

The US Army War College Quarterly: Parameters

Manuscript 3210

Review and Reply: On “Why America’s Army Can’t Win America’s Wars” (part 2)

G. L. Lamborn

John A. Nagl

Follow this and additional works at: <https://press.armywarcollege.edu/parameters>

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

G. L. Lamborn
©2023 G. L. Lamborn

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

1. John A. Nagl, “Why America’s Army Can’t Win America’s Wars,” *Parameters* 52, no. 3 (Autumn 2022): 7, <https://press.armywarcollege.edu/parameters/vol52/iss3/3>.

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.² 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.³

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

2. Seymour Martin Lipset, *Political Man: The Social Bases of Politics* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1963), 68–69.

3. Lipset, *Political Man*, 69; and G. L. Lamborn, *Arms of Little Value: The Challenge of Insurgency and Global Instability in the Twenty-first Century* (Havertown, PA: Casemate Publishers, 2012), 61–64.

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

5. Lamborn, *Arms of Little Value*, 58–59.

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

| Regime Type | | Description |
|--------------|-------------|---|
| Legitimate | Effective | Least vulnerable to insurgency, most stable, and highly likely to defeat an insurgent challenge |
| Legitimate | Ineffective | Vulnerable to insurgency but capable of rallying most of the people most of the time |
| Illegitimate | Effective | Vulnerable to insurgency; if the insurgents can capture the banner of legitimacy they will win |
| Illegitimate | Ineffective | Highly vulnerable to insurgency, least stable; the regime will collapse even with massive third-party aid |

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.”⁶ 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

6. Nagl, “America’s Army,” 12.

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.⁷ 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.

7. Carl von Clausewitz, *On War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), bk. 6, chap. 26, 479.

Mao Zedong calls insurgency “the university of war.”⁸ 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.⁹

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.

8. Mao Tse-tung, Fleet Marine Force Reference Publication (FMFRP) 12-18, *Mao Tse-tung on Guerrilla Warfare* (Quantico, VA: US Marine Corps, 1984), 73, <https://www.marines.mil/Portals/1/Publications/FMFRP%2012-18%20Mao%20Tse-tung%20on%20Guerrilla%20Warfare.pdf>.

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 aching *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

Dr. John A. Nagl is an associate professor of warfighting studies in the Department of Military Strategy, Planning, and Operations at the US Army War College. He is the author of *Knife Fights: A Memoir of Modern War in Theory and Practice* (Penguin Books, 2014).

DECISIVE POINT

The USAWC Press Podcast Companion Series

Hear our author provide further insights
on the genesis article at:
[Decisive Point](#)



Read the genesis article at: [Parameters](#)