State, opportunities could include liaison positions in the Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations, the Bureau of Political-Military Affairs, and the the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration. In the US Agency for International Development (USAID) opportunities exist within the Bureau of Conflict Prevention and Stabilization in the Office of Civil-Military Cooperation or the Office of Transition Initiatives. Stability officers could also advance the missions of NATO’s Civil-Military Cooperation Centre of Excellence and the Department of Defense Regional Centers for Security Studies.

**Considering Alternatives**

Two arguments might be made against the proposed stability professional. The first is a belief that the expertise to conduct stability operations already exists within the government and is available to support military operations. The second is that stability missions are not the Army’s real job.

**The Capability Already Exists**

Many in the military believe civilians from other agencies are responsible for the success of stability missions. The Department of State and USAID are thought to be America’s nation builders. While these executive agencies have critical leadership roles in stabilization, they are primarily responsible for policy and working through partners to achieve long-term goals. In *War and the Art of Governance*, Nadia Schadlow calls out the “myth” that

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the US government has “significant nonmilitary, deployable capabilities in sufficient scale” for stability operations. Agencies have attempted to expand civilian capabilities for post-conflict stabilization, but Lieutenant Colonel David A. Mueller observes that such capacity “does not exist in a deployable form in the United States and never has.” Even if the United States could assemble vast numbers of expeditionary civilian experts, Schadlow notes that their presence during and immediately after military action would likely impede a coherent stability strategy by creating redundant control, funding, and reporting structures.

If other government agencies are not suited for stability operations, then some might say Army Civil Affairs forces are adequate. Doctrine calls them “DOD’s primary force to engage and influence [civilians], conduct military government operations, and provide civil considerations expertise.” Unfortunately, this mostly reserve force has limited resources and training time and faces significant obstacles to mobilizing and integrating with active-duty forces and applying its expertise in concert with other stability efforts.

The Army has a brief chance to seize and maintain the stability initiative—every day that passes without effective governance allows near-peer adversaries, insurgents, and criminals to manipulate human suffering to their benefit. This fleeting time has been called “the golden hour” of stability. A RAND Corporation report notes the Army’s action (or inaction) early in an operation puts “[stability] on a trajectory that, if trending downward, becomes increasingly difficult to correct.” Units deploying without stability officers will lose precious opportunities to consolidate gains. The stability situation might be beyond professional help by the time Civil Affairs reservists arrive.

To address this gap, brigade and higher-level units need active-duty officers with an expert understanding of stability on their primary staffs. No expertise can impact the outcome of an operation if it is unavailable for that operation. By keeping most of its officers with stability skills

47. Schadlow, Art of Governance, 274–76.
49. HQDA, Civil Affairs Operations, B-1–B-6.
51. Dobbins et al., Seizing the Golden Hour, xix.
in the reserves, the Army entrenches itself against its military responsibility to set conditions for stability from the moment an operation begins. This arrangement guarantees strategic and operational plans will fail to assess the requirements of stability operations accurately because few military planners understand them.\textsuperscript{52} Likewise, units should be trained to use their own planning processes and capabilities for stability operations during and after large-scale combat. Unfortunately, this concept is undertaught at all levels of professional military education and underemphasized in the force.\textsuperscript{53}

Another significant gap in reserve Civil Affairs capabilities is a lack of training. In addition to having some of the most ambiguous and complex responsibilities in the Army, Civil Affairs reservists must maintain the ability to operate in tactical environments, which limits the amount of drill time available for applying their civilian knowledge in military settings.

It could be said Civil Affairs reservists train every day in their civilian jobs, but applying civilian professions to military operations can be difficult. Professional knowledge is highly contextual. Doctors and lawyers may spend entire careers in a single practice area—shaping, and often narrowing, the limits of their competence. It would be unethical for a cardiologist to perform brain surgery or for a title attorney to frame a nation's constitution. In many professions, location matters as much as specialty. A civil engineer in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, works in a different sociopolitical, economic, and geographic context than a civil engineer in Saint Paul, Minnesota. Both engineers practice the same profession on the same river in the same country, but if they switched places, it would take time and effort for them to adjust to their new environments. How much more adaptation would it take for the mayor of a suburban American town to advise a tribal leader in the Hindu Kush effectively? Civil Affairs reservists cannot put their civilian professions in a duffel bag to unpack in a foreign country and achieve lasting results, yet that is what the Army expects them to do.

At first glance, a relatively new reserve Military Government program seems to address the lack of Army officers with stability skills by recruiting people with highly specialized civilian education and experience.\textsuperscript{54} While the Military Government program’s technocratic approach may retain a small number of experts for the Army’s use at high levels (for example, in theaters and combatant commands), these officers will be stretched too thin to help staffs in brigades, divisions, and corps apply their

\textsuperscript{52} Mueller, “Civil Order and Governance,” 44.
\textsuperscript{53} Hicks, Wormuth, and Ridge, \textit{U.S. Civil Affairs Forces}, 40.
military capabilities to stability problems in local situations. They will not be available in a contingency because of the time it takes to mobilize reservists, nor will the Army be able to replace quickly experts lost to tour-of-duty rotations and casualties. This new program may also run into an old problem; people are generally not eager to subject their civilian lives and credentials to the needs of the Army. Even volunteers may become uninterested in occupation duty after the war is over, as was the case with some military medical professionals in the postwar Pacific.\textsuperscript{55}

\textbf{Not “Real” War}

The Army has participated in hundreds of government and stability operations.\textsuperscript{56} Indeed, official DoD policy states, “Stability operations are a core U.S. military mission that the Department of Defense shall be prepared to conduct with proficiency equivalent to combat operations.”\textsuperscript{57} Yet, the “Army’s institutional biases . . . [have] instilled the conviction in most officers that . . . ‘real’ war is a conventional undertaking” involving only large-scale state on state combat. Consequently, the Army has a “general disinclination to study and prepare for . . . stability operations.”\textsuperscript{58}

Stability operations are not distractions from large-scale combat; they are inseparable from it. World War II offers many examples of how stability enabled the Army’s continued operations during the most extensive and intense combat it had ever experienced, prompting a senior officer to emphasize the military necessity of stability.

The Army is not a welfare organization. It is a military machine whose mission is to defeat the enemy on the field of battle. Its interest and activities in military government and civil affairs administration are incidental to the accomplishment of the military mission. Nevertheless, these activities are of paramount importance, as any lack of a condition of social stability in an occupied area would be prejudicial to the success of the military effort.\textsuperscript{59}

55. Sams, Medic, 35.
Schadlow observes every “significant [US] military intervention” has required the Army to “shape the political outcome of a war.” She uses the term *American denial syndrome* to describe how the US government has “consistently avoided institutionalizing and preparing for the military and political activities that are associated with the restoration of order during and following combat operations” (emphasis added). The Army typically refocuses on “real” war after a stability-intensive conflict has not gone well, abandoning lessons learned from places like Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan. In this view, though the Army has fought so-called nation-building wars in the past, it will not fight them in the future because that is “not what the Army does.” This attitude ignores the fact that the purpose of war is to create political change by force, making all wars nation-building wars.

Some argue failures in Iraq and Afghanistan were the result of high-level policy decisions that created unsolvable problems for the Department of Defense. While policy undoubtedly affected the outcome of these wars, others have noted the Department underperformed in tasks below the national policy level, to say nothing of the Department’s role in shaping those policies. Policy decisions, good or bad, do not relieve the Army of its responsibility to get results within the areas of its professional competence—offense, defense, and stability operations on land.

As the Hunt report observes, “The history of the United States offers an uninterrupted series of wars, which demanded as their aftermath, the exercise by its officers of civil governmental functions.” The truth in these words, written shortly after World War I, can be seen in the wars of the next 100 years (World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the Gulf War, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and dozens of other operations) that needed an Army capable of stabilizing foreign territory. Unfortunately, its officers were seldom trained sufficiently for the job.

**Conclusion**

The Army must establish a stable political arrangement during and after large-scale combat to accomplish its missions, but almost no active-duty officers focus on this aspect of war. The few that do are not educated properly for this complex task and are rarely assigned to billets where they could significantly impact the outcome of major

Army operations. The Army needs active-duty stability professionals to support conventional forces across the spectrum of operations. These professionals should be functional area officers whose career field is entirely new or the result of a dramatic restructuring of current Civil Affairs officer development and employment. The creation of a stability and military government functional area is a realistic way to improve the Army’s competence in its missions. By investing in people first, the Army prepares select officers to use existing doctrine and institutions to improve its ability to carry out its ultimate purpose of securing land and establishing a political order that furthers American interests.

Stability professionals should be proven leaders with general professional proficiency (ILR 3) in a foreign language, a graduate-level education aligned with US government stability sectors and Army stability operations tasks, and appropriate professional military education. These officers would advise commanders and integrate civil considerations into staff planning. At the tactical and operational levels, they would promote local stability to enable the Army’s continued operations. At the strategic level, they could participate in theater, combatant command, and national planning, shaping appropriate interventions with a nuanced regional understanding grounded in military experience.

In 2018, then Secretary of Defense James N. Mattis stated that the American military has “no God-given right to victory.”65 This truth applies equally to large-scale combat against enemy armed forces and to the stability operations that will occur before, during, and after the fighting. As learned from the recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, there is more to “mission accomplished” than defeating an enemy in battle. The Army should educate active-duty professionals who can integrate this understanding into plans and operations; mitigate political, social, and economic instability; and secure American victories.


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Select Bibliography


Minotaurs, Not Centaurs: The Future of Manned-Unmanned Teaming

Robert J. Sparrow and Adam Henschke
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ABSTRACT: Contesting Paul Scharre’s influential vision of “centaur warfighting” and the idea that autonomous weapon systems will replace human warfighters, this article proposes that the manned-unmanned teams of the future are more likely to be minotaurs, teams of humans under the control, supervision, or command of artificial intelligence. It examines the likely composition of the future force and prompts a necessary conversation about the ethical issues raised by minotaur warfighting.

Keywords: manned-unmanned teaming, centaur warfighting, autonomous weapon systems, future force, ethics

What role will human beings play in the wars of the future? An influential answer to this question is that they will partner with sophisticated machines to leverage the distinctive capacities of both parties. Paul Scharre coined the term centaur warfighting to describe the use of manned-unmanned teams, arguing they possess a number of key advantages relative to the use of autonomous weapon systems (AWS). By enabling human beings to control, supervise, or command multiple unmanned systems, human judgment and cognitive flexibility can be combined with the reaction speed, sensors, strength, and power of machines to outperform humans and machines fighting separately.

A centaur is a mythical creature with the head and upper body of a man and the lower body of a horse. When used to describe manned-unmanned teams, the image of the centaur promotes the idea that human beings will lead the team. We outline an alternative vision of the nature of manned-unmanned teams, which is more likely to be realized...

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in key domains of warfighting in future wars. Rather than human beings directing multiple robots, we suspect artificial intelligences (AI) will direct the activities of multiple human beings. The cyborg soldier of the future is more likely to be a minotaur—a mythical creature with the body of a man and the head of a bull—than a centaur: they will have a monstrous head rather than a monstrous body.

The reasons why the minotaur is a better figure for thinking about the future of human participation in the prosecution of war relate to technological dynamics and ethical imperatives. Artificial intelligences are arguably already more capable of performing the cognitive tasks most relevant to warfighting than robots are capable of performing the functions of the human body most relevant to warfighting. Moreover, advances in the applications of AI are emerging more rapidly than are advances in the applications of robotics. For the foreseeable future, then, in many domains, it will be more plausible to substitute machines for humans where humans have executive roles than where humans have roles involving the manipulation of objects or movement through cluttered environments. Indeed, there will often be an ethical imperative to place human beings under machines’ control, supervision, or command. As the tempo of military operations increases due to the introduction of new technologies, shifting some functions of battlefield command to AI will help prevent friendly fire incidents and enhance the survivability of human warfighters.

Given the pace at which AI is being developed, there is an urgent need to consider the implications of minotaur warfighting, both for the effectiveness of the fighting forces of the future and for the human beings who will increasingly fight wars at the direction of machines. This article discusses the factors driving us toward a future in which wars are fought by minotaurs and begins a conversation about the ethical implications of minotaur warfighting.

**Centaur Warfighting**

Scharre introduced the idea of centaur warfighting in the context of debates about the impact and the ethics of the use of autonomous weapons. Scharre concedes that fully autonomous weapon systems may have a role to play in future warfighting, but he argues that, in most cases, teams of humans and machines will outperform both when they operate separately. Robots and AI programs excel at integrating large amounts of data, responding quickly, and carrying out precision strikes. At present, though, they are less capable than human beings when it comes to other roles
critical to warfighting. In particular, he suggests, AI still struggles to make good decisions in complex and unexpected circumstances and, especially, to exercise the moral judgment necessary to resolve the ethical dilemmas that often arise in the context of war. For this reason, in many applications, according to Scharre, teams of human beings and robots (or AIs) working together will outperform autonomous systems and human beings when they fight separately, in combat and in other military operations.²

The idea of centaur warfighting has been highly influential, in terms of the way people understand the operations of existing weapon systems and as a model for how to design and use robots and AI to fight wars going forward.

Scharre himself uses the figure of the centaur to analyze the operations of the US counter-rocket, artillery, and mortar system (C-RAM), which has been in operation since 2010. This system consists of a radar-and-computer-controlled high-speed Gatling gun. It is highly automated and capable of engaging and destroying targets without human supervision. Current doctrine, however, requires a human to be in the loop (meaning the system cannot operate without input from a human operator) to authorize the engagement of particular targets to reduce the risk of fratricide. Scharre cites this arrangement as a model of centaur warfighting that should be emulated wherever possible. He also notes that similar systems include humans only “on the loop” (meaning the human supervisor has the option of intervening to alter the operations of the system) and suggests this arrangement may become increasingly common and even necessary as the tempo of operations increases due to the use of autonomous systems in more roles.³

Importantly, centaur warfighting serves as a model for future operations using robotic and autonomous systems currently under development. The US Department of Defense Unmanned Systems Integrated Roadmap 2017-2042 asserts that “[m]ilitary operations of the future will require collaboration between unmanned systems and humans” and emphasizes the importance of “human-machine teaming.” Manned-unmanned teaming (MUM-T) is a key goal of the US Army Unmanned Aircraft Systems Roadmap 2010-2035 and also features heavily in the US Navy’s Unmanned Campaign

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While manned-unmanned teaming is compatible with a range of relationships between the machines and the humans in the team, the context and examples provided in document make it clear that these manned-unmanned teams are imagined as centaurs. Moreover, the flagship examples of unmanned systems include the US Army’s Robotic Combat Vehicle-Light, the US Marine Corps’ Remotely Operated Ground Unit for Expeditionary (ROGUE)-Fires platform, the US Air Force’s SkyBorg project, and the Royal Australian Air Forces Loyal Wingman project (recently renamed MQ-28A Ghost Bat). These examples are almost universally advertised as enhancing the effectiveness of human warfighters—that is, as facilitating centaur warfighting.


(unmanned-manned teams) than centaurs (manned-unmanned teams) because the machines in the teams will effectively be in charge.

### Key Technological Dynamics

The initial period of the development of AI was characterized by the belief that the key challenge was to create machines able to perform cognitive tasks—playing chess, completing mathematical operations, and dealing with large datasets, for example—we find hard and think of as the pinnacle of intellectual achievement. For instance, notoriously, the original grant application for the Dartmouth Summer Workshop, which is widely recognized as the starting point of modern research into artificial intelligence, suggested that:

> An attempt will be made to find how to make machines that use language, form abstractions and concepts, solve kinds of problems now reserved for humans, and improve themselves. We think that a significant advance can be made in one or more of these problems if a carefully selected group of scientists work on it together for a summer.\(^7\)

It soon became apparent, however, that the real challenge lay elsewhere. Tasks we find easy (and that, we think, do not require intelligence because they are performed equally well by children and animals as by adults) proved to be difficult for machines. Perception, locomotion, and manipulation are now recognized as hard problems in AI and robotics. Despite significant progress in machine vision over the last decade, the capacity of machines to orient themselves and recognize objects in unstructured environments remains limited, and dexterous manipulation remains a key challenge. Robustness in real-world operating conditions is also challenging for robotic systems, as are energy requirements. It is striking at the current moment how much faster AI research is progressing than robotics research. In general, AI heads are still better than robot bodies. As computer scientist Donald Knuth observed, “AI has by now succeeded in doing essentially everything that requires ‘thinking’ but has failed to do most of what people and animals do ‘without thinking’—that, somehow, is much harder.”\(^8\) Given the extent

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of the challenges involved in embodied engagements with the physical world, this will likely remain the case for the foreseeable future.

The relative strengths of AI and robotics are evident in many civilian applications. Today, when humans and intelligent machines work together in teams in industry, machines often perform the mental work while humans do the physical work.

Perhaps the most prominent civilian example of a minotaur is Amazon’s fulfillment centers. Workers in these centers are directed and supervised by machines. Complex algorithms determine which goods must be shipped, where, and how, but humans must collect and (sometimes) pack them. Machines tell workers, via handheld devices, what to collect and from where. Because the warehouses use an algorithmic packing system, which stores goods to minimize the time required to collect them, rather than in a fixed location, humans could not find the products they are required to collect without the machines.9 More and more, roboticized forklifts, pallets, or storage units bring product bins to tables where humans lift and package the goods or put them in another machine: human beings are thus reduced to being the hands of machines. As Noam Scheiber noted in the New York Times, “[the] steady stripping of human judgment from work is one of the most widespread consequences of automation—not so much replacing people with robots as making them resemble robots.”10

Another example of a civilian minotaur is provided by the evolution of long-haul trucking. Truck drivers increasingly collect and deliver items and follow routes assigned to them by algorithmic logistics systems. Sensors that transmit data back to these algorithms monitor the drivers’ speed, route, and driving performance. Drivers may even be automatically penalized for various infractions.11 Instead of humans choosing a destination to which an autonomous vehicle drives, autonomous systems instruct humans when, where, and how to drive. These human-machine teams have developed and flourished, mostly because they are more technologically feasible than the

alternatives (such as humans choosing routes or machines driving), but also because they reduce road deaths.

The difference in the performance of AI and robots has been under-recognized in discussions of the future of manned-unmanned teaming in war because the success stories for unmanned systems in military applications have involved machines operating in (or attacking targets in) the aerial domain. Problems related to perception, navigation, and locomotion are relatively tractable for unmanned aerial vehicles, and problems related to manipulation and dexterous handling do not arise. If one considers the performance of unmanned systems at tasks central to land warfare, the situation looks very different.

Urban environments, forests, mud, snow, ice, and sand are extremely challenging for robots. Moving safely through such terrain in wartime requires constant judgments about how objects and surfaces interact, the best route to choose, the goals of other friendly and enemy units, and the information available to other agents. While humans make these judgments intuitively and often unconsciously, this bodily and perceptual know-how is difficult to render in algorithms. That the unstructured and refractory nature of the physical environment poses profound challenges for robots is even more obvious when it comes to other activities that play a key role in land warfare. For instance, transporting and emplacing ordnance, setting up defensive fortifications, or clearing a building requires humans. Increasingly, though, machines can identify enemy military objects and personnel in (near) real-time by integrating information from multiple sources (such as drones, satellites, video feeds from cameras mounted on weapons or helmets, and signals intelligence), a task that can exceed the capacities of humans, but is now within the capabilities of machines. Scharre and others have argued that machines may struggle to take account of contextual cues important to applying the law of war or make the ethical or strategic judgments required to determine an appropriate target.12 In many circumstances, however, the context will actually make such decisions tractable for machines. For instance, it is plausible that in a particular area or engagement, all enemy submarines, tanks,
or fighter aircraft may be legitimate targets, and it is within the capacities of existing AI to distinguish such systems from civilian objects.  

Similar observations can be made regarding the applications of AI and robotics in naval warfare. Many tasks essential to the operations of ships will be hard to automate or assign to robots because they rely on humans’ ability to identify, move, and manipulate a range of different objects in complex environments. In particular, for the foreseeable future, humans will be needed to load and maintain weapons and service engines. However, cognitive tasks central to naval warfare (such as determining the best routes for ships, controlling air defense systems, and identifying and prioritizing targets) appear well within the capabilities of existing—or near-future—AI capacities.

Shifting our attention from the skies to land and naval warfare highlights the ways in which the physical environment poses challenges to the operations of machines that we are further from solving than we are from creating AIs that can identify targets and set priorities for warfighters.

**Minotaur Warfighting**

The emergence of minotaur teams in civilian life suggests minotaurs will also play a role in military operations in the future. At the very least, military stores and logistics will likely follow civilian models and create minotaur teams to carry out key functions.

Turning to combat operations, plausible use cases for minotaurs abound.

Despite recent progress in automating some functions, towing or driving, emplacing, and loading ordnance requires multiple humans. Identifying, tracking, and prioritizing targets, though, can be done by machines. In the era of so-called network-centric warfare, the best way to get inside the enemy’s Observe-Orient-Decide-Act loop is to allow a computer to allocate targets or even aim and fire weapons.  

Indeed, the Ukrainian military has reportedly taken significant steps in this direction in the current war with Russia.

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Where weapons lugged and loaded by human beings are aimed and fired at targets chosen by machines, we have minotaur warfighting.

Emerging technologies also threaten to turn infantry squads into minotaurs. The US Army’s Integrated Visual Augmentation System will provide warfighters with tactical data using a mixed-reality headset based on Microsoft’s HoloLens. A recent US Army “request for information” provides clues as to how its developers anticipate AI will be used to extend the capabilities of this system. This document lists “AI-enabled target detection algorithms,” “machine assisted mission planning,” “AI tactical predictions,” and an “AI-enabled digital battlefield assistant” as areas of interest. Although the request’s phrasing implies that AI will act as an assistant or adviser, there are strong reasons to believe that AI will not remain confined to these roles for long.

Studies of Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) show that people tend to over trust artificial intelligence, especially if the AI has proven itself generally reliable—a phenomenon known as automation bias. If a target detection algorithm or battlefield assistant indicates that a particular object or person is a threat, warfighters are unlikely to gainsay the AI, especially given that the premise of the Integrated Visual Augmentation System is that it helps reduce the fog of war. Moreover, where the AI can draw on information from multiple platforms and sensors to formulate threat assessments or mission objectives, it may be wrong to act against its advice, given the machine’s better vantage point. Once the performance of AI reaches a certain level, warfighters who assert their judgment over the AI’s judgment will place their lives and the lives of those around them at risk; they will also detract from the combat effectiveness of the team. Eventually, the advice of AI will come to have the psychological, or even normative and institutional, force of orders, and warfighters engaged in small-unit combat will spend most of their time trying to achieve goals set for them by an AI.

As Thomas Adams argued more than two decades ago, as the impact of AI accelerates the tempo of battle and reduces effective decision-making time for humans, militaries may have little alternative but to outsource

many decisions to AI.\textsuperscript{19} For the foreseeable future, though, the successful prosecution of war will involve human beings dealing with the mundane physical and material challenges machines currently handle poorly. If, in the future, AI is doing the cognitive work in a manned-unmanned (or, more accurately, unmanned-manned) team by choosing targets and setting goals, and humans are toiling at the direction of AI, we will have a minotaur rather than a centaur. The same dynamic Adams identified suggests that minotaurs will triumph over centaurs in future battles, creating a strong incentive for militaries to adopt minotaur warfighting.

The ultimate minotaur fighting force would consist of a team of humans and robots commanded by the AI equivalent of a general officer. Although not yet feasible, in the long term this idea is less far-fetched than it appears. Artificial intelligence tends to excel at games, including wargames, because an AI can learn from the experience of playing multiple iterations of a game.\textsuperscript{20} If war were only moving units on a screen or maximizing a score according to a complex set of rules, machines would already outperform humans at directing military operations. The reason they do not yet relates to the difficulties involved in accurately representing in military simulations the capacities of different weapon systems and military units and the affordances of the terrain (including human terrain) on which operations will take place. Should the technology of military simulations improve so real-world operations can be accurately represented in wargames, the door will be opened for the development of sophisticated war-fighting algorithms.\textsuperscript{21} Eventually, the pursuit of victory may require handing over command to machines and victory may be determined by which force has the better AI.

It is also worth noting that automation bias suggests some highly automated systems people currently think of as centaurs are actually minotaurs. If the human “in the loop” is unlikely to gainsay the machine, then the manned-unmanned team is a minotaur rather than a centaur. We suspect this may be the case with the Phalanx close-in weapon system and counter-rocket, artillery, and mortar system.

Finally, recognizing that even purportedly “autonomous” systems will rely on humans to load, repair, and maintain them suggests that

many autonomous weapons systems should be understood as the heads of minotaurs and their human support teams being the body.

**Ethical Implications**

It is vital that military policymakers and the broader society begin a conversation now about the ethics of minotaur warfighting to prepare for or shape the future.

There are powerful ethical arguments for minotaur warfighting. Minotaur warfighting is likely to emerge in response to the ethical imperative to avoid fratricide. More controversially, the obligation of civilian society to warfighters, and of commanders to their troops, to avoid exposing friendly forces to unnecessary risk will also often argue in favor of minotaur warfighting. By swiftly identifying and prioritizing targets, minotaurs will reduce opportunities for the enemy to bring weapons to bear. Finally, the fact that minotaurs are likely to defeat centaurs in the not-too-distant future is ethically salient; if we fight in a just cause there are strong ethical reasons to field as powerful a military force as possible.22

Nevertheless, minotaur warfighting also has some profoundly troubling aspects. Indeed, in granting machines power over humans to the point of sending them into battle to be killed, minotaur warfighting foregrounds ethical questions being discussed in the contemporary debate about the relationship between machines and humans more generally.

One worry is that machines will not care sufficiently, or in the right way or, indeed, maybe at all about the lives of those they command. For instance, AI generals might use humans as cannon fodder to clear the way for a more powerful unmanned system. It is important to distinguish here between a worry that machines will risk human lives unnecessarily and a concern about them risking human lives at all. The former is really a doubt about the effectiveness of military AI and should eventually be assuaged by evidence that minotaurs win battles and reduce the risk to (human) warfighters.

The concern that human lives should not be at stake in the decisions of machines, which also arises in the debate about the ethics of using AWS, might be expressed in the philosophy of Immanuel Kant. Kant insisted that human beings should always be treated as “ends,”

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not solely as means. Unlike machines, humans have free will. According to Kant, we must respect this capacity in each other and avoid treating other people solely as tools to advance our purposes. It is difficult to see how machines could demonstrate such respect and easy to worry that minotaur warfighting could reduce human beings to mere means.

There is also a republican version of this objection. According to this tradition, liberty is compatible with laws that are the outcome of a process of deliberation that tracks the interests of citizens. Where individuals can act as they wish only at the sufferance of the powerful, though, they are dominated and, to that extent, not free. The equal freedom of citizens requires that they not be subject to the arbitrary power of the sovereign or other citizens. It is tempting to think that the exercise of power by machines is always arbitrary insofar as machines cannot participate in the practices of reason giving that are constitutive of deliberation.

Both these objections have merit. It is, however, difficult to formulate them in a way that does not invite the reply that a similar situation exists when humans order other humans into battle. Soldiers consent to be used to serve larger purposes when they enlist and are, arguably, subject to the arbitrary power of their superiors. While one hopes commanders only treat those under their command in ways they could justify to their subordinates in terms of their interests, military necessity may sometimes require otherwise. Thus, the ethics of command by machines does not look that distinct from the ethics of command more generally.

Nevertheless, it is hard to avoid a sense that there would be something wrong with granting machines the authority to send humans to their deaths. Humans are valuable in a way that machines are not. Placing humans under the command of machines seems to express the idea that machines are more important—or at least better—than humans. Unsurprisingly, this intuition also arises in the debate about the ethics of the use of autonomous weapon systems, wherein it plays an important role.

Another question, which arises for both autonomous weapon systems and minotaurs, concerns the attribution of responsibility for decisions made by machines. When parents learn their children have been killed after being sent into battle by a machine, they may want to know whom to blame.

When, if ever, it might be appropriate to hold a machine morally responsible for “its” actions remains a topic of vigorous philosophical debate.\(^{27}\) We suspect the answer to the grieving parents’ question will ultimately be settled as a matter of law, if not of morality, by assigning responsibility for the consequences of the decisions of AI and the actions of minotaurs to a human further up the chain of command.\(^{28}\)

The ethical issues raised by minotaur warfighting identified here are troubling enough and more will undoubtedly emerge as the use of minotaur teams spreads. In military contexts, however, the case for minotaurs—that they will win battles and save the lives of friendly forces—is remarkably strong. For this reason, our analysis suggests that, as is often the case with new technologies, an all-things-considered ethical assessment of minotaur warfighting would require resolving a clash between Kantian and consequentialist intuitions.

Like many distinctions we use to understand the world, the contrast between centaurs and minotaurs is undoubtedly overdrawn. In reality, there will be a range of relationships between humans and machines when they work together. Even within particular teams, some tasks will be delegated more to humans and others to robots or to AI. Nevertheless, the image of the minotaur reminds us that this negotiation will not always favor human beings.

Similarly, insofar as the military is a system of systems, whether a particular collaboration between humans and machines is a centaur or a minotaur will be a function of the level of analysis. A system that looks like a minotaur if one draws the boundary around the team one way may appear as a centaur if one draws it another way. Thus, if AI battlefield assistants evolve to become AI squad leaders, one would hope human officers would command them. If the general directing the nation’s military is an AI, one presumes the nation’s civilian leadership would set the AI’s war objectives. Recognizing, however, that, at some levels of analysis, machines will be in charge helps us understand the strengths and limitations of different forms of manned-unmanned teaming. As we have argued, the ethical questions will also look very different when one concedes that


some humans are effectively under the command of machines, even if those machines are in turn under the command of human beings.

Final Reflections

Minotaur warfighting will develop in key domains of warfighting because unmanned-manned teams will outperform manned-unmanned teams or humans or autonomous weapon systems operating alone. The nature of the relationships between humans and machines in this emerging mode of manned-unmanned teaming raises profound ethical questions. We also expect the development of minotaur warfighting to be challenging personally and institutionally for those who have spent their lives honing the capacity for human judgment that currently plays a central role in warfighting. Despite the ethical and institutional challenges posed by minotaurs, it is far from clear that those responsible for winning wars should resist the development of minotaur warfighting.

If militaries or societies do decide that putting warfighters under the control, supervision, or command of machines is a step too far, we believe that three tasks—one technological, one ethical, and one political—would need to be confronted as a matter of urgency.

First, significant financial and intellectual resources must be dedicated to developing robots capable of functioning effectively for extended periods in unstructured environments. A challenge in this task will be to succeed without also making it more plausible to hand over key cognitive tasks involved in warfighting to AIs. There is a real danger that the software advances required for robots to cope with the uncertainties and complexities of the physical environment will only further empower AI to strategize and exercise operational control over military forces.

Second, the intuitions grounding an ethical and political commitment not to put humans under the command of machines must be clarified and strengthened. Doing so also risks implying that the development and application of autonomous weapon systems is more problematic than many military ethicists and policymakers acknowledge. If it is morally wrong to allow machines to tell humans what to do, it is difficult to see how it could be morally permissible to allow machines to kill people.

Third, the international community must consider whether an international legal prohibition on the use of minotaur teams in war or in certain roles in war is desirable—or even feasible. Each nation will
also need to consider how it will respond if other nations start fielding minotaur teams in war.

Whether any of these challenges can be successfully met, or if they should even be attempted, remains unclear. We hope this discussion has demonstrated the importance of confronting these questions. Before human warfighters cede the field to minotaurs, we need to know that the price of their victory will not be our humanity.

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Afghanistan: The Logic of Failing, Fast and Slow
George Shatzer

Review of
The Forty-year War in Afghanistan: A Chronicle Foretold
By Tariq Ali
The Fifth Act: America’s End in Afghanistan
By Elliot Ackerman

Keywords: Afghanistan, NATO, policy, strategy, logic

Why did the US-led war and reconstruction campaign in Afghanistan fail in 2021? After nearly 20 years of effort, over $2 trillion in direct costs, and over 73,000 US and allied deaths (including NATO and Afghan security forces as well as contractors), for the uninitiated it must have seemed impossible that Afghanistan would once again fall under Taliban rule. For those familiar with the war, and with Afghanistan, the rapid collapse of the Afghan government and its security forces in August 2021 was indeed shocking but certainly no surprise.

To cite just one well-known and long-running example, attrition (in all forms) in the Afghan National Army typically ran at 24 percent annually. The issue of force retention alone is complicated and multifaceted. Factors related to pay, training, leadership, operational tempo, corruption, culture, organizational systems, US and allied advise-and-assist policies and practices, and many others, all conspired to create a hollow and brittle Afghan Army unable and unwilling to fight for its country and itself. Force retention among Afghan security forces was arguably a symptom of the many complex issues that bedeviled the campaign in Afghanistan.

Coherency. The United States’ strategic aims in Afghanistan were ill-defined, disparate, and haphazardly implemented depending on the year, the presidential administration, the province, or the headquarters in charge. Was the central strategy focused on counterinsurgency? Combat? Reconstruction? Advise and assist? Counterterrorism? Counterdrug? Institution building? Democratization? Yes, or, more accurately, it depended. This issue was compounded by the array of allies, partners, and other actors (for example, nongovernmental organizations) who brought their own agendas and approaches to operating in Afghanistan.
Corruption. How much of the trillions of dollars spent on Afghanistan was siphoned off to line pockets or ended up supporting the insurgency? The answer is likely lost to history. As others have said, the system in Afghanistan is not corrupt; corruption is the system in Afghanistan. There seemed to be little practical consideration of the country’s inability to absorb the sudden deluge of assistance money and programs.

Pakistan. We know Pakistan created, supported, and then harbored the Taliban (to say nothing of Osama bin Laden and other malign actors) for the duration of the war. Some allege Pakistan also evacuated large numbers of Taliban senior leaders and fighters from Afghanistan even before the start of and following US military operations in October 2001. Those escorted out of Afghanistan were likely the human capital needed to create and sustain the insurgency that followed.

Factionalism. The deadly rivalries of Afghan society are legendary. Some have suggested that a Pashtun civil war has been the primary conflict driver in Afghanistan for at least the last 40 years. The pseudo-country is home to at least 14 major ethnicities with many long-running and ongoing conflicts between them. A resort to warlordism has cemented a toxic mix of tribalism and violence, resulting in a badly fractured society.

Nationalism. Considering the previous point, as well as the United States’ own history, it seems foolish that the United States and its EU and NATO partners would seek to create a strong Afghan central government and national army. Mortimer Durand and nineteenth-century Britain get most of the blame for creating this problem, but the United States did not have to double down on it.

Iraq. Starting a simultaneous war in Mesopotamia is another US choice that many view as senseless. While operations in Iraq certainly consumed vast quantities of critical resources and attention that could have gone to Afghanistan, it is not clear that the United States would have chosen to commit any more to Afghanistan than what it did.

Rigidity. It has been widely reported that Taliban leader Mullah Mohammed Omar was willing to surrender and accept a peace deal with the United States and the new Hamid Karzai government in Kabul both in late 2001 following the US invasion and again in 2003. The United States allegedly rejected both deals because it would not permit any role for the Taliban in the new government.

Narcotics. Afghanistan produces more opium poppy than any other country and struggles with domestic addiction. The illicit drug economy in Afghanistan tears away at the country in myriad ways, critically undermining security and reconstruction efforts—however, poppy cultivation and the drug trade are also vital
sources of revenue for many Afghans and the Taliban. US-led counter-narcotics efforts arguably failed to deliver any lasting, positive impacts.

**Brutality.** The Afghan people have experienced sustained conflict since at least the early 1970s with the start of the communist movement there and the eventual Soviet invasion in 1979. By the time of the US invasion in 2001, civil strife and conflict had already gripped Afghanistan for 30 years. Many assert that indiscriminate US combat operations (especially air strikes) and US support to violent militia groups caused thousands of civilian deaths nationwide and drove a population already desperate for security to support the Taliban.

Tariq Ali, a Pakistani-British political activist and author, discusses these and other issues in his book, *The Forty-year War in Afghanistan: A Chronicle Foretold*. The book, published quickly following the collapse of the Afghan government in August 2021, is a compilation of Ali’s writings about Afghanistan since 1980 and the very early days of the Soviet invasion. The writings, mostly a collection of book chapter and article excerpts, seek to establish the point that his predcations about the security situation in Afghanistan have mostly been correct over the decades. His commentaries deliver stinging criticisms of Pakistan, Soviet Russia, and US, EU, and NATO actions that he alleges have fundamentally been designed to preserve these actors’ interests while victimizing Afghanistan. His assessment suffers for ignoring the wholesale brutality that the Soviets visited on Afghans during their war, while he focuses intense scrutiny on US combat operations that caused civilian deaths and casualties. Setting aside this bias, readers will find the book is an uncomfortable read, as it recounts the many recurring failings and problems throughout four decades of futility. Considering these issues, the real surprise is that the United States and NATO were willing and able to sustain operations in Afghanistan as long as they did.

Ali recounts the long-forgotten and failed effort in 1993 by Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Pakistan to broker a peace deal among the warring Afghan factions fighting over the post-Soviet wreckage in Afghanistan. The proposed deal included provisions for an Afghan national army, elections, and a new constitution. Despite signing the deal in the Holy City of Mecca and being warned of Allah’s wrath over breaking a promise made there, the Afghan warlords resumed fighting promptly upon their return to Afghanistan (54). Noting that foreign interference and sectarianism contributed to the quick end
of the peace deal, Ali primarily blames greed and a desire to control the lucrative illicit drug economy as the key drivers of renewed conflict. He contends that the promise of Western money in 2001 is what briefly compelled these factions to promise solidarity once again. Writing in 2002, in a chapter aptly titled “The Dam Will Burst Sooner or Later,” he notes wryly, “Once the Marines depart, with or without the head of Bin Laden, the Alliance will discover there is no money for anything these days except waging war” (56). Of course, the United States and NATO knew the basic history of Afghanistan’s wars. Indeed, this knowledge helped drive the nation-building instinct and a desire to bring the Afghan people some peace finally. Neither the United States nor NATO, however, seemed truly to understand the degree to which warlord greed and bloodlust had displaced any prospect for renewed leadership and peace, the way calcareous material replaces organic matter and petrifies into a fossil.

This lack of real understanding is apparent in the book’s true gem: a reprinted series of letters from 2003 between the author and Mike O’Brien, the then UK minister for trade, investment, and foreign affairs. In the letters, Ali offers a harsh assessment of failed US and NATO objectives in the efforts to defeat the Taliban, destroy al-Qaeda, and rebuild Afghan society and the country. O’Brien accuses Ali of cynicism and just being plain wrong, asserting that programs are taking hold and positive progress is being made. Ali counters that the minister sounds like a Soviet propagandist ignorant of how bad things really are. The minister sums up their exchange by writing, “I still believe government driven by idealism can do good things, you don’t” (65).

This tug-of-war between perceptions of harsh reality and aspirations for lofty goals hamstrung the campaign in Afghanistan, probably for its duration. The realists never fully committed to the effort and kept plugging away out of a sense of duty. The idealists downplayed problems and failed to acknowledge the severity of the fundamental issues. The result was that true problems were never adequately or consistently addressed. During my tour in Afghanistan from 2014 to 2015, the Taliban, at various times, briefly seized key provincial government or Afghan military facilities. Normally, in just a few days’ time or less, Afghan forces (with substantial US support) would reclaim possession of the facilities. Within the NATO headquarters where I served, both the realists and the idealists saw the Taliban incursions as no real cause for concern or need to change how we were operating to improve conditions. The realists would chalk up these episodes to “business as usual,” while the idealists would dismiss the incidents as anomalies readily corrected by the Afghans. Neither group seemed mindful of the much larger point that the security dynamics were fundamentally broken—that a few Taliban fighters could quickly scatter Afghan forces that were unwilling to fight for themselves, let alone the people living in that area. Yet, more
than a decade in, we continued to assess that the Afghan government and security forces were making progress.

Ali’s book also falls short when it comes to recommendations. Beyond the expected judgments that the US and NATO presence only increased popular support for the Taliban, that US and EU financial assistance supercharged already rampant corruption, and that the solution had to be political and not military, he offers only that true stability in Afghanistan would have to come from below and slowly (that is, not imposed by a foreign army operating on a timetable). He does briefly contend that a Marshall Plan–style assistance and reconstruction program implemented after the Soviet withdrawal might have turned the country around and prevented the situation today, but this is highly speculative (77).

In *The Fifth Act: America’s End in Afghanistan*, Elliot Ackerman leads the reader through an emotional gauntlet winding between his own past experiences in Afghanistan and his recent efforts to arrange the evacuation of Afghan allies from the country once again under Taliban control. Like Ali’s book, *The Fifth Act* was published soon after the collapse of the Afghan government and offers a decades-long retrospective on American failures in Afghanistan. Ackerman, well-known for his novels and other memoirs, was a Marine special operator and later a CIA operative in multiple tours in Afghanistan. He offers firsthand tactical observations but draws insightful strategic, and even epochal, conclusions.

His most striking judgment, alluded to in the double meaning of the book’s title, is that the collapse in Afghanistan is a harbinger of the potential failure of the United States itself. Ackerman cites the unprecedented confluence of several factors posing a grave threat to the integrity of the nation: an all-volunteer military force consistently shrinking in size, the increasing development of a military caste taking up the burden to fill this force’s ranks, use of debt financing to fund perpetual wars, the resulting distancing of the American population from service in the military or being affected by these wars, dysfunction in the US government, and increasing partisanship among the electorate. He astutely notes that these factors speak to a growing political and societal incoherence in the country—a sort of nihilism (on display at the January 6 US Capitol attack) that is “ubiquitous in war” (189). In short, two decades of war, and detachment from it, in Afghanistan (and Iraq) have infected American society. Perhaps most unsettling is his conclusion that the American people now “lack the resolve to look in the mirror and ask ourselves how we got here and whether we’re willing to change” (184).
With respect to the failed war in Afghanistan, Ackerman covers nearly every issue mentioned earlier and many of the same points Ali discusses. But he centers squarely on the duality of blunders first perpetrated in Iraq and repeated in Afghanistan: the commitment of troops to a war without a clear aim and then the withdrawal of troops to end the war for domestic political reasons, not the reality of the situation in the war zone. He heaps the most blame on President Barack Obama for simultaneously announcing the troop surge in Afghanistan with its end date. But he also takes Presidents Donald J. Trump and Joseph R. Biden to task for essentially wanting to end the war at any cost, despite the security situation having been a stalemate for many years in which the Taliban had no real hope for winning so long as the United States and NATO continued to back the Afghan government and security forces. Ackerman implies that a solution would have been to commit to a very long-term US military presence to prop up Afghanistan and hold the Taliban at bay. Alternatively, he argues that invading Afghanistan and Iraq were both unnecessary wars of choice. He suggests the United States should have instead narrowed the scope of its aims in Afghanistan to counterterrorism and conducted a much more focused campaign based on that. He does little to support the idea that either approach would have been more successful in the long run. To his credit, Ackerman acknowledges that the “ultimate disaster that unfolds in Afghanistan is the accumulation of hundreds of bad decisions over two decades” (42).

Ackerman makes another rare point about the US campaign. He asserts—and I agree—that the effort lacked true commitment and hence any sort of permanence. As he puts it, “At any given point in our twenty-year Afghan odyssey, we were always—in our minds, at least—only a year or two from a drawdown followed by an eventual withdrawal” (38). This pattern was certainly the dynamic at play in mid-2014 when I arrived at NATO’s International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) headquarters in Kabul. Within the plans section of ISAF, where I would serve the next year, the outgoing planners had begun the preparations for the next round of US and NATO force drawdown. During my tour, ISAF would stand down its combat-focused Joint command headquarters in NATO’s transition to an advise-and-assist-only mission. To reflect this change in mission, NATO would rename ISAF to “Resolute Support” (a horrible irony that bothers me to this day). Our central focus in the plans section would remain gauging US and NATO intent for the next round of drawdowns and attempting to plan for that. We routinely fielded queries from US Central Command, the Pentagon, higher NATO headquarters, and even the US National Security Council about how we could reduce boots on the ground and whether the Afghans
were ready to take on additional responsibilities. Foreshadowing the events of August 2021, there was keen interest in closing Bagram Air Base even in 2014.

Ackerman illustrates this collective short-timer mindset with an anecdote about the US Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force headquarters in Afghanistan still being built with plywood after nearly a decade in the country—a point he says Afghans noticed with the observation that “wars . . . are not won with plywood” (38). For me, this transient approach to operating in Afghanistan was evident in the way both the United States and NATO staffed their headquarters. The vast majority of personnel assigned were on six-month tours. A small minority of us were on one-year tours. A select few would serve beyond a year (such as the commander, other general officers, and a few civilians and military who volunteered for multiple tours). In my 12 months, I saw the ISAF/Resolute Support headquarters staff effectively turn over three times. At the beginning of my tour, the new crop of personnel was abuzz, constantly meeting and trying to grasp the situation, batting around all sorts of “new” ideas, and bemoaning how the last crew had not accomplished much. This pattern repeated six months later at my mid-tour point. Yet another six months later, at the end of my tour, the same dynamic happened again as I heard much the same set of “new” ideas (for a third time) offered by the personnel who had just arrived in country. This tour-length system, meant to preserve morale and spread deployment time across the force, simply does not work. It also partly reflects, I think, a lesson overlearned from the Soviet experience in Afghanistan. The tenor of discussion within the Army immediately after 9/11 was one of caution and not overcommitting to Afghanistan because it was a backward country beyond fixing—a realist view that hampered effectiveness and clashed with the idealist aims that exerted growing influence over the campaign.

The title of this article is a play on the titles of two other books very relevant to the lost war in Afghanistan, though neither treats the topic directly. The first is The Logic of Failure: Recognizing and Avoiding Error in Complex Situations (Basic Books, 1997) by Dietrich Dörner. Better known is Daniel Kahneman’s Thinking, Fast and Slow (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011). Both books are about examining our thinking and the actions that our thinking leads us to, particularly when dealing with difficult problems. Dörner’s central point is that failure is not just accidental but that there is also a real (though faulty) logic to our mistakes. Kahneman asserts that human thought is basically of two types—instinctive and deliberative—and that humans are overly confident in their judgment. Read together, Ali, Ackerman, Dörner,
and Kahneman provide a vivid and powerful picture of why the United States failed in Afghanistan and why it might well do so again in the next war.

George Shatzer

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To Consider – Recent Books and Studies on Similar Topics

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On “Why America’s Army Can’t Win America’s Wars”

Alex, special operations NCO

This commentary responds to John A. Nagl’s article, “Why America’s Army Can’t Win America’s Wars,” published in the Autumn 2022 issue of Parameters (vol. 52, no. 3).

Keywords: victory, Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan, irregular warfare, Landpower

John Nagl’s article, “Why America’s Army Can’t Win America’s Wars,” features many points of analysis that I appreciate. In particular, his point that “In the wake of the Vietnam War, the US Army turned away from counterinsurgency to focus on deterring and, if necessary, winning a conventional war with the Soviet Union in Europe” struck me.¹ This statement reminds me of the bad impression Special Forces left with the post-Vietnam Army, which influenced the United States to pivot from counterinsurgency and irregular warfare.

As much as I enjoyed Dr. Nagl's incisive analysis and marvelous setup, his less-than-stellar conclusion disappointed me. I hoped he would provide recommendations for the direction current US strategy should take, especially with the inclusion of the digital domain in warfare, or even offer some thoughts on the shifts in Army culture that must occur to succeed in irregular warfare. Instead, his conclusion reads to me like advocacy for what got American politicians and military leaders in trouble in the first place—nation building.

If success in Afghanistan had been possible, we should have focused on eradicating al-Qaeda and only engaged the Taliban insofar as it supported al-Qaeda. The Taliban was a regional, not a global, threat, so it did not make sense to wage war against it, especially considering it was the stabilizing influence in Afghanistan (much as Saddam Hussein was the stabilizing influence in Iraq). America attempted to create a nation for the Afghans that they did not want or need. Imposing American morality on another culture or assuming that others will acknowledge American culture as inherently superior is foolhardy. Part of success in irregular warfare involves a willingness to negotiate and partner with others who

do not share our morals and do not want their nation to be a clone of America. The United States can fight for its interests without imposing its morality—unless making the rest of the world more like America is a strategic interest.

I agree with the author’s analysis, and reading his article sharpened my thinking. I disagree, however, with the conclusions he derives from his analysis. A longer commitment does not mean better results. Based on his conclusion, it would make more sense if the author advocated for colonization because that is what a multigenerational commitment looks like—the imposition of rule with an iron fist.² If a nation is unwilling to invade and colonize, then a long-term commitment of soldiers does not make sense. Afghanistan would be better off if either no attempt at nation building had been made and American forces came, eliminated prime targets, and left or if Afghanistan had become an American colony. Instead, we applied a lukewarm solution and tried to make the American way of life appeal to the majority when only a minority were interested in it.

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Alex, special operations NCO

The Author Replies

John A. Nagl

Keywords: victory, Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan, irregular warfare, Landpower

Thank you to Alex for his thoughtful comments on my article, “Why America’s Army Can’t Win America’s Wars,” particularly his description of my analysis as “incisive” and my set-up as “marvelous.” Like any good Army leader, Alex led with praise, but readers rarely write letters to the editor about articles they agree with completely, and this was no exception. Alexander decided my conclusion was “less-than-stellar,” as he had hoped for “recommendations for the direction current US strategy should take, especially with the inclusion of the digital domain in warfare, or even some thoughts on the shifts in Army culture that must take place to be successful in irregular warfare.”

Of all possible questions, this is the one I would have chosen to answer; though I thought I did so exhaustively in the article, I am happy to do so again. The thesis of my article, at least as I saw it, was that “America must learn the lessons purchased at so high a price in the past 20 years of war and build the capabilities needed to increase the Army’s effectiveness in this kind of war. In the wake of Afghanistan and with continued conflict in Iraq, when the Army swears ‘never again,’ it must mean the United States will never again be as unprepared for irregular warfare as it was when the towers fell.”

The Army should make changes across doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership and education, personnel, and facilities (DOTMLPF) to ensure our armor is impenetrable across the spectrum of conflict and not just invest in our capabilities in large-scale combat operations that are unlikely to happen. The current conflict in Ukraine demonstrates how difficult it is for autocrats to invade neighboring countries successfully across a land border without facing US troops in direct conflict, and China is watching the debacle carefully. Beijing is now even less likely to invade Taiwan conventionally than it was when I wrote the article. Instead, China is far more likely to use hybrid and irregular war techniques, including the information and cyber operations Alex discusses, to put economic and diplomatic pressure on Taiwan to achieve its goals.

Hence, my reason for the Army to focus not exclusively on China as a pacing threat, as the Navy, Marine Corps, and Air Force are doing, but to work across DOTMLPF to maintain and increase our capability and capacity lower on the spectrum of conflict. This work ranges from developing doctrine on information operations in low-intensity conflict and training and advising foreign militaries at the operational, strategic, and enterprise levels to creating force structure to do high-level advising and training all Army forces on low-intensity conflict tasks (even as we regain our edge in large-scale combat operations). As I noted, “the failure to build a sufficient dedicated advisory force structure is among the most critical failures of the military in Iraq and Afghanistan and contributed significantly to American defeat in the latter war.” Maintaining and expanding that force structure to build capacity and capability at the Ministry of Defense level for our allies and partners may be the most important task remaining for the Army as it digests its failures in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Alex is correct that the Army needs a culture change. This change must begin with a complete examination of why we failed so badly in Iraq and Afghanistan, and my article intended to beg the Army to do just that. We paid too high a price—and our Afghan friends and allies paid even more dearly—for us to make the same mistakes again next time.

Moreover, there will be a next time, more likely than not, in the Hindu Kush. This is my strongest disagreement with Alex. We did not choose to fight with the Taliban. After September 11, Taliban leaders were asked to turn over Osama bin Laden and the leadership of al-Qaeda for justice. When they refused to do so, the United States had no choice but to invade Afghanistan to defeat al-Qaeda. Due to failures in planning and conducting Operation Enduring Freedom, bin Laden escaped to Pakistan, and America’s longest war began. We could not have left until bin Laden was brought to justice and should not have left when we did in 2021. A long-term presence in Afghanistan would have prevented radical Islamist extremists from again using the country as a home base for terror. They are mobilizing there now. While I desperately hope they do not succeed in attacking America again, Alex is young enough that he may see US troops in combat there again, securing ground that has already been paid for once with American blood.

John A. Nagl


Read the genesis article at: Parameters

Hear our author provide further insights on the genesis article at: Decisive Point

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On “Why America’s Army Can’t Win America’s Wars”

G. L. Lamborn
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This commentary responds to John A. Nagl’s “Why America’s Army Can’t Win America’s Wars,” published in the Autumn 2022 issue of Parameters (vol. 52, no. 3).

Keywords: Afghanistan, insurgent, counterinsurgent, armed politics, Clausewitz, effectiveness in government, legitimacy

John Nagl, in his excellent article, “Why America’s Army Can’t Win America’s Wars,” lays out his explanation for American failures in Vietnam, Somalia, and Afghanistan. Nagl draws his perspective from case studies in which he shows how current Army doctrine “may have succeeded if given more time or executed differently.” He freely acknowledges that operations in Vietnam and Afghanistan “were not wins in any meaningful sense of the word” and that our outright defeats and humiliating exits from Vietnam and Afghanistan were “ignominious at best.”¹ Any objective observer would agree with Nagl on each of these points.

Where Nagl takes his argument, however, is deep into the territory of wishful thinking. His exposition focuses on what the Army might have done, should have done, or should not have done. Unfortunately, he fails to consider that each of these adventures was doomed at its inception—not by anything the Army did or did not do, but because of fundamental, underlying political and cultural realities brushed aside by policymakers. The Army’s failing in the field, therefore, lies mainly with the policy community here at home, as the tasks assigned were beyond hope of success. A contrary view to Nagl’s would indicate that none of the failed campaigns could have been successful regardless of the doctrine followed, the weaponry employed, or the amount of time allotted. Army failures resulted from fundamental flaws of national policy and a failure at all levels to appreciate the nature of the struggles at hand.

The central issue in all three cases (Vietnam, Somalia, and Afghanistan) is the political instability of the lands where the so-called governments

in power were inefficient and inept at best and corrupt and often 
malign at worst. In the case of Somalia, government was in the hands 
of “road warrior” gangsters. In no case were these countries US allies—
except in name only. Moreover, each of these regimes lacked any shred 
of political legitimacy.

American political scientist Seymour M. Lipset noted the stability 
of a government rests upon its *effectiveness in governing*—that is, meeting 
the needs of most of the people most of the time—and upon *legitimacy*—
or the shared belief among the majority of the people that the regime 
reflects their core values and interests and is the form of government most 
appropriate to their cultural norms. Lipset argues that the most stable 
governments have legitimacy and demonstrate a high degree of effectiveness 
in governing, whereas the least stable governments—that is, those most 
susceptible to insurgency and an overthrow—are perceived by the people 
as illegitimate and have little or no capacity to govern.

Many American military professionals, perhaps including Nagl, 
conceive of war as a Clausewitzian clash of regular military forces with the 
winner dictating the terms of peace. Although World War II ended almost 
eight decades ago, its afterglow seems to color what we think about how 
a proper war should be fought. The American public desires unadulterated 
victory in its wars. It was not impressed by the negotiated cease-fires in 
Korea or the first Gulf War against Iraq that left armed enemies in place.

The debacle in Vietnam, the tragic 1993 Battle of Mogadishu in Somalia, 
and the summer 2021 defeat in Afghanistan offer very different ideas about 
what insurgent warfare is. Insurgency—revolutionary warfare—is a thing 
apart from Carl von Clausewitz’s conception shaped by his struggle against 
Napoleon. Perhaps our triumph in World War II over national enemies 
fighting a conventional war blinded us to irregular warfare, especially wars 
against insurgent opponents of vastly different cultures and political beliefs.

Insurgencies—which we attempted to counter in the cases of Vietnam 
and Afghanistan—do not lend themselves to Clausewitzian (much less 
Jominian) analysis. I make the following point in *Arms of Little Value*:

If we are to conduct effective counterinsurgency 
we must first understand insurgency. As a people we

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2. Seymour Martin Lipset, *Political Man: The Social Bases of Politics* (Garden City, NY: 
apparently do not. This is especially ironic as the United States of America won its independence from Great Britain by means of a ten-year-long insurgency aided and abetted by outsiders.4

Insurgencies differ fundamentally from Clausewitzian theory in at least three major ways. First, insurgency is an internal war. It is not fought one nation against another, the way Clausewitz and most other Western thinkers conceive of war. Rather, it is fought by part of the people against the established regime in their own country—a regime many perceive as illegitimate. Insurgencies can only take place under certain dysfunctional political and social conditions and can only be understood in terms of the insurgents’ cause and the people who support it.

In Vietnam, the insurgents’ goals were reunification motivated by nationalism and the expulsion of intruding foreigners—in many ways, a continuation of the First Indochina War. In Afghanistan, a shrill, reactionary version of Islam coupled with the majority Pashtun population’s ingrained anti-foreign views fueled the Taliban's ultimate victory.

Second, an insurgency is armed politics. It is the direct involvement of civilians—not necessarily bearing arms, but always as important actors—to gain the desired political end. Insurgent groups may use uniformed elements, including regular units, alongside peasant guerrillas in civilian clothes, but the real war is distinguished by proselytizing, recruiting, organizing, and mobilizing rather than by using weapons. In conventional wars, civilians are considered noncombatants. They may complicate operations, but the people basically sit and watch as hapless bystanders and await the outcome. In an insurgency, the people are the political object and are involved in every military or political activity.

Let us be clear that insurgency is much more than guerrilla warfare. Many military professionals, who should know better, often equate the two. Although guerrilla warfare can play a considerable role in the process of insurgency, it is merely one tool of many in the insurgents’ toolbox. Another tool is regular warfare—mobile warfare with uniformed troops—which also plays a part, usually near the end of a protracted war when the target regime is near collapse. But the historical record makes clear that insurgents also employ acts of terrorism, sabotage, infiltration of the regime and various organizations, economic warfare, and omnipresent, often highly sophisticated, propaganda and political warfare aimed at building support

4. Lamborn, Arms of Little Value, 54.
for the insurgents or undercutting the regime. Given a politically vulnerable regime, this almost invisible activity is the true centerpiece of insurgency.

Third, because insurgencies can take place only under certain conditions and involve insurrection, and because the heart of any insurgency is its political basis, the chief weapons are intelligence and counterintelligence, subversion, propaganda and political warfare, passive resistance, sabotage, and time. Heavy weaponry and large conventional units contribute very little.

Insurgency stands Clausewitz on his head in that its centerpiece is the capture of the nation's people politically and psychologically, and the replacement of its government. The destruction of the country’s armed forces is achieved through the disintegration of a government rather than by defeating its army in battle. Indeed, the steady erosion of the existing regime from within merely paves the way for the dramatic photo op of tanks crashing through presidential gates. The war was already over long before this.5

The fundamental problem of counterinsurgents is that they must operate from diametrically opposed political bases from the insurgent. Insurgents fight because they demand change. By definition, counterinsurgents defend the status quo. This is a major handicap and places the US Army in a politically untenable position because—as the counterinsurgent—the Army finds itself defending a regime widely viewed as illegitimate and corrupt.

A glance at the many disadvantages facing a counterinsurgent force is illustrative of this handicap. Counterinsurgents face a daunting challenge.

First, they are caught in a trap, whereas defenders of the status quo must maintain many of the social and political ills that caused the insurgency, such as regime corruption and stupidity, elite privilege, and other perquisites. Claims of standing for “freedom and democracy” lose credibility if the people see only exploitation, graft, and malfeasance.

Second, to win, the only option for counterinsurgents is thoroughgoing reform, not the application of more heavy weaponry or the deployment of more American troops. Yet, the leaders of corrupt regimes quite often

are loath to make concessions because reform implies loss of their political and economic power.

Third, as the counterinsurgent force attempts to protect population centers and economic assets, it must do so at the cost of hobbling its offensive capabilities, thereby yielding the tactical initiative to insurgents. Troops are tied down in static defenses around assets that must be defended.

Fourth, the larger the counterinsurgent presence grows, the more likely it is that counterinsurgents will unwittingly stir up even more hatred and resistance, especially if they are of a markedly different culture. At the height of the Vietnam War, there was roughly one American military servicemember to every 38 Vietnamese.

Fifth, as counterinsurgents deploy ever more troops and equipment into the war zone, their costs spiral out of control, exceeding their means. The treasury faces the trilemma of cutting nonmilitary programs to pay war costs, rolling the printing presses, and raising taxes. Their strategy is undone because their political ends—especially vaguely defined political objectives—cannot be achieved within available means, or at any cost remotely commensurate with the value of any political goal.

It should be noted, almost parenthetically, that if our so-called ally has a “paper pretend” government—as was the case in Vietnam and Afghanistan—and is therefore bankrupt, the American taxpayer bears the entire cost of the war.

This, in a nutshell, is the counterinsurgency conundrum.

Let us look now at the South Vietnamese and Afghan regimes. There are those like Nagl who hold the opinion that the Viet Cong—and by extension the insurgency—had been destroyed in early 1968 during the Tet Offensive. This group contends that from Tet onward the war was a contest between conventional forces, with the issue decided solely on the field of battle. This view is incorrect for two reasons. First, the armed element constituted only part of the insurgency, and then only the visible part of a much broader politico-military contest. Political cadres continued their recruitment and indoctrination of peasants and many other Vietnamese long after our forces had retaken the Citadel.
in Hue. Sustained Viet Cong political action was the invisible, albeit ultimately lethal, part of the insurgency.

Second, the Saigon government’s ability to govern effectively outside the capital city was weak and steadily declining. Although Saigon and other major cities were cleared of armed insurgents in 1968, the provincial countryside was falling increasingly under the administrative control of insurgent cadres. The generals in power in Saigon had no effective means for dealing with the political and administrative challenges they faced from their enemies.

In Afghanistan, the situation was much the same. Instead of Viet Cong cadres, the mobilizing force consisted of highly reactionary mullahs. In tribal areas and remote villages, the government of Kabul’s presence was thin or nonexistent. Corruption and influence peddling tainted whatever justice there was in rural areas. In stark contrast to their counterparts sent out from Kabul, Taliban judges (qadis) administered justice swiftly and impartially. Indeed, some provincial governors were notoriously corrupt, quietly enriching themselves either from the Americans—or from the people. The Afghan army had some excellent soldiers, but many others participated unwillingly. Many went unpaid for months. Some Afghan soldiers turned on their trainers. Others fled to the Taliban with their weapons. The more territory the US Army and its NATO allies attempted to hold, the stronger was the reaction against farangi (“foreigners”), just as it had been in earlier times with the British and the Russians.

The Somalia misadventure ranks even below these examples of unsound policy making. It is not worthy of comment other than to say the Army deployment was a grotesque policy blunder.

Policymakers must have a clearly stated objective in mind and comprehensive knowledge of the country in which they contemplate military operations. But they face a dilemma; countries most vulnerable to insurgency are also the hardest to assist. There is an enormous temptation to rush in, sending troops to save a neither effective nor legitimate regime. This is a grave mistake. The Army is not the agent to bring about fundamental reform of a corrupt or inept regime.

A case in point is South Vietnam. Despite massive, expensive effort and the loss of 58,000 servicemembers (not counting the wounded and psychologically impaired), at the end of 10 years, the Saigon generals’ bankrupt, illegitimate, corrupt, and ineffective regime could not be saved. Would a 20- or perhaps 30-year American commitment have brought about different results? Nagl seems to think so. But an argument can be made that
the regime would have collapsed eventually due to its internal fatal flaws. The outcome would have been just the same—only the American taxpayer’s bill would have been higher and the number of American deaths greater.

If a government has lost its legitimacy in the eyes of the people, no amount of military force can regain that essential factor. Lipset describes four kinds of regimes: legitimate and effective, legitimate but ineffective, effective but illegitimate, and those that are neither legitimate nor effective (see table 1 below).

Table 1. Lipset’s Types of Regimes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regime Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Legitimate</td>
<td>Least vulnerable to insurgency, most stable, and highly likely to defeat an insurgent challenge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legitimate</td>
<td>Vulnerable to insurgency but capable of rallying most of the people most of the time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illegitimate</td>
<td>Vulnerable to insurgency; if the insurgents can capture the banner of legitimacy they will win</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illegitimate</td>
<td>Highly vulnerable to insurgency, least stable; the regime will collapse even with massive third-party aid</td>
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Political legitimacy and effectiveness are vital to a regime defending itself against insurgents, but it is also helpful to examine the two kinds of time affecting an insurgency.

It would appear Nagl misunderstands the differing value of time to the insurgent and the counterinsurgent. He does note the Taliban quip that “while Americans have all the watches, the Taliban has the time to wait them out.” But this is more than a joke. Regardless of the small size of an insurgent armed force, possession of the initiative determines the value of time. In a contest of endurance, if the insurgents have the initiative—and they usually do—then in relative terms they also have more time. This is because they may choose to delay the onset of their next campaign while threatening a variety of points held by the counterinsurgent. Put another way, the insurgent may choose to attack or fade away into the countryside and do nothing—but even inactivity on the insurgent’s part constitutes a threat. The counterinsurgent, however, must always be fully alert and prepared everywhere to meet a possible attack. Being constantly fully alert is tiring, psychologically draining, and costly. Each day that passes costs the Taliban or Viet Cong insurgent daily provisions, whereas the

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counterinsurgent force with its US troops and heavy weaponry bleeds the US Treasury for no appreciable gain.

Modern Western armed forces are exceedingly costly. In just a few weeks of conventional combat in Ukraine, the United States spent several billion dollars. Although the dollar cost per day is less in an insurgency, it still amounts to hundreds of millions when factoring in salaries, supplies, equipment, logistics, and many support activities necessary for a conventional force. Added to this sum would be the amount essentially subsidized for the troops and equipment of the bankrupt client regime.

Nagl’s “if only” wish that we had stayed longer in Vietnam and Afghanistan begs the question of a higher dollar cost and additional lives lost. But there is also another hidden cost. Prolonged stays in foreign lands amount to occupations in which we Americans basically direct the decisions and actions of a weak client state in what comes within a hair’s breadth of colonialism or imperialism. The Karzai and Ghani regimes in Afghanistan were no more independent of US guidance than the Najibullah regime was of Soviet direction. Given our historic anti-colonial stance regarding the former European empires, we must ask ourselves whether we would wish to maintain an indefinite semi-colonialist presence in third world countries. This would amount to establishing protectorates much like those of the French and British in the nineteenth century.

A word must be said in agreement with Nagl, General Jack Keane, and many others concerning the Department of Defense’s intentional destruction of valuable studies, documents, and after-action reports from both the Vietnam and Afghanistan campaigns. The clearing of shelves at the Pentagon Library and elsewhere in the Defense Department was egregious and short-sighted. We must learn from the past, not erase it.

We must think more profoundly about the nature of revolutionary warfare that seeks to overturn an existing regime and install a new government of the insurgents’ own choosing. Clausewitz nods to insurgency in chapter 26 of On War but considers it a useful adjunct to conventional operations. Arguably, he did not comprehend its deep nationalistic roots among the Spanish resisting French occupation and rejecting Napoleon’s brother, King Joseph, as an illegitimate (puppet) monarch.

Mao Zedong calls insurgency “the university of war.” Nagl refers to counterinsurgency as “the graduate school of war.” Clearly, much more brainpower than firepower must go into deciding upon a counterinsurgency campaign on behalf of an unstable client state. Acting as a counterinsurgent to an illegitimate regime invites unlimited human and financial costs—with a high probability of failure. In this regard, Clausewitz gives his famous directive to the policymaker on making war.

No one starts a war—or rather, no one in his senses ought to do so—without first being clear in his mind what he intends to achieve by that war and how he intends to conduct it. The former is its political purpose; the latter is operational objective. This is the governing principle which will set its course, prescribe the scale of means and effort which is required, and make its influence felt throughout down to the smallest operational detail.

Clausewitz brings us back to this salient point: the US Army has been sent abroad several times to accomplish missions for which it was neither designed nor intended. It could not win certain wars. The best the Army could hope for in those cases was to hold the line and possibly buy a little extra time for politically unstable client regimes.

The US Army serves the American people under the orders of democratically chosen leaders. Like a civilian police force, its motto might well be “to protect and to serve.”

But senior Army leadership and the leadership of our sister Services has another obligation to the American people: to be heard when policymakers with little knowledge of an unstable foreign country contemplate rushing the US Army to that country to “fix the problem.” That iron obligation is to speak truth to power and tell the elected leadership bluntly that sending young Americans to their deaths to defend predatory or corrupt paper governments is a crime against the American people.

This is the nexus of policy between the statesman and his military commander of which Clausewitz spoke. If a president thinks to send American soldiers to unstable alien lands for unclear purposes—and senior Army leadership merely salutes and says “yes, sir”—it betrays both the US Army and the American people.

9. Clausewitz, On War, bk. 8, chap. 2, 579.
G. L. Lamborn

G. L. Lamborn is a retired US Army Reserve full colonel and CIA officer with more than 40 years (1967–2013) of service to the American people. His duty stations included Vietnam, Korea, Iraq, Afghanistan, El Salvador, and other Third World hot spots. He is a specialist in insurgency and revolutionary warfare and the author of Arms of Little Value (Casemate, 2012), Jihad of the Pen (DIA, 2010), The People in Arms (DIA, 2009), and coauthor of To Blind the Eyes of Our Enemies (White Hart Publications, 2018). His latest book is Invisible: The Sino-Russian War to Bring Down America (White Hart Publications, 2022). Lamborn holds a bachelor of arts degree in history from Washington University in St. Louis and a master of arts degree in Chinese studies from the University of Washington in Seattle. He is an Air War College graduate.

The Author Replies

John A. Nagl

Keywords: victory, Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan, irregular warfare, Landpower

Many thanks to my old friend Larry Lamborn for several things, not least his long service to our nation fighting insurgencies both with the pen and with the sword. Larry is a retired Army Reserve colonel and 26-year CIA officer who served in Vietnam; he was practicing counterinsurgency while I was still wet behind the ears. It is thus quite flattering that he has taken so seriously my argument in my Autumn 2022 Parameters article, “Why America’s Army Can’t Win America’s Wars,” explaining why, in his view, “America’s Army Could Not Win America’s Irregular Wars.”

Like Alex’s response to my article, Colonel Lamborn begins with words of praise before lowering the hammer, arguing that my article “fails to consider that … [the American effort in Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan] … was doomed at its inception—not by anything that the Army did or did not do—but because of fundamental underlying political and cultural realities brushed aside by the [nation’s] policymakers.”
He continues, “the tasks assigned were beyond hope of success. . . . none of the failed campaigns could have been successful regardless of the doctrine followed, the weaponry employed, or the amount of time allotted.”

It is hard for me to imagine disagreeing more profoundly, about an issue of more importance, with someone I respect so much. Larry’s argument devalues military history, doctrine, even human agency itself. It also flies in the face of his own lifelong effort to understand, and to help others understand, the principles and course of rebellion and insurgency, and of efforts to mitigate and manage the same. Larry’s book *Arms of Little Value* is an ach-ing *cri de coeur* to help soldiers better understand the wars that have given the United States fits over his long lifetime. I believe, quite strongly, that Larry is wrong in his letter but right in his book and in his lifetime of work to help America understand counterinsurgency. The tasks assigned to the US Army in Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan were not beyond hope of success, and better doctrine, employment of weaponry, and dozens of other human choices would have increased the chances for success. Indeed, following Larry’s own advice is one of the things that would have helped!

Admittedly, none of these were easy wars to win. Larry is certainly correct that “the central issue is that in all three cases . . . the governments in power—if that term may be used—were inefficient and inept at best, and at worst, corrupt and often malign.” Those are precisely the sorts of places where the United States is likely to deploy armed forces in low intensity conflict, stability operations, operations other than war, counterinsurgency and foreign internal defense efforts, and irregular wars; there is little need to employ American arms in places where the governments are efficient and well-run! Instead, as Larry notes in his letter, “The countries that are most vulnerable to insurgency are those that are hardest to assist.” He might well have added, “and the ones to which we are most likely to deploy American arms.” All the more reason to have devoted significant time and effort to developing DOTMLPF to increase our ability to help governments afflicted by insurgency defeat their enemies and increase their legitimacy; the time to practice a reverse 4.5 somersault triple-twist gainer is well before you have to perform the dive in the Olympics.

Larry is correct again when he states that “The Army is not the agent to bring about fundamental reform of a corrupt or inept regime”—unless that regime governs a country that is important to US interests and is facing an insurgency, in which case the Army is the only agent that can operate in the country. No other US entity can operate
in conditions of such danger and uncertainty, although we can hope that it does so in support of an all-of-government effort with a gradually decreasing role for the Army and an increasing role for US civilian government agencies—and for the host nation’s own slowly developing security forces and its own agencies. This is, as Larry knows, an effort that may take decades, especially if the United States has tacitly supported coups against the government (as we did in Vietnam) or dismantled the government’s security forces (as we did in Iraq). Both were US policy failures that vastly increased the degree of difficulty of an already complex set of tasks.

And, there will be future policy failures that make more difficult future irregular wars in which US policymakers decide to engage American soldiers. This is a fact that sticks in Larry’s craw, and his paper rises to a crescendo when he argues that the senior Army leadership has an “iron obligation... to speak truth to power and tell the elected leadership bluntly that sending young Americans to their deaths to defend predatory or corrupt paper governments is a crime against the American people.” (emphasis his)

Here Larry is being unfair to recent senior Army leaders and hopelessly naïve in his expectations of the willingness of politicians to hear them speak truth to power. The invasion of Iraq on false intelligence and faulty logic in March 2003 shows exactly the sort of moral courage from a senior uniformed leader that COL Lamborn requests so urgently; Army Chief of Staff Eric Shinseki, a wounded Vietnam veteran and commander of the stability operation in Bosnia, correctly estimated that it would take “several hundred thousand” troops to stabilize Iraq in the wake of an invasion to topple Saddam Hussein in response to a question from House Armed Services Committee Chair Ike Skelton. General Shinseki’s informed, reasonable, and accurate estimate led Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz to retort in later testimony that the Army Chief of Staff was “wildly off the mark” and asked “Who could possibly think it would take more soldiers to occupy a country than to topple its government?”

Well, the guy who had led the American occupation of Bosnia, for one. But General Shinseki was cut off at the knees for espousing a (correct) military opinion that violated the political objectives of the Bush administration, and the biggest American foreign policy disaster since Vietnam was set in motion by political leaders who ignored the advice of senior military leaders doing exactly what Larry begs them to do. Political leaders have the right to be wrong; they have been before, and they will be again. When they are, military leaders should give their
best military advice, and then salute and carry out their orders, or resign their commissions. Hence the military must be ready to fight these kinds of wars from the beginning, rather than relearning the lessons of irregular war and counterinsurgency yet again, lessons that have already been paid for in American blood in the many irregular wars that have marked Larry’s long career of public service.

Even with all of the mistakes that were made by both political and military leaders early on, and in marked contrast to Larry’s argument, not only could the failed campaigns in Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan have been successful, but by the standards of these kinds of wars, at least two of them were successful when they were terminated prematurely by America’s political leaders, who can be as wrong about ending American military commitments as they often are about beginning them. The host-nation governments, supported by American airpower and a few thousand advisers, were holding the enemy at bay at an acceptable long-term cost in American blood and treasure in both Vietnam and Afghanistan when Washington decided to pull the plug on our support, leading to unimaginable devastation in both countries upon our ignominious withdrawal. Better doctrine and employment of weaponry (and all other elements of American power) would have made American arms more successful in these wars more quickly at a much lower cost in both blood and treasure and given political leaders more cause to allocate the time required for the creation of stable governments that act in broad accordance with US interests and values. Larry’s book, Arms of Little Value, his lifetime of work, and the conversation inspired in these pages by his misguided but heartfelt letter can all help contribute to better outcomes when next America’s Army is given the extraordinarily difficult task to help defeat an insurgency in our troubled world.

John A. Nagl

Hear our author provide further insights on the genesis article at: Decisive Point

Read the genesis article at: Parameters
Since the death of Mao Zedong in 1976 and the opening of China in 1978, China has been marching toward great-power status on par with the United States—with breathtaking results. The title of Clyde Prestowitz’s latest book, *The World Turned Upside Down*, aptly captures the impact of the rise of China and the high stakes involved for Western economies. Until recently, it was unclear what impact China’s economic development would have on the rest of the world. The emergence of China and its participation in the concert of nations were supposed to be blessings for peace and prosperity. They are starting to appear more like curses.

Fortunately, as we take stock of what has happened, we may be better able to deal with the predicament before us. Now that China has made it to the top of the agenda of the June 2021 G7 summit in England and was included in the final statement at the NATO summit in Brussels that same month, we may finally have a thorough discussion on what ails Western economies in the face of the Chinese juggernaut and what to do about it. The assessment and prescription that will emerge from such a discussion could decide whether the West as we know it can maintain its predominance in the world.

Author Clyde Prestowitz, a seasoned observer of Asia, has been building his expertise since the late 1960s. On the advice of his father, he pursued the study of Japan and subsequently joined the Foreign Service before working at the Department of Commerce. He was involved in negotiations with Japan over its trading practices in the 1980s. He details his views of Japanese commercial practices in the influential book *Trading Places* (Basic Books, 1988). He was identified with a small group of Japanese hands who rejected the traditional view of successful economic development found in neoclassical economic theory. Now, in *The World Turned Upside Down*, Prestowitz uses his expertise to describe China and the United States’ respective paths toward economic development and offer prescriptions to redeem the situation with China.

For Prestowitz, China’s defining element is its self-perception. The term *Zhongguo*—middle kingdom in English—centers China in the world. This perspective has fed China’s perception of itself as a uniquely important power and dominated the entire Chinese imperial period. The Chinese Communist Party’s assumption of power in October 1949 revived this China-centric perception with near-religious zeal. The differences between imperial and communist China can have dire consequences—Communist China can exact obedience and conformity unprecedented by imperial rule. China’s public-government relationship has allowed its government to reform and
direct various economic sectors in a manner that enhances state power and is at odds with the global community and various international regimes seeking greater integration involving give-and-take.

The failure to appreciate this reality was compounded by a misunderstanding of the origins of America’s path to economic development. In his extensive survey of the evolution of the United States’ economic policy making, Prestowitz begins with the early days of the Republic, quoting Adam Smith and David Ricardo. Like China did earlier, the United States made extensive use of mercantilist policies in the nineteenth century to build its economy. This fact was largely forgotten by the end of World War II, when the reconstruction of Europe and the need to respond to the Soviet threat led the United States to promote economic activity actively in the West and also in places like Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan. By the 1980s, as China was opening up, the United States was promoting a policy of engagement with China to integrate it in the world economy, undermine communist influence, and lead to liberalization and democratization. The application of this policy, however, suffered from a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of the Chinese state.

In the third and final part of *The World Turned Upside Down*, Prestowitz summarizes the evidence and offers proposals to manage the threat China poses to the current order. Taken in aggregate, these proposals would involve a cultural transformation on a level arguably unseen since the reform era under President Franklin D. Roosevelt in the 1930s. Some of Prestowitz’s suggestions are targeted at China in particular, but most of them involve domestic programs and a new vision of the compact between the state, the American people, and big business. Given the debates of recent years over a national health-care program and the mixed record in the attempts of the previous administration to force behavioral change in Chinese trade practices, it is difficult to maintain optimism about the United States’ ability to respond successfully to this new challenge. The lucidity of the sometimes unexpected and depressing picture that emerges nevertheless provides hope for the future.

**Partners of First Resort: America, Europe, and the Future of the West**

By David McKean and Bart M. J. Szewczyk

Reviewed by Dr. Scott Smitson, professor of geostrategy and transnational affairs, Joint Special Operations University, and lieutenant colonel (US Army, retired)

While the United States retracts from the Middle East and simultaneously positions itself for long-term strategic rivalry with China and Russia, the relative strength of the post–World War II international order—and America’s role in it—is once again a topic ripe for discussion in defense and foreign policy circles. *Partners of First Resort* assesses the utility of alliances and coalitions within this context. Written and published in the initial months of the Biden–Harris administration, it provides foundational knowledge on the history of transatlantic ties between the United States and Europe, the current status of relations,
and where the North Atlantic community should orient its future efforts. Part history lesson, part advocacy, part commentary, the book attempts to embody many things, yet is only somewhat successful in its execution.

Authors David McKean and Bart M. J. Szewczyk, seasoned policy veterans of transatlantic affairs, passionately argue it is in America’s best interest to optimize the depth and breadth of its strategic collaboration with Europe. Key to their argument is a comprehensive and consumable primer on the genesis and maturation of the liberal order following World War II and the outsized role the United States and Europe played in sustaining and benefiting from it. This section of the book is excellent. It outlines the history of the iterative growth of multinational institutions like NATO and the EU, fosters a greater appreciation for the establishment of the post-war order, and explains how that order ultimately succeeded against the Soviet threat. Additionally, the authors provide an in-depth analysis of the key events that shaped transatlantic relations in the dying days of the Warsaw Pact and the initial years of America’s “unipolar” moment. This contribution should be applauded, as events like the reunification of Germany, nuclear disarmament, and early NATO expansion in the Baltics were not foreordained, nor were they inconsequential.

The remainder of the book is adversely impacted by polemic attacks on certain presidencies at the expense of true objectivity. Although this tendency may be in part a function of the authors’ professional experience in past administrations, the borderline pejorative language detracts from their important—and, I believe, accurate—argument that American interests are best served when deeply integrated in European affairs. The narrative devices hinder what should be a significant scholarly contribution to canonical writings on the transatlantic community.

First, the authors are quick to condemn the behavior of former President Donald J. Trump toward Europe, conferring too much agency and explanatory power to the actions of a one-term president as the sole reason for weakened transatlantic ties. In reality, American presidents’ interactions with Europe have waxed and waned over time, depending on geopolitical circumstances, crises, and domestic political considerations. In many ways, the differences Presidents Barack Obama and George W. Bush had with Europe are downplayed, minimalized, or ignored, devoid of major domestic political analysis. This deficiency also reveals itself in select elements of the policy recommendations that close out the work.

Second, while much of the back half of the book praises American-European engagement during the Obama administration, in contrast to the more adversarial and transactional approach taken by Trump, there is little discussion concerning the huge impact of populism on the politics of both sides of the Atlantic and how it acts as a major impediment to greater transatlantic integration. From Trump in the United States to the push for Brexit by the UK Independence Party, the ever-present strength of Marine Le Pen’s National Front (Le Front National) party, and the rise of leaders in Eastern Europe like Viktor Orbán in Hungary, the politics of disenfranchisement among populist-sympathetic voters is just as important a factor in forecasting American-European relations as is any judgment or hagiography of a president. This element of future transatlantic relations is crucial, but it only receives cursory attention near the end of the book. There is also little mention of French President Emmanuel Macron’s strong push for the “strategic autonomy” of Europe—a major point of friction between the United States and select
European nations (like France), as some see this as weakening NATO over the long term (7–8).

Third, I constantly struggled to identify the book’s intended audience. While many policy recommendations are enlightened and meaningful (and would find traction in the beltway), like the idea of a new Atlantic Charter, it begs the question if this work was intended to influence the transition between administrations or exist on its merits. While the sections on historical analysis are ideal reading for university students, chapter 3 seems to place the preponderance of strategic drift between the United States and Europe solely during the Trump administration, when tensions emerged well before the 2016 election (84). Additionally, this judgment significantly underappreciates the scope and scale of enduring institutional coordination and collaboration that occurs—despite these tensions—between the United States and European nations, regardless of who occupies the White House.

The authors argue the transatlantic community needs a new vision grounded in “principled pragmatism,” with a nuanced understanding of strategic geopolitical context and understanding, and informed by an objective analysis of mutual strategic interests (88, 166). I agree. This diagnosis is only the beginning, however. It is the voting constituencies of nations on both sides of the Atlantic—the same constituents who elect the politicians who decide the budgets for foreign and defense policy initiatives—that will determine the long-term solvency of the transatlantic community.

It is difficult to see how much of the policy advocacy spelled out in Partners of First Resort will easily translate and resonate with US domestic political audiences—particularly the middle class. Of the entire American population, the middle class enables the kind of grassroots populism that views multinational institutionalism as anathema to America’s long-term interest. This audience—not necessarily established policy wonks and academics—needs to be informed and educated on the absolute importance of transatlantic relations.

**DEFENSE STUDIES**

**The Sailor: Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Transformation of American Foreign Policy**

By David F. Schmitz

Reviewed by Dr. Sarandis Papadopoulos, strategist, US Navy

Retrospectively, American’s foreign role seems to have witnessed a 1941 caesura. Before the attack on Pearl Harbor, the United States was a continental nation—holding a few insular colonies or territories—with US presidents who usually played minimal external roles. A small State Department managed international affairs—attended by equally lean Army, Navy, and Marine Corps units overseas, as a minority of citizens traveled or did business abroad. These conditions marked the post-1919 Paris Peace Conference era. Yet, by 1945, a series of changes had occurred,
transforming America’s foreign role into something unrecognizable. The United States joined international organizations and committed to defending its allies around the globe, actions backed by overseas militaries numbering in the hundreds of thousands. American noninterventionism—pejoratively termed “isolationism”—was gone, succeeded by robust internationalism. How did this change occur?

According to historian David F. Schmitz, President Franklin D. Roosevelt (FDR) anticipated a need and seized the initiative to craft this national shift. Contemporary Americans were uncommitted to a significant international role, having perceived benefit from US intervention in Europe’s Great War. FDR expected the 1930s economic crisis to menace global interests and the domestic way of life and extended America’s attention outward. While he sought to accommodate noninterventionists, FDR educated US citizens on the need to engage with the world and kept an eye out for opportune routes to navigate the rising tide of aggression and threat.

Before 1941, FDR’s changes meant embracing the “Good Neighbor Policy” of equal trade, respecting foreign sovereignty in Latin America, and tactically signing the 1935 and 1937 Neutrality Acts to embargo overseas arms sales, while also negotiating with nationalist-socialist Germany, fascist Italy, and Imperial Japan (preface). The last step of this policy—then called appeasement—had a meaning other than what the term now represents. At the time, appeasement referred to the negotiation of compromises with aggressive states, consideration of whether to empower less assertive foreign elites, avoidance of drawing the communist Soviet Union into wider European affairs, and evasion of war in general (69). American domestic opinion, before and after the 1936 elections, was ardently neutral, and FDR needed time to change it. The president also modified his stance as new crises unfolded. For example, he initially attempted to maintain neutrality during the Spanish Civil War but later accepted the need to prepare the armed services as deterrents or for war.

During wartime, FDR could rely on greater national support. Even before the attack on Hawaii, a close relationship with Great Britain, resistance against aggressive states through the authorization of Lend-Lease, defense of values (the Four Freedoms), and US rearmament had all become acceptable to his constituents. FDR also sought international support. In order to ensure victory over Nazi Germany at a realistic cost to the United States, he had to secure an alliance with Joseph Stalin’s Soviet Union. Later, FDR committed America to the United Nations, which he believed would tie together the victorious Allies in peacetime and prevent another war, extend American values overseas, as exemplified by the Good Neighbor Policy, and manage the decolonization of European empires. According to Schmitz, these accomplishments, realized after FDR’s death, make the president “the most important and most successful foreign policymaker in the nation’s history” (242).

Schmitz relies on FDR’s archived letters and speeches and records of his wartime meetings with Winston Churchill, Chiang Kai-shek, and Stalin. His choice to use public pronouncements to understand foreign policy—acts often performed behind closed doors—may seem odd, but these sources show the gradual evolution of the president’s ideas and language. FDR sustained his foreign policy leadership by continually remaining slightly in advance of evolving public opinion. Multilateral meetings in Argentia, Cairo, Casablanca, Quebec, Tehran, Washington, and Yalta sustained wartime goals while attempting to bind the Allies in the post-victory order. At the Yalta Conference meetings, FDR sought to keep Stalin in the wartime alliance by delaying
agreement on Poland’s postwar alignment. Although the results of those meetings proved unsustainable, Soviet troops in Eastern Europe and the president’s subsequent death probably prevented a better outcome (227).

*The Sailor* does have flaws. Readers might fault Schmitz for placing the heaviest focus on relations with Europe and not East Asia, but FDR himself accepted a grand strategy of Germany first: Nazism threatened America more than Imperial Japan. Additionally, the metaphor in the book’s title and occasional mention of FDR tacking through the hazardous waters of the political environment are not compelling descriptors of the president. He was a yacht sailor, but the maritime comparisons are too limited in scope. Readers might expect to encounter information about the prioritization of naval investment, given FDR’s background as former assistant secretary of the Navy, or at least reference to FDR’s durable commitment to rearmament at sea (which began well before World War II), but they will not. Instead, Schmitz presents all military spending as though the Department of Defense existed before 1947. This gap matters because FDR remained committed foremost to the Navy, and he understood the longer lead times needed to create the oceangoing forces for World War II and the postwar order. This last objection is minor.

In sum, *The Sailor* is literate and accessible. It successfully shows readers how the greatest shift in American foreign policy took place and how FDR’s efforts realigned American attention for the long term. A self-contained continental republic no more, the United States became, and remains, a globally interested nation with the following foci, which Schmitz highlights: international organizations, free trade, and military power in concert with other nations (at least when they agree on goals). Contemplating FDR’s ability to make such vital changes and resource them, despite the strongest headwinds contemporary domestic politics could pose, will provide readers food for thought on how to sustain an American internationalist mindset.

**Military History**

*Land Warfare since 1860: A Global History of Boots on the Ground*

by Jeremy Black

Reviewed by Dr. Jason W. Warren

Prolific historian Jeremy Black’s *Land Warfare since 1860: A Global History of Boots on the Ground* is an original and useful overview of land warfare, but it is too ambitious for the goals he sets out to accomplish in the preface and introduction. These types of synopsis histories of large swaths of time—as is the case with the author’s other offerings as part of Rowman & Littlefield’s series on the histories of the domains of warfare (air, land, sea)—are best delivered modestly. In this case, Black aims to achieve his deep analysis of multiple land warfare issues from 1860–2018 in under 300 pages. This leads to areas in the volume that lack in-depth analysis.
Although a diverse and interesting account of little-known wars such as the War of the Pacific (1879–83) of Bolivia, Chile, and Peru—featuring such battles as San Juan and Chorrillos and Miraflores—which contextualizes the standard Western military focus, it proves too much to achieve his broader objectives (28–29). This includes the idea that there is “no one essential character of warfare,” which “invalidates notions of clear-cut developmental patterns, as well as the related clichés, such as total war, industrial war, and wars among the people” (viii). He also addresses what he views as the historiography’s shortcomings on the obsolescence of land warfare given the current lens of failure with the wars of post-9/11: an overly Western focus that keys on occidental great powers; gapping time between Western wars, which leads to misinterpretations; and the explanatory factor that more means and nuclear capabilities usually determine the winner of conflicts.

There is more. Black seeks to critique the “End of History” thesis from the fall of the Soviet Empire, the focus on technical military history compared to people’s war, counterinsurgency (COIN, also known as compound or hybrid) war, differing Western Services’ views on war, the levels of war (tactical, operational, strategic), and a concept of time where there really is only a fleeting present, and hence the past determines the near future (viii, 1–10).

This overreach inevitably leads to strange apportionments of limited space, such as four pages spent on mapping in World War I out of a total of 30 pages detailing the conflict (82–86 out of 57–87; see also Professor Peter Mansoor’s review, Journal of Military History 83, no. 3, July 2019, on apportionment). There is a tendency toward a sympathetic view of British military history with a synopsis of the Dunkirk evacuation coming in for two pages of World War II coverage and an overly flattering portrayal of General Bernard Montgomery’s abilities during 1944–45 (146). Black does not mention British COIN failure in southern Iraq during the 2003 Iraq War while tweaking the American effort there, which ultimately witnessed the Iraqi Army—backed by US enablers—pacify the Basra haven of insurgents the British left behind (215–16). Further, there is no consistent definition of land warfare that could have lent more cohesion to this wide-ranging book. Military doctrine on landpower, for instance, would have been a useful starting point for thematic development, and its evolution from 1860 may have been monitored in a more holistic fashion.

To Black’s credit, he adequately addresses a number of his goals. He is particularly effective in undermining the Western lens—especially with his coverage of China. This is useful given the United States’ current standoff with this near-peer power. Black is at his best when dissecting combined arms warfare, particularly in the World Wars. Black concludes with a useful chapter on the future of land warfare, in which he makes a solid case for its continued utility and offers useful frameworks for thinking about it (233–44). Land Warfare is more of analysis of various historical interpretations rather than a standard history of what happened in the ground domain during the modern and post-modern eras. Had Black stuck to this with a consistent theme or two, this book would have been an excellent history for such a series. As it stands, it is still very useful for students of military history and military officers seeking a brief coverage of historical events and major ideas on the topic of land warfare.
Within *The US Volunteers in the Southern Philippines*, John Scott Reed, associate professor of history at the University of Utah, studies in detail how the United States raised, maintained, and employed a volunteer force to subdue resistance in the Visayas and Mindanao regions of the Philippines from 1899–1901. This comprehensive, heavily referenced history leans on official Army reports, congressional inquiries, and military policy and doctrine. It represents the author’s important archival effort and contribution to the topic of counterinsurgency as a whole and provides an increased understanding of the mobilization of militias for foreign occupation.

Reed efficaciously argues the US approach to counterinsurgency during this period included incentives for Filipinos to accept US occupation and strong deterrents for resistance. On the one hand, enticements included opportunities for participation in representative government, education for children, employment through roadbuilding, and medical vaccinations. The United States also offered immunity to guerillas who turned themselves in—a strategy that curtailed violent means of resistance. On the other hand, coercive punishments included confinement, banishment, or execution—not to mention the loss of land or business interests. Infamously, the United States also used water torture to elicit intelligence. In general, the carrot-and-stick approach—enforced by control measures—worked against stifling opposition, particularly in towns and barrios where the US Volunteers were garrisoned.

Most of the book reviews the Army’s implementation and operation of the US Volunteers militia system. Meticulously organized, the book is arranged by chapters covering the organization, morale, medical matters, and discipline of the regiments. Reed identifies the unification of local state militias into a national armed force with a common culture and ideology as one of the chief challenges. The author successfully argues that the coalescence of the US Army’s doctrine, policy, and code of conduct facilitated the indoctrination of the Volunteers.

Another major obstacle Reed addresses is the control of rampant illness in the United States, as the once-dispersed militias began to aggregate there, and in the Philippines, as US troops faced foreign diseases. To combat this problem, the US Army increased the number of active-duty and contract doctors to implement preventative healthcare. Most of these part-time soldiers conducted their duties with diligence and endured the harsh conditions of service in the Philippines, which Reed attributes to their shared concepts of masculinity and patriotism. Indeed, it is remarkable that the United States succeeded in its imperialist ambitions with volunteers, most of whom had little prior military experience and had never traveled outside their own states.
While extremely useful in its elaboration on the implementation of a US volunteer system for the purposes of foreign occupation, this study provides little insight into the Philippine resistance, instead focusing singularly on US forces. Diverting attention from the complexity of the resistance movements, Reed characterizes the many ethnolinguistic groups fighting US occupation as “nationalists.” In fact, other than the Tagalogs, most groups fought the United States for local and tribal reasons, which the author spends no time detailing (8). Additionally troubling is Reed’s statement that “the Filipino people had no tradition of sustained resistance to foreign domination” (1). This idea has been countered by many modern scholars who have cited continuous forms of Philippine resistance to outside influence, especially on the islands of Leyte, Mindanao, Panay, and Samar (the primary geographic regions discussed in the study) (1). For a comprehensive picture of the violent struggle over the Philippines during this period, readers must supplement their research with other sources.

Although Reed insists his work has no lessons for modern warfare, I recommend this book to professional military leaders and international policy specialists. I also recommend this book to infantry officers, who might enjoy the history offered on small-unit tactics used to counter guerillas in a tropical climate. It is an excellent case study on the unique US approach to counterinsurgency and the incentive-based method which continues to influence policy and tactics. Additionally, the tactics used to quell the rebellion and to keep US forces free from disease remain relevant.

**Germantown:**

*A Military History of the Battle for Philadelphia, October 4, 1777*

by Michael C. Harris

Reviewed by Rev. Dr. Wylie W. Johnson, US Army War College class of 2010

Michael C. Harris’s second readable and well-researched volume in his Revolutionary War history of the battle at Germantown, Pennsylvania, studies the summer 1777 British campaign to capture and defend the colonial capital city, Philadelphia, and end the American Revolution. The book continues the saga of colonial General George Washington’s on-the-job training in senior military command. The fledgling, ill-equipped colonial forces’ surprising and unforeseen second victory against the world’s most powerful professional army caused European powers to take strategic notice (xi).

The book’s nice arrangement begins with 28 brief biographies to acquaint readers with familiar and unfamiliar major characters involved in the military campaign. Harris then narrates the larger strategic overview of the Philadelphia Campaign in the first chapter. He addresses what prompted the second British attack on Philadelphia and the colonialist response. Harris includes numerous helpful maps and photos of landmarks. He goes to great lengths to identify modern locations (such as roads, intersections, and buildings) of the eighteenth-century battles. This exceptional
scholarship helped me—a longtime resident of this region—reconcile the incredible differences between 1777 terrain and 2022 structures.

General William Howe, the commander-in-chief of the British Army in North America, had two options for the summer campaign. His first option was to go north from New York City and link up with his forces descending the Hudson River from Canada—effectively cutting off the head of the rebellion and isolating New England. Howe's other options was to go south, seize the colonial capital, Philadelphia—given the southern colonies' perceived loyalty to the Crown—proceed up the Hudson, join General John Burgoyne's forces, deprive the colonies of the middle states, cut off New England, and quell the rebellion. This ambitious plan was stymied, however, by arrogance, logistics, weather, and Washington.

The story of an outclassed, poorly equipped, and semi-professional (at best) colonial army reeling from a major defeat at Brandywine River parallels this one. In that battle's aftermath, colonial and Crown forces maneuvered for advantage while fighting some small engagements. Washington faced a huge strategic problem, including the protection of his logistical supply bases in Reading and Lancaster and of the colonial capital. Washington made the expedient but deadly political choice to protect his bases and relinquish the capitol.

Howe could not survive without his own logistical base—an armada of 265 deepwater ships commanded by his brother, Admiral Richard Howe—so he chose to occupy Philadelphia. The colonial river fortifications obstructing the Delaware compelled General Howe, who was in possession of one of the largest Western cities, to divide his superior occupation force into a security cordon: north, west, and south. Part of this force cleared the Delaware River to solve the resupply problem, which resulted in the Crown having about 9,000 British and German mercenary troops positioned northeast to face the colonial threat.

Washington's active spy network in the city kept the general well-informed of the British dispositions. Washington developed an “all-in” plan to divide his Continental regulars and various militia forces into four offensive columns. He estimated his numbers superior to the distributed British force emplaced at Germantown. Each of the columns would have to march all night for about 20 miles on parallel roads and then launch simultaneous surprise attacks at dawn—with no apparent resupply plan. Washington knew his army might have to flee if defeated and sent the baggage train to Bethlehem, Pennsylvania—a high-risk plan even by today's standards. Amazingly, he nearly pulled it off.

Many compounding factors obstructed success. Washington's army had exhausted its ammunition in the previous battle. In the interim, each soldier and artillery crew was restocked from scratch, but there did not seem to be a plan for resupply; the army was operating on the margin. Dense fog arose through the night, which inhibited attackers and defenders. Another hindrance included the partial loss of the element of surprise, despite the poor, though credible, British communication of an impending colonial attack. Finally, distance stood in the way. Colonialist forces had to tramp nearly 20 miles there and back—and give battle for 4 to 6 hours—all within about 24 hours.

At first, the plan succeeded. The colonials coordinated surprisingly well as they initiated the attack against the Crown's surprised, unprepared, and overwhelmed forces. The colonial force had the solid initiative over the battlefield. British forces retreated into the tiny but sturdy village of Germantown. Today, Germantown lies
in a blue-collar, urban, section of northwestern Philadelphia. In colonial times, it lay at the rural outskirts of the city settled by German immigrants who built stone homes—each house equivalent to a mini-fortress. West of Germantown was one such building named Cliveden.

During the retreat, British Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Musgrave took parts of three platoons of his 40th Regiment of Foot into Cliveden, which had a two-foot-thick stone front wall, to make their stand. Colonial forces enveloped them as the British fell into Germantown proper. There, Washington’s inexperience turned the tide of battle against himself. He made the fateful decision to launch an attack at a single building rather than to isolate that impediment and continue pursuing the retreating enemy. Up to that point, the battle had been won. This action stalled Washington’s attack and turned the initiative to the British.

Harris concludes the study with a thoughtful epilogue, three appendices—including a thorough Order of Battle—and a final index. The book will provide a useful and readable study for the military historian seeking to walk the ground with Washington and his forces. I especially appreciated the in-depth discussions of the various armament, forces, personalities, and political considerations involved. Coupled with Harris’s prior volume, Brandywine (Savas Beatie, 2014), this book makes a thorough study of the 1777 Philadelphia Campaign and would be a worthy addition to any library.

The U.S. Navy and Its Cold War Alliances, 1945-1953
by Corbin Williamson

Reviewed by Dr. Nicholas Prime, postdoctoral fellow, Army Strategic Education Program, US Army War College

To label this book a timely work of history would understate its potency. United States relations with the United Kingdom and its anglophone former colonies—namely, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand—have maintained relevance in US foreign policy since World War I, but the countries’ naval relationships have not had such relevance since the precise 1945–53 period Corbin Williamson explores.

September 2021 saw the United States revitalize its political-military and military-to-military relations with Australia and the United Kingdom while the parties eyed the Indo-Pacific region’s shifting political dynamics. The sudden announcement of the AUKUS trilateral agreement and the Australian pursuit of nuclear submarines with the support of the United States and the United Kingdom—at the expense of the planned purchase of French conventional submarines—makes Williamson’s book an invaluable reflection on the history of such endeavors. The kinds of challenges arising from balancing national interests in bilateral and multilateral relationships are deeply embedded throughout Williamson’s work.

Williamson begins with a concise, helpful backstory of anglophone states’ naval relations prior to and during World War II, but he places his work’s principal focus on the immediate post-war years leading into the Korean War. Eschewing a simple
chronological narrative, Williamson layers his chapters to examine critical components foundational to fostering and sustaining interoperability at sea. Williamson balances this approach by providing readers with a macro-level context of the diplomatic and political relations between heads of state combined with an adaptation of Paul M. Kennedy’s “History from the Middle” approach. The latter approach provides readers with a valuable understanding of the effects of grandiose statements and intentions of senior policymakers on naval effectiveness in wartime. The book shows a range of influence from famous figures—such as Winston Churchill, Harry S. Truman, Bernard L. Montgomery, Dwight D. Eisenhower, Chester W. Nimitz, and John A. Collins—and lesser-known mid-career naval officers—such as Stephen Jurika Jr., former US naval attaché to Australia. Williamson highlights the ability of middle management to help or hinder the grand ambitions of the most senior leaders.

In later chapters, Williamson explores essential aspects of fostering and maintaining cooperation between navies to make combined operations at sea possible, let alone effective. Williamson begins with another top-down discussion of efforts made to collaborate on global naval planning—no small challenge given the divergence of interests and simple challenge of geography. Williamson reminds readers of the near constancy of the struggle to weigh US security focus between Europe and Asia—from the attack on Pearl Harbor through the Cold War—in a fashion any observer of current events can appreciate.

From here, the book explores the seemingly mundane but consequential issues of personnel, equipment standardization, and training and education nuances—each of which comes with myriad challenges worthy of reflection by anyone seeking to understand contemporary allied and partner collaboration challenges. The Korean War functioned as a test case for the application of practical avenues for the development and maintenance of a functional level of at-sea collaboration. Although Williamson forgoes a detailed campaign analysis, he provides strong, compelling evidence of where efforts made in 1945–50 have shaped the US Navy’s operations with partner navies off the Korean peninsula.

Most importantly—and to his credit—Williamson does not simplify his narrative as a well-varnished, shining success story. He balances his narrative of the practical, ground truth of alliance relations. By some measures, the book’s most valuable contribution as a historical work lies in its present relevance. Williamson explores unvarnished challenges accompanying shifting interests and contingent on trust. These challenges offer valuable lessons to astute observers of current events and present or future practitioners.

In March 2021, Admiral Philip S. Davidson, the then commander of US Indo-Pacific Command, offered a pronounced statement of concern before the Senate Armed Services Committee regarding the risk of conflict in the Pacific, which he expects to peak in 5 to 10 years. The accuracy of Davidson’s “window” aside, so long as the United States perceives the Chinese Communist Party agenda as a threat to regional stability, it must remain cognizant of the lessons learned from the period Williamson covers. In particular, the United States must appreciate the delicate balance of interests in multi-lateral alliance relations with regard to concerns about trust and the sharing of precious knowledge, information, and technical development—more tightly guarded now as technological complexity has exploded over the last 70 years. Williamson provides a valuable contribution to the field of history and a cogent
reminder of history’s ability to speak with uncanny cognizance and candor to the challenges of today and tomorrow.

**The Road Less Traveled:**
*The Secret Battle to End the Great War, 1916–1917*

by Philip Zelikow

Reviewed by Dr. Dean Nowowiejski, Ike Skelton Distinguished Chair for the Art of War, Command and General Staff College

Through haunting depictions of forfeited opportunities, Philip Zelikow reveals in his gripping history, *The Road Less Traveled: The Secret Battle to End the Great War, 1916–1917*, just how close several diplomats came to ending World War I two years before its resolution. Zelikow exhausts American, British, and German sources in a new exploration of the conversations and opinions of would-be peacemakers. He mines diplomatic records, secret communications, and the diaries and papers of many participants to recreate a coherent sequence of events—at times evoking a feeling of being in the room with or in the minds of the protagonists during key discussions. With his rich archival study and ingenious recombination of documents, Zelikow relates a thorough, chronological tale of incompetence, missed signals, and misunderstandings in World War I.

This piece of essential reading for the defense community makes a convincing case for the potential to reach—or squander—lasting peace through diplomacy. Zelikow emphasizes the criticality of making peace as a part of making war. Through his narration, he shows disastrous consequences follow when military leaders lack awareness of diplomatic and political circumstances or work to thwart political leadership. He also brings into focus what happens in war when all the instruments of national power are not accounted for and when economic factors constrain the ability to wage war.

Zelikow—who holds two professorships of history and governance at the University of Virginia—has unique qualifications because of his lifetime of achievement as a diplomat. He understands the potential of diplomacy, how to set conditions, negotiation, agreement, armistice, treaties, and how to achieve peace. Looking through the lens of diplomat and historian, he understands the minds and conversations of the historical figures, appreciates what should have been done, and recognizes the wasted opportunity for an early end to the war.

In this drama, Zelikow features President Woodrow Wilson and Edward House, his trusted adviser, as principal actors in the United States. Germany and Britain looked to Wilson, the then leader of the most significant neutral power, to help start the process for peace, especially given Wilson controlled Britain’s purse strings. Next to Wilson, House had the most significant chance to help nations avoid further bloodshed, despite having no official governmental role. It is amazing that a figure with no office and no State Department position would help determine,
through his own inclinations and failures, such consequential wartime decisions. Yet, House stepped into this role because Wilson did not trust anyone else—including the then Secretary of State Robert Lansing—to help him through the secretive peace process. House served as Wilson’s private counselor and go-between, thereby shielding the introverted president from wider personal engagement with either side. Wilson’s failure to execute at such a consequential moment—due to his incompetence and botched choice of a confidante—is the story’s sorriest revelation.

Other key actors include German Chancellor Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg, who staved off German militarists for months. Another important German was Count Johann von Bernstorff, the competent German ambassador to the United States, who signaled German readiness for peace. Unfortunately, his signals were lost in transmission due to House’s limitations.

Significant British actors include Prime Minister Herbert Henry Asquith, Foreign Secretary Edward Grey, David Lloyd George (Asquith’s successor), and other members of Asquith’s War Committee. Asquith and his allies pursued peace, but George’s rise to power and House’s misreading of the British willingness for a ceasefire thwarted their efforts. Under George—who kept the initial path to peace open—the window of opportunity for peace talks closed. Britain’s financial weakness, its correlated high susceptibility to American influence, and the rise to power of Generals Erich Ludendorff and Paul von Hindenburg provide a backdrop to the failed opportunity to end the war sooner. The ascent of Ludendorff and von Hindenburg resulted in Germany’s declaration of unrestricted submarine warfare on February 1, 1917, and ended the chance to come to a conflict-free agreement among nations until later.

Others have explored the broad aspects of this failed effort for peace—the late 1916 secret German attempt has long since been publicized—but Zelikow has the distinction of showing how often key figures could have concluded World War I before 1918. Zelikow resurrects key actors in a pathos filled reconstruction of consequential interactions. Zelikow’s illumination of this real chance for peace stands in stark relief when contemplated with all that occurred and, perhaps, all that could have been avoided after January 1917: the American entry into the war; the casualties and destruction on both sides in 1917 and 1918; the collapse of the Russian, Austro-Hungarian, German, and Ottoman empires and their accompanying revolutions; the failed Treaty of Versailles; and the Treaty of Versailles’s relationship to World War II.
Ever since Bernard Brodie attempted to explain our failure in Vietnam in his War & Politics (Macmillan, 1973), scholars and practitioners—recognizing the past often acts as prologue—have probed the Vietnam War for insights into better ways to wage war. W. R. Baker, a US Army intelligence analyst during the Vietnam War, has added to the ever-growing body of analysis with *Break in the Chain*. Part memoir and part historical account, the book is a welcome addition to scholarly and popular literature on the jungle conflict.

Baker begins by recounting his journey from “army brat to basic training” and then to his deployment in Vietnam (5). Readers will feel as if they are listening to a grandfather describe his life’s story to his grandson seated on his lap. This account includes both serious discussions—for example, in “The Barn,” where Baker learned map reading and mapmaking as part of his military training—and more lighthearted anecdotes, such as soldiers playing poker played in Vietnam (13, 21). Although ancillary to his overall theme of the Easter Offensive, the introductory chapters add a personal touch to the book.

In the next two sections, Baker’s extensive knowledge and firsthand account of the events surrounding the Easter Offensive shine. This book is a truly comprehensive tactical history of the attack and a magisterial culmination of decades-long research and study. Baker’s unparalleled work traces the origins of the Easter Offensive to Operation Lam Son 719, which he notes gave the North Vietnamese the idea and confidence to launch a massive offensive action. He documents the North’s buildup along the border and highlights the goals they hoped to accomplish by launching the surprise attack, in a vivid play-by-play of the battle only available from a firsthand account.

As to the book’s subtitle, *Why the Easter Offensive Should Have Turned Out Differently*, Baker’s thesis remains unchanged from his articles published in the 1990s. Despite reliable intelligence indicating heavy North Vietnamese buildup and a large offensive operation, US and South Vietnamese commanders ignored those warnings (71). Baker specifically points to three failures of the decisionmakers: “deferring to a command hierarchy, ‘stove-piping’ intelligence, and relying on one form of intelligence” (71). He notes a similar failure occurred during the Battle of the Bulge. In particular, US and South Vietnamese leaders ignored vital human intelligence—especially intelligence provided by a “usually reliable source”—which revealed the North Vietnamese Army’s switch to conventional operations in 1972 (73). He writes that in ignoring “the evidence of [photographic intelligence] PHOTINT, [signals intelligence] SIGINT, and [human intelligence] HUMINT collections, the major field and national commands displayed either complete ignorance, incompetence, or deliberate malfeasance towards what was about to take place on the battlefields” (158). What accounts for the command failure? Baker suggests it was “that
the United States was too much in a hurry to leave South Vietnam and that shifting responsibility was the order of the day” (159).

Although Baker does not present a large, theoretical deep dive into intelligence failures and surprise attacks, there is much to admire about his thesis. He shies away from the conventional wisdom of surprise attacks, which insists failure to anticipate attacks is caused by a lack of imagination or the inability to connect the dots (a thesis popularized by Roberta Wohlstetter). Instead, he notes the best intelligence in the world is meaningless without a receptive and captive audience who can issue orders to act. Erik J. Dahl expounds on a nearly identical thesis in his book *Intelligence and Surprise Attack* (Georgetown University Press, 2013). In *Break in the Chain*, Baker presents an important case study in how failure to push aside preconceived notions and unwillingness to listen to intelligence reports can have disastrous consequences. If only we would learn our lesson.

Two critical points should be raised. First, readers will find it hard to overlook Baker’s bias. Written from “the perspective of the only trained US Army Intelligence Analyst in I Corps” who reported on the North’s buildup and possible invasion, the book represents a case of self-exoneration (cover). Because Baker was intimately involved in the intelligence surrounding the Easter Offensive, he is able to shift blame easily from himself and his fellow analysts and onto his superiors. This point does not discredit his account and thesis—he may very well be correct—but readers should be aware of this strong bias. Second, a heavier editing hand could have enhanced the book’s quality. Grammar and syntax issues throughout make for an occasionally slow and uncomfortable read.

Overall, Baker’s book is a valuable addition to Vietnamese history and historiography and intelligence literature. It is an impressive tactical history with a message that should be heeded sooner rather than later.
Illicit Money: Financing Terrorism in the 21st Century

by Jessica Davis

Reviewed by Elizabeth Weakley, MBA, CGMA, vice president, Anti-Money Laundering and Suspicious Activity Reports Data Management and Quantitative Analysis at Bank of New York Mellon Corporation (BNY Mellon)

Jessica Davis writes that the objective of her book *Illicit Money* is to “guide academics and practitioners in understanding terrorist financing” by providing a “framework for analysts of terrorist financing . . . [and] a theory from which to predict how terrorist groups, cells, and individuals will finance their activities” (2). She achieves this goal by providing well-researched historical examples that support the different facets of her proposed framework. *Illicit Money* and the knowledge provided within it will benefit both newcomers and those already entrenched in the world of counterterrorism financing, whether it be through tangible examples of the procuring of funds or through a new way of approaching terrorist financing as a business study and understanding the vertical integration techniques terrorist organizations use to operate.

The book is thoughtfully laid out: first, with an explanation of how terrorist organizations, cells, and individuals raise money; next, with an explanation of the use, storage, management, and movement of that money; and, finally, with an explanation of the link between past, emerging, and future terrorist financing methods—and how to disrupt them.

Davis analyzes 55 terrorist organizations, 18 plots, and 32 attacks in a quantitative analysis for readers. The figures and charts presented throughout the book provide depth to this analysis—however, readers will better appreciate her discussions of actual events. Davis references supporting research from scholars in this area and utilizes her past employment experience with the Canadian Security Intelligence Services and her time at the Financial Transactions and Reports Analysis Centre of Canada to provide as well-rounded a study of terrorist financing as any currently available.

Davis first walks readers through the ways in which terrorist organizations, cells, and individuals source funds for their operations. She establishes a framework here for distinguishing operational activities from organizational activities. Davis’s breakdown is an effective tool for unraveling the sources, use, and movement of funds. If investigators were to focus strictly on operational funding for an attack, for instance, they would limit the areas in which they would be able to identify the source or use of funds for more expensive organizational costs. The first section of the book also conveys that shared ideologies are not the only common threads among those providing funds to terrorist organizations. From state sponsorship to a common social identity originating from shared geography, culture, language, ethnicity, grievance, or religion, many factors drive those who help support terrorist
organizations, both financially and otherwise. Davis also addresses the fine line between voluntary donations and extortion or other rackets.

In supporting her proposed framework, Davis highlights the stereotypes or common misconceptions that may interfere when investigating the financing of terrorism. For example, she clearly explains the confusing influence of the media's veiling of certain terrorist organizations as drug cartels. Davis explains that these terrorist organizations are more involved in taxation and extortion than the actual movement of drugs.

The book then delves into an interpretation of terrorist organizations as global business enterprises. This supports the author's goal in setting up a framework for an analytical approach toward these organizations. Davis clearly defines the businesslike importance of appreciating local resources—such as human, environmental, and geographical—and how these develop the scope and methods of business operations. Familiarity with a region's resources—whether illicit or legal—is a key starting point to understanding financing opportunities to the terrorist organization.

*Illicit Money* details the sophistication of some of the larger terrorist financing schemes that operate with a near-corporate strategy of diversification through taxation, extortion, and donations. This strategy requires bookkeeping capabilities to manage the stream of financing and account for organizational costs, salaries, and training expenses. Davis notes some regions require strategies to enable terrorists to operate within the same "market" as other terrorist organizations while maintaining their funding sources and occurrences where one terrorist organization will provide assistance in the form of money or weapons to another, seemingly unrelated one.

The final section rounds out the book by detailing approaches to counterterrorism and the overlap in methods needed to ensure its effective implementation. This section also elucidates many current shortcomings within the counterterrorism realm. Davis stresses the need for public and private initiatives to work together and share information and tools. Challenges also emerge from developments and changes within terrorist organization operations—from in the rise of extremism to the use of bitcoin and social media. Davis notes that, while the Internet has benefited terrorist organizations by allowing them to reach a broader audience, the digital trail could prove useful in unwinding financing methods.

Ultimately, Davis successfully shines a light on a broad topic and supports her analysis with tangible, historical events. She provides a balance of details without losing readers in her presentation of statistics. This book would serve well as a tool for anyone hoping to become involved in the prevention of terrorist financing. Davis's proposed framework helps develop the mindset of readers to approach the understanding of terrorist financing in a new and robust way.
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File Type
Text must be provided in a single MS Word document (.docx).

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Charts, graphs, and photographs may be provided to clarify or amplify the text. Tables must be presented in the body of the Word document. Microsoft-generated charts and graphs must be submitted in Excel. Photos must be provided as .jpg images of not more than 9MB(at 300 dpi). If any table, chart, graph, or photograph has been previously published, written permission from the copyright holder to republish the content must be included with the submission.

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