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Mission Statement

The US Army War College has published *The US Army War College Quarterly – Parameters*, a refereed journal for contributions concerning contemporary strategy and Landpower, since 1971. *Parameters* is a product line of the US Army War College Press, which publishes and disseminates strategic-level analysis to inform US military and civilian decisionmakers as well as PME faculty and students. The US Army War College Press supports the research and educational missions of the US Army War College by publishing expert strategic analysis via multiple product lines and platforms on topics such as grand strategy, military and defense strategy, strategic leadership, military ethics, and the military profession.

Parameters is an official US Army periodical, published quarterly by the US Army War College. The Secretary of the Army has determined that publication of this periodical is necessary in the transaction of the public business as required by law of the Department. Use of funds for printing this publication has been approved by the Secretary of the Army in accordance with Army regulations.

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From the Acting Editor in Chief

Welcome to the Autumn 2024 issue of *Parameters*. The Autumn issue consists of a special piece from the US Army War College commandant and provost on their strategic vision for the college, three *In Focus* special commentaries, three forums (*Cooperative Partnerships*, *Professional Development*, and *Historical Studies*), two regular forums (*A Major's Perspective* and the *Civil-Military Relations Corner*), and a review essay focused on strategy in India.

Our *In Focus* feature includes three special commentaries. The first, "Avoiding the Escalatory Trap: Managing Escalation during the Israel-Hamas War," by C. Anthony Pfaff, a contributing editor of the *Parameters* editorial board, describes how past escalatory cycles provide a path to avoiding regional escalation. "The Challenge of Next-Gen Insurgency," by Steven Metz, also a contributing editor, argues that next-gen insurgency will be networked, swarming, global, and focused on narrative-centric conflict and integrated cost imposition and that social media and the virtual world will be its central battlespaces. The third special commentary, "A Long, Hard Year: Russia-Ukraine War Lessons Learned 2023," by Michael Hackett and John Nagl, outlines the findings of the integrated research project team studying the second year of the Russia-Ukraine War.

The first forum, *Cooperative Partnerships*, features one article. In "Why the Afghan and Iraqi Armies Collapsed: An Allied Perspective," Colin Robinson shows how the failures in Afghanistan and Iraq can be explained when the role of classical liberal thought on Western attempts to build strong armies in conflict-affected states is analyzed.

The second forum, *Professional Development*, contains two articles. In the first, "Restoring Priority on Cultural Skill Sets for Modern Military Professionals," Daniel Henk and Allison Abbe claim that the Department of Defense has failed to distinguish and sustain cultural education relative to foreign language and regional expertise, putting servicemembers at a competitive disadvantage. The second article, "Operating Successfully within the Bureaucracy Domain of Warfare: Part Two," by Jeff McManus, continues the discussion he began in the previous issue. He outlines the last 7 of 10 fundamentals (principles, perspective, prediction, persuasion, privacy, programming, and permanence) that policy professionals should consider when navigating the bureaucratic domain

of warfare and maintaining trusted access to senior decisionmakers.

The third forum, *Historical Studies*, showcases two articles. Regan Copple, in "The Fallacy of Unambiguous Warning," uses the case studies of the 1973 Yom Kippur War and the Pearl Harbor attack to show how the Intelligence Community subfield of Indications and Warnings often simplified warnings into "ambiguous" and "unambiguous" that provided a false sense of security, leading to the incorrect interpretation and understanding of information received and the failure to identify warnings of impending wars. In "Eisenhower as Supreme Allied Commander: A Reappraisal," Richard Hooker Jr. examines several strategic errors and missteps attributable to Dwight D. Eisenhower and uses them as a basis for assessing the qualities necessary for selecting successful leaders for theater command during wartime.

The Autumn issue concludes with two regular forums. In *A Major's Perspective*, Brennan Deveraux discusses two tools available to researchers—the *Annual Estimate of the Strategic Security Environment* developed by researchers at the US Army War College Strategic Studies Institute and a special *Military Review* how-to issue created through a Harding Project / Army University Press partnership to revitalize the professional discourse process. In the *Civil-Military Relations Corner*, Carrie Lee focuses on the prevalence of retired general and flag officer endorsements of political candidates and the theoretical and empirical work needed to determine the best approach to developing policies that address this civil-military relations phenomenon.

Finally, in a review essay, Vinay Kaura analyzes two books focused on strategy in India that he feels are important reading for senior members of the defense community. ~CAP

The Forward Edge of the Fifth US Army War College

David C. Hill, David D. Dworak, and Aaron Blair Wilcox

Keywords: Joint Force, professional military education, information age, human-machine teaming, war gaming

> The War College marks a great change in the thinking or, let us say, the formal education of officers of our armed service. . . . The strength of a nation can never be measured merely in guns, planes, tanks, and ships. The real influence of a nation in the world is measured by the product of its spiritual, its economic, and its military strength. And so, realizing that war involves every single facet of human existence and thinking, every asset that humans have developed, all of the resources of nature, here [at the US Army War College] education deserts the formerly rather narrow business of winning a tactical victory on the battlefield; it is now concerned with the nation.
>
> —Dwight D. Eisenhower
> US Army War College Address, 1966[1]

Keywords: Joint Force, professional military education, information age, human-machine teaming, war gaming

Since its establishment in 1901, the US Army War College (USAWC) has adapted to meet the needs of the Army and a nation during episodic changes in the security environment. Most of this adaptation occurs incrementally as the college adjusts its courses and processes during its annual curriculum review processes. Periodically, significant shifts occur when the character of war reaches inflection points (times of profound change).

Four Army War Colleges

The US Army War College has experienced four broad evolutions during nearly 125 years of dedicated work "[n]ot to promote war, but to preserve peace by intelligent and adequate preparation to repel aggression," in the words of Elihu Root, its founder, as the cornerstone was laid for the college's first building. The college's first evolution (1903–17—General Staff

training) graduated 256 Army officers for *specific* utilization as part of the General Staff. Ultimately, this limitation in scope discouraged innovation and did not account for the political, social, and economic dimensions of warfare. World War I demonstrated that the Army and the country needed officers educated beyond the practical application of military science. It needed strategic thinkers and leaders. The college's second evolution (1918–40—General Staff education) adapted a broader strategic education. As the world descended into its second global conflict, the Army closed the US Army War College, reconvening a decade later.[2]

Reopening in 1950, the US Army War College confronted a more complex world and increased requirements for preparing Army leadership. The college's third evolution (1950–89—US "great-power" status) concentrated on great-power competition in a bipolar world. It ended much as the previous evolutions did—with an exogenous shock stemming from the fall of the Soviet Union and the rise of the information age. In describing the college's fourth evolution (1990–2022—information age adaptation), the then USAWC Commandant Richard A. Chilcoat emphasized information-based technologies and war gaming to achieve continuing dominance over America's adversaries during counterinsurgency and counterterrorism. The college's fifth evolution now begins with a renewed focus on great-power conflict against near-peer adversaries.[3]

Coinciding with the college's fourth evolution almost 30 years ago, historian Harry P. Ball recognized four dynamics driving change at the US Army War College:

1. America's position in the global order;
2. the Army's position as a national institution;
3. the role of the military profession; and
4. the changing nature (character) of war.

The United States is experiencing a change in the international environment, familiar to great powers historically, that demands political and military adaptation. The return of great-power competition, the rise of a multipolar order, rapid advances in human-machine teaming and artificial intelligence, ground wars in Europe and the Middle East, and persistent tensions in Asia demand political and military leaders' attention. Former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Mark A. Milley characterized Ball's first and final assertions—geostrategic shocks and the changing character of war driven by technological adaptation—as occurring *now*. Similarly, Chief of Staff of the Army Randy A. George has demanded a reemphasis on strengthening the profession and combat readiness

during continuous transformation in contact to deliver combat readiness as a pillar of the Army vision, reflecting Ball's second and third observations.[4]

The US Army War College is adapting amid the drivers of change. In academia, civilian institutions and professional military institutions are fundamentally adjusting their educational approach by focusing on what is learned, rather than what is taught. The adoption of outcomes-based and experiential education is changing how faculty teach and assess learning levels. Institutions are shifting away from industrial-age, teacher-centered approaches toward modern methods prioritizing students.[5]

Changes in educational theory, combined with the changing character of war and global order, form a strategic inflection point for the US Army War College. A new evolution is underway—one that incorporates technology, experimentation, research, student choice, and problem-solving skills in groundbreaking ways. At this strategic inflection point, the college emerges as a strategic center of thought for the US Army in the global application of Landpower. The goal is simple: produce graduates with the intellectual overmatch to outthink competitors and adversaries today and in the future.[6]

The "Fifth" US Army War College: "Tailorable Education and Adaptive Leadership"

While the USAWC mission—to produce strategic leaders and ideas that are valuable to the Army—is unchanged, its graduates must operate in unprecedented conditions. The Army needs officers who know how to use data, understand that determining the truth in data often hinges on asking the right questions (as incorrect or misguided inquiries can lead to flawed conclusions), can react to changes in the operating environment at a rate never encountered previously, and effectively communicate and use information in a world where everyone with a smartphone is a news reporter and networks are exponential. The Army and Joint Force need an educational program that provides a core foundation in strategic Landpower application while also offering students a more tailored experience to make the most of this opportunity. Tailorable options enhance student outcomes by leveraging existing expertise to produce relevant, experiential, and problem-based coursework rather than spending time on concepts students already know. The fifth USAWC evolution will focus on what is learned and how it is learned.

The US Army War College employs four broad lines of effort to achieve its mission:

1. develop strategic leaders;
2. advance knowledge regarding national security with an emphasis on the global application of Landpower;
3. connect partners and the American public with the US Army; and
4. create a values-based experience (the "Carlisle Experience") that enables and strengthens our workforce, students, and families.

The following describes how the US Army War College is accomplishing these lines of effort during the current strategic inflection point.

Develop: Assessment-Informed, Tailored Education

With a few exceptions for special programs, the USAWC seminars historically followed the same course and lesson schedule. This approach allowed students and faculty to learn from one another but insufficiently challenged students who had significant experience within the discussion topic and required faculty to deliver the same material regardless of their academic fields or professional backgrounds. The fifth evolution in the curriculum provides a better way.

The rapid evolution of the security environment and extraordinary increase in knowledge across multiple domains means professional military education must make the most of every learning event. The Army and its educational institutions must assess student performance honestly and ensure courses are as rigorous as possible to prepare graduates for service in peace and war. This goal requires senior service college programs to offer varied educational options to meet individual learners' needs.

With tailorable education, the US Army War College is exploring how to offer different levels of courses and different models to leverage faculty expertise. Some students might select special programs (for example, advanced strategic arts) to deepen particular skill sets. Others may elect to learn about fields in which they have little background. Some may desire to improve cognitive or interpersonal skills. Piloting and experimentation with deliberate assessment plans determine optimal approaches to deliver students what they—and the nation—need most.

For the greatest effect, individual student competency assessments should inform selections for tailorable education. Do students choose courses or programs because they look appealing, or do they choose them because assessment tools identified a need to develop those skills? To make informed choices, the institution must offer several developmental assessments at the beginning of academic programs, which students and faculty can then partner to interpret.

While conceptually simple, implementing these assessments is challenging. Developmental assessments (which are different from assessments of student learning) are a growing field the Army has only begun to explore. Key questions include:

- What knowledge, skills, and behaviors are essential to leaders' success?
- Of these factors, which ones are malleable through educational programs?
- Finally, of these malleable factors, which ones can we directly assess?

The Army is implementing the initial concepts in the command assessment programs underway. While many assessment tools are under development Army-wide, work remains to determine what data should be shared across organizations and how the data should be used.

Offering a menu of institutional course choices is also complex and difficult to implement. How does the college ensure the attainment of core program learning outcomes across numerous learning paths? How does the college manage faculty expertise to allow the most students to benefit from exposure to the best instructors? What is the right number of choices available to students?

The college's fifth evolution must offer a generalist *and* tailorable education. Delivering the same curriculum the same way for all students may not provide the desired results, while an approach of 380 individual degree programs is unrealistic and unfeasible. Ultimately, balancing student demand and faculty capacity will determine the optimal approach. Finding this balance will require several years of piloting and experimentation but will allow for incremental improvement and the development of the necessary assessment tools.

Advance: Enable Informed Decision Making

Feedback from alumni and Army senior leaders highlights an essential skill for senior leaders: executive communication. Senior leaders must be able to deconstruct issues, develop plans on how best to communicate responses, collect and quickly assess data, then develop and deliver the written, verbal, and visual communication that produces desired effects. Strategic communication is concise, convincing, and focuses on underlying problems rather than symptoms. Developing this skill is part technical, part cognitive, and requires repetition to improve. The US Army War College refers to this process as the "Carlisle Method."

With faculty guidance and mentoring, students assess contemporary problems through strategic teaming, problem deconstruction, information collection, analysis, and production. The Carlisle Method's tailored education and mentorship has produced original research and recommendations in more than 17 recent reports for senior Army decisionmakers, including the United States Army Futures Command, United States Army Pacific, the Army G-2, and the needs of Joint senior leaders and the Chief of Staff of the Army. Recent student and faculty research products like the June 2024 Russia-Ukraine lessons-learned report and the protracted war with China assessment demonstrate the power of integrated research to leverage student talent and experience with faculty expertise to advance Landpower application. The Carlisle Method institutionalizes research questions and processes that support the Joint Force, capitalizing on student interest and career experiences to increase the Army's combat lethality and inspire the profession.[7]

In addition to critical research, the US Army War College has been a center of war gaming for several years. Beyond developing and executing war games for students and government stakeholders, the fifth evolution of the college now offers war games *and* courses in war-game development. Organizations across the government greatly need this expertise as they explore issues like conflict over the Arctic and effective negotiation strategies. International partners are also participating in these courses, and the demand exceeds the supply. War gaming will continue to be an area of growth as big data and artificial intelligence mature into useful resources for solving problems within complex adaptive systems.

The US Army War College is also harnessing the burgeoning utility of artificial intelligence within institutional processes and decision making. The college is exploring how large language models can assess curricula and offer recommendations on individual student courseloads and gaps or overages

in subject material. Results matter; survey data and assessments of operational performance post-graduation will shape ongoing curricular adaption.

Further adapting to the nation's needs, the US Army War College established the China Landpower Studies Center in January 2024. While the other services have centers that focus on Chinese airpower and sea power, senior professional military education institutions have been more limited in their examinations of Landpower in Chinese strategic and operational approaches. The China Landpower Studies Center fills this void in research, allowing the Army and Joint Force to gain a better understanding of Landpower as an element of Joint power in the People's Liberation Army.

Connect: Extend National and International Impact

Fundamentally, USAWC graduates must be prepared to fight and win in a Joint and Combined environment. Moreover, graduates must be effective across the continuum of cooperation, competition, crisis, and conflict. Ideally, skilled leaders should successfully navigate through the first three parts of the continuum and avoid the risks associated with the last. To achieve this goal, leaders need expansive networks, effective interpersonal skills, and the ability to exercise strategic empathy.

Multinational operations provide the United States and its friends, partners, and allies a distinct advantage when dealing with potential adversaries such as China, Iran, North Korea, and Russia. The foundation for multinational operations rests on relationships built during peacetime. The expansion of the USAWC International Fellows Program in professional military education provides the perfect opportunity for building these relationships.

The US Army War College hosts more than 80 international officers in its resident and nonresident programs annually. The relationships built in Carlisle are the US Army War College's superpower—they pay dividends for decades after the International Fellows have walked across the Wheelock Bandstand, diplomas in hand. There is a growing tension, however, between the need to incorporate international officers into senior service college programs and a desire to increase classified instruction. There is a real benefit to having international perspectives in seminars when discussing contemporary challenges, but there is also a value in exposing US students to classified planning documents. In practice, this form of instruction resembles contingency planning within a combined headquarters. Schools must develop creative approaches that incorporate classified material without excluding the possibility for international student involvement. This task is easier said than done, especially given the lack of educational spaces equipped for classified discussions.

Creating broad allied or partnered networks cannot occur solely within the United States. A targeted strategy of engagements with international professional military institutions is essential to develop and maintain enduring relationships across nations. For example, NATO's Defense Education Enhancement Programme and the Department of State's Africa Military Education Program provide opportunities to share best practices and develop contacts with nations worldwide. The USAWC International Fellows Continuing Education Program reinforces long-term US security goals with allies and partners while sustaining professional and personal relationships with alumni across the globe. The USAWC staff and faculty currently support Azerbaijan, Mauritania, Mongolia, Morocco, Nigeria, and Ukraine with faculty and curriculum development, institutional improvement, and war-gaming instruction. These engagements directly support President Joe Biden's *National Security Strategy* and play a vital role in achieving the goals of combatant commands and country teams.[8]

Testing strategic and operational concepts through tailored Joint war gaming is a pillar of the Carlisle Method and essential to training Joint war fighters. The Joint Land, Air, and Sea Strategic Enhanced Program exemplifies how senior leader education, war gaming, and international engagement can synergize. The program is a strategic war game that evolved from the Strategic Crisis Exercise of the fourth war college and engages students in a global, strategic, and competitive environment set 10 years in the future. Students role-play various organizations at the national-strategic and theater-strategic levels. It is a Jointly focused professional military education war game where teams are formed from across US senior service colleges and international war colleges from Europe and Africa. This program provides participants with in-depth knowledge of the National Security Council, Office of the Secretary of Defense, Department of Homeland Security, the Joint Staff, all US geographic combatant commands, and notional multinational task force organizations. The result is a greater appreciation for national security processes, employment considerations, and the capabilities of Joint and coalition partners.

The US Army War College is experimenting with human-machine teaming at the strategic level in the classroom and through operational outreach. Recognizing that strategic leaders must be data literate and comfortable adapting to advances in artificial intelligence, the college conducts use-case research to increase its understanding of this expanding technology. Artificial intelligence–enabled strategic advisers actively integrate with faculty and students across the enterprise. Training and educating strategic leaders in the practical application of human-machine integration to achieve decision dominance faster than the adversary and with trusted data is critical for the

future application of Landpower. The US Army War College coordinates across professional military education to explore the implications of human-machine integration with the goal of future application within large-scale war games like the Joint Land, Air, and Sea Strategic Enhanced Program.

Create: Create a Community of Academic and Nonacademic Activities

The USAWC vision is to be an institution of choice for students, staff and faculty, families, and stakeholders. This vision has several components, which collectively form the "Carlisle Experience." The Carlisle Experience is the totality of academics, extracurricular affairs, family programs, and a supportive small-town environment that provides a war college experience unlike any other professional military institution. The goal is for everyone who studies and works at Carlisle Barracks to say that if they had to do it all over again, they would not go anywhere else.

The fifth USAWC evolution involves critically reassessing all the components of the Carlisle Experience to ensure that academic and nonacademic programs, community events, research, and support services collectively support the needs and desires of a changing force. Families increasingly prioritize work-life balance over professional opportunities. More students attend programs as geographic bachelors. Nonresident programs must be as impactful and rewarding as resident programs. The college must, therefore, evaluate all aspects of the educational experience and meet these changing needs across a career continuum. Meeting these needs may include reinvesting in premier graduate certificate programs to promote enduring intellectualism throughout officers' careers, rather than during episodes of residential learning.

The Carlisle Experience applies to more than those who study or work at Carlisle Barracks. The US Army War College is a place to explore critical issues of national importance with and for the Army, the Joint Force, and other governmental leaders. The USAWC school, centers, institutes, and programs provide opportunities to explore issues from a past-present-future approach. The United States Army Heritage and Education Center archives are a national resource. Research faculty at the Strategic Studies Institute can focus on the most complex issues, while the Center for Strategic Leadership develops war games to explore these issues using a different methodology. Staff and faculty within the School of Strategic Landpower and the Army Strategic Education Program provide world-renowned expertise in senior leader education. Collectively, this team represents a unique capability for the Army to explore any issue and to make informed recommendations. The fifth evolution of the US Army War College is global in reach, scope, and service.

A Fifth Army War College

The US Army War College recognizes the requirements for continued adaptation during periods of systemic and technological change. Currently on the forward edge of its fifth evolution, the college is adapting to provide assessment-based, tailorable education to its students and deliver impactful leader-development programs, research, and war gaming to inform strategic leaders about critical national security choices. Adapting strategic education to keep pace with the needs of the future operational force is essential to maintain the war-fighting edge for the Army of 2040 and beyond. This fifth evolution of the Army War College reinvigorates education requirements in the global application of Landpower. In a testament to the quality of adaptive curricular processes and design, the college is envisioning new means and methods to answer the call that Secretary of War Root issued more than a century ago, "[n]ot to promote war but to preserve peace through intelligent and adequate preparation to repel aggression."[9]

David C. Hill

Major General David C. Hill is the 53rd commandant of the US Army War College.

David D. Dworak

Dr. David D. Dworak is the senior academic officer and provost at the US Army War College. In addition, he teaches classes in history, military logistics, and strategic planning.

Aaron Blair Wilcox

Lieutenant Colonel Aaron Blair Wilcox is an assistant professor and deputy director in the Strategic Landpower and Futures Group, US Army War College.

Endnotes

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Avoiding the Escalatory Trap: Managing Escalation during the Israel-Hamas War

C. Anthony Pfaff

ABSTRACT: Israel finds itself in a trap: escalate or maintain the status quo; absent a political solution, it must develop capable threats that deter future Hamas attacks and dissuade Hezbollah and Tehran from providing the support Hamas requires to carry them out. This special commentary executes an analysis of Israel's precarious position and, in doing so, confronts the larger question of how to avoid escalation when engaging with violent extremist organizations with clear but unverifiable state support. The analysis provides a clear picture of the problem and offers tentative, evidence-based solutions for evading escalation or an untenable status quo.

Keywords: Israel, Iran, Hamas, Hezbollah, Israeli Defense Forces, violent extremist organizations

The Israeli strikes that killed top Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh on July 31, Hezbollah military commander Fuad Shukr on July 30, and senior Hamas leader Mohammed Deif on July 13, 2024, have sparked greater fears of escalation of the ongoing war in Gaza to a broader regional conflict. At one level, these concerns seem misplaced. Given that Israel and Hamas both seek the other's destruction, it is hard to see where there is any room to escalate. There may be variances in each side's capability for violence; however, absent a change in ends, prospects for a settlement are dim, as evidenced by Hamas's recent rejection of a US-brokered ceasefire agreement. The most one can likely hope for is a ceasefire that would, without significant concessions on both sides, return the conflict to an unstable status quo.[1]

Choosing between escalation or the status quo favors Hezbollah and Tehran more than Israel. Returning to the status quo would likely represent a defeat for the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), disincentivizing concessions necessary for anything more than a pause in fighting. Avoiding that defeat further incentivizes Israel to risk escalation, even where gains may not be proportionate to that risk. For Israel, the only way out of that trap, absent a political solution to the conflict, is developing credible and capable threats that deter future Hamas

attacks and dissuade Hezbollah and Tehran from providing the support Hamas requires to carry them out.

How far the current escalatory spiral will go is uncertain. While Israel killing a Hamas leader may not represent an escalation, killing a Hamas leader in Tehran does. Predictably, the Iranian government has called for revenge. After the anticlimactic unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) and missile attack in April 2024, it is unclear how they will do so. In response to an Israeli attack that killed Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) leaders in Syria, Iran responded with an attack by 170 UAVs, 30 cruise missiles, and 120 ballistic missiles. While visually stunning, the attack itself had little effect. Only five ballistic missiles got through, doing little damage. It does appear that Iran calibrated that attack to avoid escalation by signaling its advance.[2] Thus, despite the limited effects, Tehran offered to "[consider] the matter closed" as long as Israel refrained from retaliating. Israel retaliated anyway a few days later, when it launched a small UAV attack against an Iranian base in Isfahan. Iran played that attack down, ending that escalatory spiral. Because these responses were less destructive than the attack that prompted them, both sides were eventually able to walk away—at least temporarily.[3]

Hezbollah denied responsibility for the July 27, 2024, strike on Majdal Shams that killed 12 children. Even so, the Lebanese Foreign Minister Abdallah Bou Habib reportedly advised the organization to expect an Israeli response and not escalate in return. Whatever the organization actually expected and was willing to tolerate, Israel's decision to strike Beirut in return involved civilian casualties, which, from Hezbollah's perspective, raised the stakes. More importantly, it challenged an informal understanding between Hezbollah and Israel that attacks on Lebanese civilians would prompt Hezbollah attacks on Israeli towns in the north. Of course, from an Israeli perspective, killing Shukr was a way of enforcing norms protecting civilians. While Israel stated that it intends no further attacks of that kind, the Lebanese government has asked the UN to condemn the strike. Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah vowed to respond, saying further escalation would depend on Israel's response to Hezbollah's promised retaliation. At the time of this writing, it is not clear this spiral has ended.[4]

The Escalatory Trap

If Israel escalates, it fuels the escalatory spiral that could, at some point, exceed its military capability to manage. If it chooses the status quo, where Hamas remains capable of terrorist operations, then it has done little to improve its security

situation. Neither outcome achieves Israel's security objectives, which would represent a defeat for the IDF and could threaten the survival of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government. Under these conditions, any ceasefire would be temporary, simply allowing each side to prepare for an inevitable future and potentially more destructive round of violence.[5]

Forcing the choice between escalation and the status quo gives Iran, and, by extension, Hezbollah, an advantage and is a key feature of its proxy strategy. In the previous escalatory cycle, the IDF struck what they claimed was a military target associated with the IRGC and what Iran claimed was a consulate building in Damascus, killing two IRGC generals and five other officers who the Israelis believed were supporting Hezbollah operations. From the Iranian perspective, this attack not only violated international law protecting diplomatic facilities but also undeclared "rules" that established "red lines" to prevent escalation.[6]

By making a direct attack against Iranian facilities and personnel, even those actively participating in hostilities, a potential trigger for escalation, Tehran could portray what would otherwise be legitimate acts of defense as acts of aggression. This strategy works because international norms regarding self-defense generally only apply to direct armed attacks. They say little about more indirect acts of aggression, such as providing lethal support to a proxy. Moreover, as I have argued elsewhere, the legal bar for holding proxy sponsors accountable is high and likely would not apply to Iran. For it to apply, one would need to prove either that Tehran ordered attacks against Israel or that Hamas was effectively part of the IRGC—not simply a supported organization. As a result, Israel finds itself on the rhetorical defensive, constantly having to justify offensive operations against an enemy that, when able, would attack again.[7]

Managing the Escalatory Spiral

American officials have also expressed concerns that these killings could derail ceasefire negotiations. That criticism may be true; however, a ceasefire for its own sake may also be unhelpful if all it does is set conditions for greater violence in the future. For it to be helpful, it will need to be accompanied by a deterrent strategy that makes Hamas, Hezbollah, and Tehran believe they will be worse off if they ignore it and that Israel will be better off if they act on it. These are the conditions for a credible and capable deterrent threat.[8]

Unfortunately for Israel, deterring violent extremist organizations (VEOs) like Hamas is difficult. Successful deterrence depends on there being a clear demand that gives an adversary an alternative way out it can accept. If the demand is "cease to exist," then any threat will have little utility, as ceasing to exist is not an option an actor would rationally choose. Even where there may be such

accommodation, constructing a capable threat is still difficult. Unlike state actors, VEOs are often decentralized organizations untethered to territory. This decentralization allows them to distribute costs so that they will have the least effect on decision making.[9]

This feature characterizes much of the Iranian proxy network. Because Hamas can survive independently of Gaza, its senior leaders (many of whom live elsewhere, like Haniyeh did) are generally insulated from the losses the Israelis impose. As long as they can accept Iranian support, they will always be able to recruit more fighters and conduct more attacks. For Iran's part, as long as it can provide that support, it can further insulate itself from any losses the proxy suffers. To make matters worse, this dynamic is self-reinforcing. Where costs are imposed largely on the proxy, the sponsor maintains its incentive to provide support. The more costs the proxy bears, the more it depends on that support, reinforcing the sponsor's interests.[10]

Imposing costs directly on sponsors will likely be inadequate to deter future support or will require disproportionate force relative to the original VEO attack. Depending on how disproportionate that force is, it could count as an act of aggression under international law, whereas the original proxy attack might not. The UN, for example, defines an act of aggression as an attack against "the sovereignty, territorial integrity or political independence of another State." Attacks by VEOs may not cross that threshold because VEOs are generally incapable of, or uninterested in, exercising sovereignty or seizing territory. A state actor attacking another state actor could, however, especially if the attacks destroyed critical military capabilities necessary for self-defense or denied access to territory, even if that territory provided a safe haven for VEO operations.[11]

This use of proxies is part of the trap. Attacks against proxies are ineffective, while attacks against sponsors are self-defeating. They are self-defeating because they often cost more than they gain. The US strike that killed Qassem Soleimani in 2020 raised concerns of legality within the international community, including US partners, and made the US presence in Iraq less tenable while having little effect on Iran's willingness or ability to continue supporting proxy attacks. This point does not mean that no force used directly against Iran will be effective, but it does mean that it will have to be carefully calibrated.[12]

Escaping the Escalatory Trap: Deterring Violent Extremist Organizations and Sponsors

Fortunately for Israel, some features of VEO networks that make them resilient against attrition strategies make them vulnerable in other ways. While VEO leadership may be insulated from losses, they are not protected from failure. To the extent operations do not have the desired political effect,

leadership will lose support. Thus, Hezbollah may be in a trap of its own as escalation may trigger protests by the Lebanese public, who already face grim economic conditions that war would only worsen, while the status quo may diminish Hezbollah's credibility as part of the axis of resistance.[13] The political effect necessary to get out of that trap can be realized in two ways:

1. terrorizing a population to the extent it pressures its government to give in to VEO demands; or
2. increasing support among sympathizers for VEO operations.

Hamas has unintentionally helped Israel prevent Hezbollah from achieving the first condition. Given Hamas's objective to destroy Israel and the viciousness of the October 7, 2023, attacks, Israelis will likely continue to prefer operations against Hamas to a settlement under unfavorable conditions. According to a May 2024 poll by the Pew Research Center, 73 percent believed the response had so far been "about right" or had "not gone far enough." While 61 percent of Israelis also fear escalation to a regional conflict, 67 percent of the population believes Israel will "probably" or "definitely" achieve its security objectives. While Israelis were divided over what a postwar settlement should look like, only 2 percent would accept Hamas continuing to govern Gaza in a postwar settlement. For Hezbollah, Israel's and Hamas's inability to de-escalate makes it hard for Hezbollah to avoid escalation. Without a ceasefire, Hezbollah has to continue some level of operations against Israel; otherwise, as mentioned above, it risks losing credibility.[14]

Preventing the second condition may be more difficult. The suffering caused by the Israeli response has galvanized many in the international community, especially in the Global South, against continued Israeli operations, however, that political support has not translated into materiel support. While Chinese, North Korean, and Russian weapons have been found in Hamas's hands, there is some uncertainty about whether these actors provided them directly or if they were purchased by Iran, which has frequently done so over the years, and provided to Hamas with or without their knowledge. Given Iran's central role in supporting Hamas, deterring or disrupting their future lethal assistance would likely neutralize what other international support Hamas enjoys.[15]

The most direct way to accomplish that deterrence is for Israel to attack the Iranian assets the regime cares about. The obvious difficulty with that approach is that it is also the most direct path to region-wide escalation, which is arguably not in Israel's (or anyone's) interest. The IDF is decisively engaged in Gaza, suggesting that increasing demands on its forces could be a strategic mistake, especially if it alienates its partners in doing so.

For Israel's partners, a region-wide conflict could stress an already weakened global economy, lead to inflation and food insecurity, and further embroil them in the fighting, as Houthi attacks against Red Sea shipping have already done.[16]

However, as Israel's strike against the IRGC in Syria suggests, there may be room for attacks against Iranian assets without risking regional escalation. Whether doing so would have an enduring deterrent effect is unclear. However, the decreasing cycle of violence after April's attack suggests Tehran is prepared to accept more risk outside its territory than inside, as evidenced by its response to Haniyeh's killing. This makes sense. In Syria, Iran is risking proxies and the personnel and assets it uses to support them. In Iran, the regime risks appearing vulnerable, which diminishes its deterrent capability and risks political instability. This point suggests that, if nothing else, attacks against Iranian military personnel and assets in combat zones may not have the escalatory effect that many fear. Even if that is not true, attacking Iran's proxy support infrastructure would likely have some disruptive effect on proxy operations, diminishing the options Iran would have to retaliate.

A less direct way would be to reduce Hamas's effectiveness as a proxy. Here is where targeted strikes on Hamas leadership can play a role. In 2003, during the second intifada, Hamas paused operations after Israel killed some of its senior leaders. That pause did not come immediately. In the beginning, Hamas escalated after senior leaders were killed, and their attacks increased. At some point, however, Hamas leadership had to choose between escalation and losing their current leadership, many of whom played important roles in the organization's history. At the end of 2003, Hamas deliberately ceased operations within Israel's pre-1967 borders in exchange for a halt to Israel's targeted killings of Hamas leadership. Thus, there seems to be a threshold for when targeted killings work for rather than against conditions for a ceasefire.[17]

While several factors undoubtedly contributed to the decrease in attacks, it seems the scope and frequency of targeted killings against leaders who were integral to the organization's identity had an effect. Of interest, Hamas was more likely to retaliate when it perceived it was exercising restraint or abiding by a ceasefire. When violence was high, however, Hamas reduced attacks to disincentivize Israelis from killing its leaders. Hamas would not be compelled, but it could be deterred. This observation raises an important point regarding the role informal norms can play in escalation management. Where they evolve, as it seems in the conflict between Israel and Hezbollah, they perform at least two functions. First, setting expectations for what responses are legitimate places boundaries on escalation. Second, observing those boundaries signals an acceptance of the other, which is necessary for deterrence. When these norms

lose their effectiveness, as seems to be the case here, the likelihood for escalation increases until a new normal is established.[18]

The point here is not to endorse continued targeted killings but, rather, to point out that the ability to target multiple senior leaders in succession offers Israel leverage to push for a ceasefire, if not a settlement, on more favorable terms than the status quo. This approach is not without risk. There is insufficient study to differentiate the disruptive effects of targeted killings from the deterrent ones. Even if there were deterrent effects, VEOs, perhaps more so than state actors, even totalitarian ones, are more dependent on personality and relationships when it comes to decision making, which makes generalizations difficult. The Hamas that paused operations in 2003 may not in 2024.

Conclusion

Force can play a de-escalatory role, even in intractable conflicts. Where belligerents establish expectations regarding legitimate resistance, attacks intended to enforce those expectations are less escalatory than those simply intended to impose costs. However, when such attacks are also norm violating, they can exacerbate conditions for escalation as all sides seek to establish a new normal for legitimacy and recalibrate deterrent thresholds. In the conflict between Israel and Hamas, those norms have likely been shattered. Even if there is a ceasefire, as long as their goals remain mutual destruction, the potential for future escalation remains high. Reinforcing norms regarding legitimate resistance would be one way to reduce that potential.

It is also not entirely clear what ceasefire terms would be enduring. While recovering the hostages would be a significant gain for Israel, there are likely no security guarantees that Hamas can give that Israel can trust, and vice versa. Under these conditions, deterrence is Israel's only option to achieve a more stable status quo. However, capability and credibility depend on convincing Hamas, Hezbollah, and Tehran that escalation on their part would make them worse off and Israel better off for responding. To do that, there need to be alternatives they can choose that adequately accommodate their interests while not making Israel less secure.

It is beyond the scope of this discussion to examine what those alternatives might be. Whatever they are, threatening further targeted killings, continuing military pressure to disrupt Hamas and Hezbollah operations, and disrupting Iran's proxy support infrastructure could incentivize their acceptance. Doing so both disincentivizes and reduces Iran and its proxies' capacity for escalation. However, these measures also set conditions for a new normal with rules of engagement that could be self-defeating. Targeted killings

outside combat zones risk normalizing assassination. Military pressure that causes civilian harm in populations not already involved in a conflict incentivizes rather than deters a similar response. Where a sponsor's support infrastructure is difficult to differentiate from critical defense capabilities, destroying them raises the stakes and forces the sponsor to establish new deterrent capabilities and thresholds. Thus, for a more stable status quo, these measures must incentivize acceptance of more restrictive norms that protect civilians and limit the scope of operations rather than replace them.

C. Anthony Pfaff

Dr. C. Anthony Pfaff is the interim director of the Strategic Studies Institute at the US Army War College. He is also a senior non-resident fellow at the Atlantic Council and a distinguished senior researcher at the Institute for Philosophy and Public Policy. He is the author of *Proxy War Ethics: The Norms of Partnering in Great Power Competition* and the forthcoming *Bargaining for Justice: Ukraine, Gaza, and the Ethics of Conflict Termination*.

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The Challenges of Next-Gen Insurgency

Steven Metz

ABSTRACT: States and their security forces often assume future insurgency will be versions of Mao Zedong's "people's war," and counterinsurgency remains backward looking without a theoretical foundation to situate it within broader global security environment and armed-conflict trends. Next-gen insurgency will be networked, swarming, global, and focused on narrative-centric conflict and integrated cost imposition, and social media and the virtual world will be its central battlespaces. No nation has fully grasped that the "people's war" reflected the military, economic, political, informational, technological, and social conditions of its time. Through an examination of insurgency's nature, character, patterns, and trends and a thought experiment about next-gen insurgency, states and their security and intelligence services can think about what insurgency will be (rather than what it has been) and prepare.

Keywords: insurgency, Cold War, people's war, Mao Zedong, social media, al-Qaeda

Insurgency, or something like it, has existed for as long as weak organizations have used protracted violence against power structures. While insurgency is often portrayed as a type of war or organization, it is more useful to think of it as a strategy. During the Cold War, enough successful insurgencies existed for some security experts to consider them unstoppable when skillfully executed. This inaccurate perception did not consider that most insurgencies never take root, grow strong, or attain their objectives. People become insurgents when they have no other viable options or because "the myth of the guerrilla" skews their assessment of their chance for success. People who succumb to this misperception and survive often abandon insurgency once they discover its dangers and inefficacy.[1]

States and their security forces also often fall into an equally dangerous trap by assuming one variant of insurgency defines it, namely Mao Zedong's "people's war" concept of an armed struggle for public support. Counterinsurgency doctrine worldwide focuses on containing or defeating contemporary people's war variants and defines the "population" as the center of gravity. This peculiar focus differs from conventional war-fighting doctrine, which does not fixate on enemies utilizing twentieth-century organizations, concepts, and methods. Counterinsurgency remains backward looking without a theoretical foundation to situate it within a broader global security environment

and armed-conflict trends. Security experts and strategists thinking about insurgency and counterinsurgency assume the future will resemble the past and that what worked before will work again.[2]

Insurgency, like war, has an enduring nature but a changing character. Today, it is evolving, propelled by powerful forces in technology, politics, economics, security, information ecosystems, and social structures. Next-gen insurgency will be networked, swarming, global, and focused on narrative-centric conflict and integrated cost imposition. Social media and the virtual world will be its central battlespaces. Failing to grasp this fact—to think about what is coming rather than what happened in the past—is dangerous.[3]

Insurgency's Enduring Nature

Highly motivated but desperate, often non-state organizations unable to attain objectives through political means or conventional military action use insurgency. Like all coherent strategies, insurgency has a unifying and defining logic. It is asymmetric at the strategic level by design since the insurgents are weaker than the state and would face dim prospects in a symmetric conflict. Insurgents also exploit ethical asymmetry for an advantage over the state, which must hew closer to legality to sustain legitimacy and support.[4]

Insurgents exploit and amplify existing grievances and schisms to weaken the power structure. Anything will do, whether economic inequity, ethnicity, race, religion or sect, culture, regional inequities, injustice, incompetence, or corruption. In the Maoist idea of the people's war, subtracting power from the state and adding it to the insurgency would eventually allow the insurgents to become an alternative, more effective state. In other forms of insurgency, the insurgents might pursue that goal in emulation of Mao (which is common among insurgents) but cannot and, thus, concentrate on the negative dimension of weakening the state for the regime to implode and a power vacuum to arise.[5]

Violence is part of insurgency's enduring nature, but insurgencies vary in their emphasis on violence and its many forms. Often, early-stage insurgencies struggling to survive, aggregate power, establish identities, and gain attention will use low-level violence for symbolic purposes by necessity. These insurgencies commonly employ ambushes, attacks on relatively weak targets (like isolated police or military outposts) or other power structure symbols, and assassinations. This mode of violence is "armed theater." Like stage actors, insurgents interact with each other, but their primary objective is to send a message to an audience.

At its heart, insurgency is strategic communication—a violent battle of narratives.[6]

Mature insurgencies that have accumulated power and resources may shift to a more violence-centric approach. Conventional battlefield victories—not guerrilla or terrorist actions—resulted in the Chinese and Vietnamese Maoist insurgencies' end game. The insurgents designed irregular operations for psychological purposes and to shift the power balance, not for a conventional decisive victory. Other insurgencies never reached this stage and relied on guerrilla operations and terrorism throughout their lifespans. This method only worked against deeply flawed power structures, like the Batista regime in Cuba, the Portuguese colonial governments in Angola and Mozambique, or the White minority regimes in Rhodesia and South Africa.[7]

To survive and remediate the power imbalance, insurgents structure the conflict so the domains where they have an advantage become important and possibly decisive. With rare exceptions, such as the last stage of a Maoist protostate insurgency, the military domain is significant but not decisive for insurgents. Skillful insurgents avoid military defeat and win in the political and psychological realms. Insurgents and counterinsurgents seek different meta-level structures of the conflict. The advantage goes to the most successful manipulator.[8]

Insurgency also involves temporal asymmetry. Insurgents believe they have superior ethics, will, and patience. They want to extend the conflict's length, believing the power imbalance will gradually shift. Insurgency is a strategy of the weak, and astute insurgents therefore expect the regime to grow weaker through a protracted rather than short-term conflict. Insurgency requires great faith and a positive trend projection reflecting the perception that their cause is just and ethically superior. Insurgents must believe that what they see as justice will eventually trump tangible weaknesses. Otherwise, they might be tempted to pursue resolution or success before the power imbalance has shifted in their favor—and impatience is often deadly for insurgents.[9]

Insurgency's Changing Character

Insurgency's character changes in multiple ways, reflecting broad strategic environment trends and insurgents' and counterinsurgents' decisions. For example, insurgencies' strategic objectives vary. The Maoist insurgencies of the twentieth century and al-Qaeda's transnational jihadist insurgency exemplify the most expansive objectives: to become states, inspire emulators, and thus engineer revolutionary change in the transnational power structure. Individual insurgencies were considered vanguards of global communism or a revived caliphate. Other insurgencies have more limited objectives—for example, regional

autonomy, the replacement of one elite by another, or integration into the national power structure.

Insurgencies also vary in organizational formality and size. Maoist insurgencies wanted to become the state, so they organized like states once they coalesced and acquired power and resources. They had identifiable leaders, specialization among subordinate organizations, and a chain of command governed in the areas they controlled. By the twenty-first century, states had become more adept at counterinsurgency, and by the end of the Cold War, the use of insurgency for proxy or surrogate conflicts had diminished. This change pushed insurgents toward a less formal organization that relied more on cellular networks and swarming (for example, in the Iraq insurgency). Each cell or network might have had some organizational formality with a chain of command and specialization, but the insurgency as a whole did not. Insurgencies based on swarming cellular networks are more resilient and harder to eradicate than protostate insurgencies but have difficulty mobilizing enough power and resources to attain their strategic objectives, particularly state replacement. They adopt this organization out of necessity when facing adept counterinsurgents.[10]

While all insurgencies use violence, they vary in reliance on it and the form it takes. Some were violence-centric, like the Islamic State, more focused on generating fear and publicity than winning support. In South Africa, the paramilitary wings of the African National Congress and the Pan-Africanist Congress used targeted terrorism for psychological and political reasons, recognizing they could not defeat the apartheid state's military in open combat.[11]

Insurgencies vary in their linkage to specific geographic areas. Some are inextricably tied to their home regions. These insurgencies reflect the long history of armed movements resisting outside control from nations, kingdoms, or empires. Twentieth-century insurgencies developed a transnational ideological component often melded with local grievances and resistance. Modern jihadist insurgencies expanded that component with committed extremists flowing from conflict to conflict and joining forces with fighters motivated by local grievances. For example, ISIS has little grounding in a specific geographic location and swarms anywhere in the Islamic world where conditions are ripe. It uses a "franchising" tactic in which local extremist movements claim affiliation with their brand even when no formal relationship exists.[12]

Insurgencies vary by the extent, type, and importance of their alliances and support networks. Maoist insurgencies relied on popular support in their operating areas for resources, information, and recruits. They often had external support since insurgency was used for proxy warfare between ideological blocs. Movements like the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam or Tamil Tigers exploited

the global Tamil diaspora for support. Al-Qaeda and some other jihadist movements obtained resources and recruits from all over the Islamic world.[13]

Maoist insurgencies often began as "united fronts," with the Communist Party eventually taking full control. Some insurgencies remained coalitions or networks, however, such as the Iraqi insurgency and the Afghan insurgency, which included the Taliban and the Haqqani network. Ideological movements often formed alliances of convenience with warlords, criminal organizations, or ethnic or religious militias. In all these cases, there is variance along a spectrum from a unitary insurgency to coalitions or networks.[14]

Along similar lines, insurgencies vary in their reliance on foreign fighters. This old phenomenon is not limited to insurgency—consider, for example, the Marquis de Lafayette, Baron von Steuben, and Tadeusz Kościuszko in the American Revolution or the Abraham Lincoln Battalion in the Spanish Civil War. Insurgencies vary along a spectrum in the degree to which their motivational structure is based on local grievances or broader ideological motives, normally centered on the concept of justice. Ideology-based insurgencies tend to attract foreign fighters, which often leads to a greater reliance on terrorism since that tactic requires less training than guerrilla or conventional military operations. Moreover, insurgent leaders have weaker bonds with foreign fighters and consider them expendable, making those fighters useful for suicide attacks.[15]

Insurgencies also vary in resourcing. External support, voluntary contributions, involuntary contributions through extortion, theft, smuggling, poaching, narcotics production and trafficking, and other crimes are common. Some insurgencies attempt to avoid involvement in crime; others embrace it and effectively become criminal organizations with ideological or political veneers. Arms can be provided by outside supporters, taken from security forces, manufactured or fabricated by the insurgents, or purchased on the global market, if the insurgents have a dependable funding flow.[16]

Patterns and Trends

Insurgency can be portrayed as a series of continuums. Specific insurgencies fall at different places along these continuums depending on local, regional, and global conditions; the counterinsurgents' actions and effectiveness at forcing insurgents into higher-risk, less strategically effective methods; and insurgent leaders' decisions. For insurgency as a global phenomenon, however, there have

been aggregate or meta-level trends. In figure 1 (below), the arrows indicate a discernible direction of evolution in insurgency.

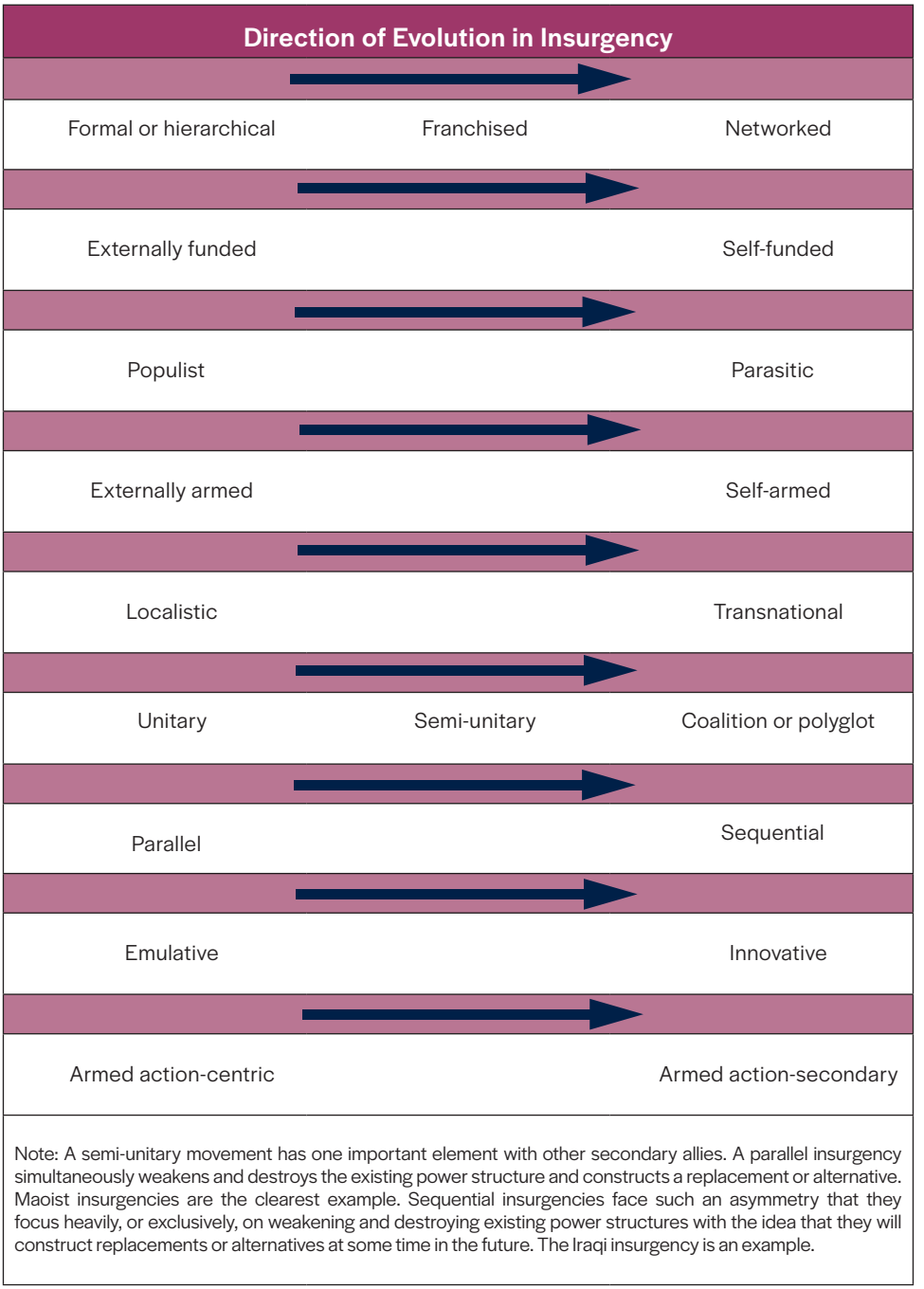

Figure 1. Direction of evolution in insurgency
(Source: Created by author)

What Comes Next?

Since insurgency is a component of the global strategic environment, next-gen insurgency will be shaped by broad forces and trends in this environment. While it is impossible to predict the precise form of next-gen insurgency, it is useful to model its feasibility, as the following section will demonstrate.

First, a fissure or schism arises that produces and sustains an insurgency. The foundational conflict in past insurgencies was some combination of economic class, ethnicity, regionalism, or sectarianism, often fueled and focused by an ideology. What then might the foundational conflict for future insurgency be? One possibility is generational antagonism, an escalating problem worldwide. Like class, ethnic, or sectarian conflict, generational antagonism does not often rise to the level of organized violence but can when combined with a mobilizing ideology and a sclerotic power structure. As with all effective insurgencies, the pursuit of justice will form a primary component of the unifying ideology of next-gen insurgencies.

Organizationally successful future insurgencies will not replicate the now-obsolete Maoist protostate model, which worked only in agrarian states with inequitable land distribution and no capacity or will to govern economically nonvital hinterlands linked to the national elite—a rare situation today. Maoist insurgencies augmented their power while degrading the state's power to win popular support. Jihadist insurgencies largely abandoned that tactic. So, too, will next-gen ones. They will focus on the conflict's negative dimension to degrade the state's power and delegitimize its power structure rather than win popular support. Next-gen insurgency will not be a contest for "hearts and minds." Reflecting the contemporary information ecosystem, negativity—specifically, an emphasis on attacking and delegitimizing opponents—increasingly dominates politics and will also characterize insurgency.

Next-gen insurgencies will also mirror the broader emergence of narrative-centric warfare in the contemporary security environment. The political and psychological domains have always been paramount in insurgency, but al-Qaeda and ISIS, capitalizing on virtual global connectivity, signaled that the narrative war in next-gen insurgency will be global rather than localized. Worldwide insurgencies will likely occur, just as there were worldwide conventional wars.

Next-gen insurgencies will be organized as networks with few concentrations of political or military power that the state can target. This organization will be a survival mechanism as states develop more effective technology-based

(and, in the future, artificial intelligence–based) intelligence capabilities. Swarming and rapid adaptation will dominate. Next-gen insurgencies will be heavily virtual. The economic element of insurgency—the need to fundraise to support fighters and buy weapons—will be less important than it was for twentieth-century insurgents. Anyone with local or global Internet access will be able to participate in the struggle. Commercial technology, rather than manufactured arms, will dominate. Fundraising will be through dark web contributions (a nefarious mirror of GoFundMe) and cybercrime.

Insurgency will pose the greatest threat to states developed enough to be dependent on global connectivity and technology but unable to eradicate the insurgents, whether through an aggregate shortage of security resources or, most often, because security forces are optimized for other threat types. This factor is important: throughout history, insurgents have succeeded when states were unable or unwilling to reconfigure their security services. Insurgency will remain a deadly adaptation contest with the advantage going to the more effective side. Within this framework, it is possible to imagine a feasible next-gen insurgency.

The Insurgency in Nation A

Imagine that in the year 2028 Nation A has devolved from sclerosis to a raging crisis. Nearly all citizens have Internet access, and most, particularly the youth, are linked to virtual global communities of people who share their perspectives and priorities. Nation A, though connected to the global economy, suffers from significant internal inequity. The opportunities the country provides its younger citizens cannot meet connectivity-fueled expectations. While not abjectly poor, it suffers perceived relative deprivation. Older generations hold the political and economic power almost exclusively. The youth are increasingly frustrated by the lack of upward mobility and limitations on influence. Many have concluded that the economic and political power structure is irredeemably repressive, corrupt, and unjust.

The youth have coalesced into virtual tribes, many centered on online gaming, politics, popular culture, or, for the adventure seeking and risk tolerant, cybercrime or symbolic vandalism. They are entranced by this environment's opportunities for perceived empowerment and heroism. Social media provides the milieu for operationalizing discontent that universities and coffee shops did for earlier generations of radicals.[17]

While, in most cases, they do not know their co-tribalists personally, they believe that through coordinated action, they could attain the opportunities and empowerment they believe their peers in other places have. From this artificial society, where they spend much of their time, they have adopted

an ideological worldview that explains the sources of their discontent and the actions needed to ameliorate it. They slowly develop a sense of purpose and meaning that had been missing in their lives, operationalizing their fantasies into a quest.

As the revolution coalesces, the budding insurgents gravitate toward a strategy-based, broad-spectrum cost imposition at minimal personal risk, which they believe the power structure's corruption and inequity necessitates and justifies. They understand that they know little about direct attacks and that the state has an elaborate security apparatus to defend against those attacks. They focus on their comfortable virtual domain, where they have advantages over the bureaucratized state security apparatus. This domain will be their battlefield. They create and propagate a revolutionary narrative focused on the justness and heroism of their cause, stressing that they, as vanguards, represent repressed and disempowered youth everywhere. Their objective is a revolutionary change in the power structure to give young people a role they feel they deserve and have earned. Their method is the weaponization of everything.[18]

Knowing the state is adept at decapitating threatening organizations or movements, particularly if supported by the United States or other outsider powers, the insurgents create a virtual leadership committee through deepfake technology to be the global face of their movement. They will be like the Wizard of Oz, controlling, charismatic, but fictional leaders who exist only as 1s and 0s, leaving those "behind the curtain" safe from security forces. They realize that some physical violence is necessary to frighten those in the power structure and attract global attention. They announce their presence with a few urban bombings, acts of sabotage, and assassinations. Most target places where old and rich people congregate, like expensive restaurants, shops, and cultural events. To preserve their personal safety, this targeting is done remotely using commercially acquired technology. The United Parcel Service, DHL, Geopost, SF Holding, Blue Dart, and Federal Express provide logistics. Cryptocurrency exchanges distribute funds.

As word of the insurgency spreads, other angry, disgruntled youth tribes around the world swarm to the cause, inspired by the revolutionary narrative and chance for heroism. Idealists are attracted by generational revolution and youth empowerment, but others join out of boredom or to demonstrate their talents to their peers. A virtual tribe skilled at cyberattacks targets Nation A's economic infrastructure and government systems, launching a multi-vector attack without officially affiliating with the insurgency. Many claim credit for this attack on social media, leaving Nation A's security forces confused. Another tribe skilled at cybercrime attacks businesses and government agencies in Nation A, often using the latest forms of ransomware. It splits its cryptocurrency with the

insurgents, giving the movement a war chest to buy more sophisticated technology, intelligence, and expertise. One tribe specializes in open-source intelligence, which it shares with the insurgents. Another tribe is adept at belief manipulation using social media, deepfakes, and fabricated news. It has been manipulating beliefs mostly for "LULZ" but now has a cause to justify its actions. Rather than being vandals and criminals, now they can attribute their actions to justice and heroism. This tribe undertakes a swarming campaign to delegitimize Nation A's government, economic elite, and security forces, portraying them as old, incompetent, sexually deviant, malevolent, or anything else that undercuts their targets' legitimacy.

None of these assaults alone is enough to bring down the government of Nation A or compel it to accommodate the insurgents' demands, but the constantly shifting cost imposition begins to grind down national leaders and elites. Security spending increases dramatically, cutting into other funds. New security measures spark massive protests, and Nation A's international credit and business ratings collapse, imposing costs on all of society. As a result of the cyber delegitimization campaign, Nation A's political and business leaders find themselves ridiculed or ostracized around the world. Even people disinclined to support the insurgents directly are drawn to what they see as the justness of its cause and its restraints on kinetic violence. Young influencers lionize them, amplifying the insurgents' carefully constructed perception of righteousness and heroism. In Nation A, virtual tribes without direct links to the original insurgents form and join the conflict, further befuddling the security services.

Eventually, the deliberate and inadvertent multi-vector, multisource costs that the insurgents and their allies imposed on Nation A's leaders become intolerable. Accommodating the insurgents is the lesser evil. Nation A announces major reforms, including the empowerment of youth councils at all levels of the government and within the economic power structure. The original insurgents see this reform as a victory and triumphantly accept inclusion into the power structure. Meanwhile, addicted to the adrenaline rush, other parts of the distributed insurgency network, whether inside or outside Nation A, continue their attacks. Emulators arise in other nations. The next generation of insurgency has begun.

Conclusion

Imagine the organizational and conceptual challenges the United States would face if asked for assistance in this situation. Existing counterinsurgency doctrine and structure would be unhelpful.

In the future, highly motivated but weak organizations will still be willing to use violence to alter the power distribution. They will, however, reflect very different military, economic, political, informational, technological, and social conditions. Successful organizations capitalize on conditions to find methods that states and their security and intelligence services are unprepared to confront. Hence, next-gen insurgents will sustain the nature of insurgency with a very different character.

State security and intelligence services continue to mistreat Maoist-style insurgencies as paradigmatic. No nation has fully grasped that the "people's war" reflected the military, economic, political, informational, technological, and social conditions of its time. Security services tend to look backward when considering insurgency, assuming next-gen insurgents will be hinterland guerrillas or urban terrorists. This lack of preparation and foresight allows insurgency to gestate. Sometimes, states innovate and reconfigure quickly enough to defeat insurgents. If they succeed, the time taken to innovate makes the conflict more dangerous and destructive than it could have been with better preparation. Imagine the difficulty traditionally configured security and intelligence services would have with this hypothetical insurgency's global swarming and adaptation of new technology and modes of conflict.

Next-gen insurgency is coming, even if it does not closely resemble this hypothetical scenario. Time is short. The strategic environment and the nature of conflict are undergoing rapid change. States and their security and intelligence services must think about what insurgency will be rather than what it has been—and prepare.

Steven Metz

Steven Metz has served on the faculty of the US Army War College, the Air War College, and the US Army Command and General Staff College. He is writing a book on the future of insurgency.

Endnotes

1. For an example of scholarship on "unstoppable" insurgencies, see Martin van Creveld, *The Transformation of War: The Most Radical Reinterpretation of Armed Conflict since Clausewitz* (New York: Free Press, 1991); and J. Bowyer Bell, *The Myth of the Guerrilla: Revolutionary Theory and Malpractice* (New York: Knopf, 1971). **Return to text.**

2. On the "people's war," see, among others *Mao Zedong, Mao Tse-Tung on Guerrilla Warfare*, trans. Samuel B. Griffith II (Baltimore: Nautical & Aviation Publishing Co. of America, 1991); and Bard E. O'Neill, *Insurgency and Terrorism: Inside Modern Revolutionary Warfare* (Washington, DC: Brassey's, 1990). For examples of counterinsurgency doctrine, see Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), *Counterinsurgency*, Joint Publication 3-24 (Washington, DC: JCS, April 2018); Headquarters, Department of the Army (HQDA), Headquarters, Marine Corps Combat Development Command (MCCDC), and Headquarters, United States Marine Corps (HQMC), *Insurgencies and Countering Insurgencies*, Field Manual 3-24 / Marine Corps Warfighting Publication 3-33.5 (Washington, DC: HQDA / MCCDC / HQMC May 2014); *Countering Insurgency*, British Army Field Manual, vol. 1, part 10, Army Code 71876 (London: British Army, October 2009); and NATO Ministry of Defence, *Allied Joint Doctrine for Counter-insurgency*, Allied Joint Publication 3-27 (Brussels: NATO Standardization Office, April 2023). **Return to text.**

3. One of the rare efforts to distinguish insurgency's enduring and changing aspects was Thomas X. Hammes, "Countering Evolved Insurgency Networks," *Military Review* (July-August 2006): 18–26. See Andreas Krieg, *Subversion: The Strategic Weaponization of Narratives* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2023). **Return to text.**

4. Contemporary Iran is an example of a nation using insurgency in its regional and global national security strategy. Insurgents occasionally undertake symmetric activities at a tactical or operational level when they are able to attain more or less equal power to the state and its security forces. Strategic asymmetry can be deliberate or inadvertent. See Steven Metz and Douglas V. Johnson II, *Asymmetry and U.S. Military Strategy: Definition, Background, and Strategic Concepts* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, January 2001), https://press.armywarcollege.edu/monographs/121/; and Rod Thornton, *Asymmetric Warfare: Threat and Response in the 21st Century* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2007). **Return to text.**

5. On insurgents' use of ethnicity, see James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, "Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War," *American Political Science Review* 97, no. 1 (February 2003): 75–90. **Return to text.**

6. Some scholars consider nonviolent movements or organizations like the civil rights movements insurgencies. For example, see Mark Grimsley, "Why the Civil Rights Movement Was an Insurgency," History.net (website), June 3, 2020, https://www.historynet.com/why-the-civil-rights-movement-was-an-insurgency/. It is more accurate, however, to consider them proto- or semi-insurgencies, since excluding violence from the definition broadens the concept of insurgency to the point that it becomes analytically unwieldy and possibly useless, at least for security practitioners. **Return to text.**

7. Insurgencies that are unable to accumulate resources and power and, following the Maoist model, become a protostate may succeed against an inherently weak and flawed power structure, particularly one unable to attract and sustain external support. After all, power is relative. Only a resource-rich, protostate insurgency might be able to defeat a competent and resilient regime, while a weaker or more amorphous insurgency might have success against an incompetent and ossified power structure. **Return to text.**

8. Allowing the armed conflict domain to be central or decisive either by strategic choice or by allowing the state to structure the conflict in this way is often a fatal flaw for insurgencies, as Che Guevara discovered. **Return to text.**

9. It is very common for there to be weak rump insurgencies long after an insurgency-based conflict has been decided. For example, the Communist Party of Malaya theoretically continued its insurgency until 1989, though the issue was settled by 1959. In the recent era when insurgency melds with organized crime, insurgent leaders often transition to warlords or criminal leaders even after their movement has lost any chance of attaining its original political objectives. The current communist insurgency in the Philippines began in the late 1960s. See "The Communist Insurgency in the Philippines: A 'Protracted People's War' Continues," Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (website), July 13, 2023, https://acleddata.com/2023/07/13/the-communist-insurgency-in-the-philippines-a-protracted-peoples-war-continues/. The most rigorous treatment of the ethical dimension is Michael L. Gross, *The Ethics of Insurgency: A Critical Guide to Just Guerrilla War* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015). **Return to text.**

10. Although surrogate warfare has changed, it remains a major element of strategy. See Andreas Krieg and Jean-Mark Rickli, *Surrogate Warfare: The Transformation of War in the Twenty-First Century* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2019). See Chad C. Serena, *It Takes More Than a Network: The Iraqi Insurgency and Organizational Adaptation* (Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 2014); and Stanley McChrystal, *My Share of the Task: A Memoir* (New York: Portfolio, 2013). **Return to text.**

11. See Mohammad-Mahmoud Ould Mohamedou, *A Theory of ISIS: Political Violence and the Transformation of the Global Order* (London: Pluto Press, 2018). I explore the challenges of a South African–style insurgency in Steven Metz, "How Insurgents Could Beat the United States," World Politics Review (website), September 1, 2017, https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/how-insurgents-could-beat-the-united-states/. **Return to text.**

12. Guerrilla resistance to outside control can been seen as a form of proto-insurgency, which, unlike modern insurgency, did not include a holistic political strategy and incorporate an ideological component. David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2009). See Daniel Byman, "ISIS Goes Global: Fight the Islamic State by Targeting Its Affiliates," *Foreign Affairs* 95, no. 2 (March/April 2016): 76–85; Vincent Foucher, "The Islamic State Franchises in Africa: Lessons from Lake Chad," International Crisis Group (website), October 29, 2020, https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/nigeria/islamic-state-franchises-africa-lessons-lake-chad; Jason Warner et al., *The Islamic State in Africa: The Emergence, Evolution, and Future of the Next Jihadist Battlefront* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2022); and Colin P. Clarke, *After the Caliphate: The Islamic State & the Future Terrorist Diaspora* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2019). **Return to text.**

13. See Rohan Gunaratna, "Sri Lanka: Feeding the Tamil Tigers," in *The Political Economy of Armed Conflict: Beyond Greed and Grievance*, ed. Karen Ballentine and Jake Sherman (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2003); and Niel A. Smith, "Understanding Sri Lanka's Defeat of the Tamil Tigers," *Joint Force Quarterly* 59, no. 4 (2010): 40–46. See Tricia Bacon, "Hurdles to International Terrorist Alliances: Lessons from al-Qaeda's Experience," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 29, no. 1 (2017): 79–101. **Return to text.**

14. See Marvin G. Weinbaum and Meher Babbar, *The Tenacious, Toxic Haqqani Network* (Washington, DC: Middle East Institute, September 2016). **Return to text.**

15. In some instances, locals were also used as suicide terrorists. See Riaz Hassan, "Global Rise of Suicide Terrorism: An Overview," *Asian Journal of Social Sciences* 36, no. 2 (January 2008): 271–91. **Return to text.**

16. The concept of criminal insurgency is widely used today, particularly in the context of Latin America. See, for instance, Robert J. Bunker, *Criminal Insurgencies in Mexico and the Americas: The Gangs and Cartels Wage War* (New York: Routledge, 2013). Its genesis was Steven Metz, *The Future of Insurgency* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 1993), https://press.armywarcollege.edu/monographs/275/. **Return to text.**

17. ISIS is considered the pioneering extremist group in the use of social media, but next-gen ones are likely to be more adept. See Laura Courchesne and Brian McQuinn, "After the Islamic State: Social Media and Armed Groups," War on the Rocks (website), April 9, 2021, https://warontherocks.com/2021/04/after-the-islamic-state-social-media-and-armed-groups/. **Return to text.**

18. On this concept, see Mark Galeotti, *The Weaponisation of Everything: A Field Guide to the New Way of War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2022). **Return to text.**

A Long, Hard Year: Russia-Ukraine War Lessons Learned 2023

Michael T. Hackett and John A. Nagl

ABSTRACT: This special commentary summarizes the major findings and lessons taken from the Russia-Ukraine War integrated research project conducted by members of the US Army War College class of 2024—all subject matter experts on their topics. It outlines seven lessons covering doctrinal, operational, technological, strategic, and political issues related to the second year of the war, including Russia's use of mercenaries; the need to create a culture of mission command; ways to deal with a transparent battlefield because of persistent, ubiquitous surveillance; air superiority as a prerequisite for successful combined arms ground offensives; and changes to the intelligence and information domains.

Keywords: Russia-Ukraine War, Winston Churchill, mercenaries, mission command, air superiority

British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, in his famous "Blood, Toil, Tears and Sweat" inauguration speech, prepared his nation for the long and difficult fight ahead, one which would bring victory over the Axis powers, but only after arduous sacrifice and suffering by the British people. His words resound through the ages:

> We have before us an ordeal of the most grievous kind. We have before us many, many long months of struggle and of suffering. You ask, what is our policy? I can say: It is to wage war, by sea, land and air, with all our might and with all the strength that God can give us; to wage war against a monstrous tyranny, never surpassed in the dark, lamentable catalogue of human crime. That is our policy. You ask, what is our aim? I can answer in one word: It is victory, victory at all costs, victory in spite of all terror, victory, however long and hard the road may be; for without victory, there is no survival.[1]

The second year of the Russia-Ukraine War saw Churchill's words come to life on the battlefields of eastern and southern Ukraine, with high-casualty battles around Avdiivka and Bakhmut spreading misery and neither side achieving significant gains in territory despite a highly anticipated Ukrainian counteroffensive. Consequently, despite dramatic moments such as the failed

Wagner mutiny, the second year (February 2023–February 2024) resulted in an apparent stalemate characterized by portions of the line of contact hardening into the entrenched "Surovikin Line" composed of 81 miles of deep trenches around Crimea that are visible from space.

Despite the static nature of the conflict, one exacerbated by delays in the delivery of weapons systems to Ukraine by international partners, Ukraine has demonstrated remarkable resolve and continues to fight. Students and faculty from the US Army War College previously examined the first year of the Russia-Ukraine War from different angles to understand what the conflict means for the changing character of war and draw lessons that could strengthen US forces. The findings and recommendations from that study are detailed in *A Call to Action: Lessons from Ukraine for the Future Force*. Highlights are available in an introductory chapter and a *Parameters* article of the same name.[2]

A new team assembled at the US Army War College in fall 2023 examined the second year of the war. While the second year did not provide the same cause for optimism as the first, the battlefield's blend of conventional warfare and innovative technology in protracted combat revealed new lessons. This special commentary highlights the team's top findings and analysis, which can inform the US Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) to equip and train the future force better following the devastating war that continues into a third year.

Mercenaries: The Double-Edged Sword that Reshaped the Russian Force

Russia's increased use of mercenaries, a combat group described by Niccolo Machiavelli as "at once useless and dangerous" and exemplified by the Wagner private military company (PMC), became one of the most visible features of the second year of the war. For Russia, the use of these companies meets several objectives:

- they can claim deniability and do not strain Russian national resolve,
- they allow for aggressive assault tactics with little to no consideration of casualty costs, and
- they permit Russian units to employ tactics unconstrained by internationally accepted ethical norms.

On the national resolve front, Wagner leader Yevgeny Prigozhin summed it up to skeptical audiences in Russia by stating that "those who do not want PMCs or prisoners to fight, who talk about this topic, who do not want to do anything and who, as matter of principle, do not like this topic, send your children to the front. . . . Either PMCs and prisoners, or your children—decide for yourself."[3]

From a battlefield perspective, the Wagner forces, supplemented by a massive infusion of prisoners, turned to assault units and tactics that featured prominently in the battle for Bakhmut and influenced Russian forces to establish "Storm-Z" units employed later in the battle of Avdiivka. These operations divided prisoner frontline troops (*zeki*) from founding members of Wagner (*osvovy*), with continuous assaults that resulted in 60 percent casualty rates among *zeki* units but eventually led to Russia's capture of Bakhmut in July 2023. Wagner absorbed those casualties because of its force structure. As one of the Ukraine team's researchers observed, "Losses did not reduce the combat readiness of Wagner units because commanders, operators of heavy and specialized weapons, reconnaissance, and command remained a constant element, not participating in the assaults." The ease with which private military companies adopt flexibility with the Law of Armed Combat, including assaulting local civilians and the high-casualty assault tactics disseminated into the regular Russian army, has left a legacy that has outlasted Prigozhin's failed mutiny in July 2023. These changes in force structure and tactics suggest that the United States and its allies must prepare for the unique challenges of fighting "stateless" proxy forces like Wagner in future conflicts.[4]

The Future of Effective Combat: Distributed, Decentralized, and Adaptive

Wagner could push changes in force structure that the Russian military was slow to adopt. With the incorporation of PMC elements into the regular Russian army following Prigozhin's mutiny and subsequent death, the "Storm-Z" structure and assault tactics became normalized in the Russian military. Russia continued to centralize its command and control over units on the battlefield, which gave Ukraine an advantage. In the second year of the war, Russia maintained a high level of control over forces with minimal subordinate initiative (mission command), unsurprising given the low level of unit training provided to Russian soldiers and the lack of trust that undermined unit cohesion. While Russian centralized command and control was effective in defensive positions, it proved catastrophic during offensive operations.

Ukrainian forces, meanwhile, adopted Western-style mission control in theory. In practice, however, they struggled to scale up mission control operations, given poorly trained staff at the battalion and brigade levels—a structural and cultural problem yet to be unwound. Developing this level of trust is woven into training at every echelon through TRADOC and, given the expected challenges of communication and isolation in the future battlefield, the military should redouble those efforts.[5]

This form of distributed operations was critical in fires direction / clearance and public information operations. Fires, long the "King of Battle," have proven pivotal to Ukraine's asymmetric response to Russia's numerically superior force, with Western systems like the high-mobility artillery rocket system (HIMARS) allowing Ukraine to strike deep behind Russian lines. Beyond the weapons systems, the decentralization of fire direction and clearance processes with technologies like the Ukrainian software Kropyva have enabled faster response times, as have the greater dispersion of artillery assets for survivability against counter-battery fire and loitering munitions.[6]

Likewise, Ukraine's decentralization of public information operations has been pivotal to shoring up resolve in Ukraine and among Western partners and countering Russian disinformation and misinformation. Ukraine's decision to afford more flexibility to its officials to speak openly and authentically has resonated with audiences and built crucial national support for difficult demands like mobilization. The Department of Defense—and the US government more broadly—would benefit from a similar approach of structured advocacy and investment in new information technologies.[7]

Finally, a new focus on the US Joint Force as an adaptive learning organization must join these distributed operations. As Russia and Ukraine grapple with the harsh realities of modern war, the margin for error has become increasingly narrow, making the ability to innovate and adapt swiftly a strategic advantage and necessity. The accelerating pace of technological change presents a unique challenge for military organizations—including our own—that are hierarchical and resistant to change. The highly volatile and fluid environment of the Russia-Ukraine War underscores this challenge. It demonstrates the value of increased investment in social capital and a federated approach to innovation and adaptation, flexibility that helped Ukraine adapt quickly to a swiftly changing operating environment.[8]

In the past, the US Army adopted this approach. Dedicating units to adaptability (such as Global War on Terror–era organizations like the Rapid Equipping Force and the Asymmetric Warfare Group) enabled rapid adaptation and fostered the capability to develop bottom-up solutions to counter asymmetric

threats. The US military should reconstitute both organizations and others like them that were discontinued to enable the flow of knowledge across the enterprise and accelerate the learning process. As our research team's innovation and adaptation expert observes, truly embracing innovation and adaptation requires leadership, dedicated resources, formal and informal networks, and a Department of Defense culture that prioritizes continuous innovation and creativity supported by policies encouraging personnel to question, observe, network, and experiment at all leadership levels.[9]

Back to the Trenches

As the war ground to a stalemate in the past year, trench warfare—not seen at this scale in Europe since World War I—presented new challenges to maneuver and protection and reinforced the critical role fires will play in future wars. Entrenched fortifications around Crimea, and those protecting the "land bridge" occupied territories of southern Kherson, Zaporizhzhya, and Donetsk oblasts along the Sea of Azov, offer lessons in continuity and change should the United States return to conventional large-scale combat operations after years of counterterrorism and counterinsurgency operations.

The conflict has offered a few lessons in the field of maneuver. First, combined arms operations at echelon remain the most effective means of seizing terrain and destroying opposing forces in land combat. They are complex, and planners cannot assume their success. Good combined arms doctrine exists and must remain central to leader development and training. Second, the utility of unmanned systems in land combat is nascent; their full potential is unrealized, and they could fundamentally change the logic of tactical risk. Unmanned systems are proving effective at augmenting current defensive practices for stationary armies but have not yet proven their worth in large maneuvers or reached full value as offensive tools with unique functions. Finally, battlefield transparency is deadly. The Russian and Ukrainian armies are adjusting to account for the probability of being seen by threat technology that reduces an organization's ability to mass offensively or to survive while massed defensively. Counterintuitively, techniques that enable survival on a transparent battlefield also undermine combined arms fundamentals; to preserve combined arms' value, the enterprise must develop technological solutions that negate transparency.[10]

Russian defensive fortifications have brought Joseph Stalin's famous line "quantity has a quality all of its own" to the modern battlefield. Russia's use of mass when employing thousands of antipersonnel and anti-tank land mines to reinforce well-constructed defensive obstacles foreshadows

challenges US Army forces will face in ground combat. As our protection research team concludes:

> As techniques for clearing obstacles have not evolved in the past half-century, the U.S. Army should explore other ways to overcome the challenges of deep, reinforced obstacles. This approach should be mirrored in electronic warfare (EW) protection, merging offensive and counter-drone efforts and co-locating activities where possible. Machine vision technology also stands to dramatically change survivability operations, driving a need for more and better decoys and incentivizing tactics that confuse algorithms, not just suppress signatures. In this area, the Army should establish more formal programs that can better judge decoy technology against the latest threats and accelerate experimentation at its training centers. By tackling these challenges now, the Army might save in future conflict the year that Ukraine lost in mounting an effective counteroffensive.[11]

Additionally, fires are pivotal to countering conventional and EW trench warfare. The US Army should integrate these capabilities into strike packages to counter enemy jamming of precision munitions and drones, revive the use of camouflage netting and decoys, and limit electronic signatures when static to avoid detection. Based on ground experience in Ukraine, the US Army should develop a "suppression of enemy electronic warfare" approach like the one used to suppress enemy air defenses.[12]

By Air, by Sea

As they had in the first year of the war, multidomain operations were a crucial element in the second year of the war. By land, air, and sea, Ukraine brought the fight to Russia in asymmetrical ways that will shape combat for years to come. Perhaps the single most significant lesson learned from the Russia-Ukraine War is that air superiority is still an essential prerequisite to enable combined-arms maneuver. In the air domain, offense is the dominant form of warfare and vital to gaining air superiority. Two years into the war, however, neither Russia nor Ukraine gained air superiority and instead focused on defensive tactics of air denial. These air-denial strategies create *air parity*, where the air domain is either neutral or contested, and neither side controls it. Air parity creates trench warfare in the sky and, subsequently, trench warfare on the ground. We conclude that defensive air-denial strategies are not winning

strategies, nor will they gain air superiority. They should only be used out of necessity until returning to the offense.

In a contested air defense environment, the United States can no longer take air superiority for granted. This shift is important for the US military; after years of fighting with air supremacy, the Joint Force has forgotten many of its capabilities and doctrines learned from previous air campaigns. Our research team's review of air operations in Ukraine in 2023 offers lessons for the Joint Force, including the need for training to air parity conditions, convergence and synchronization of Joint Forces to conduct multidomain offensive counter-air operations, improving passive and active defensive counter-air tactics, executing rapid and survivable kill chains at scale, exploring unmanned technologies, and ensuring adequate stockpiles of war materiel. These lessons should be reemphasized and codified into service doctrine and the *Joint Warfighting Concept* to ensure US capabilities to gain and maintain air superiority in future conflicts.[13]

These airpower lessons also apply to NATO, which must enhance its offensive and defensive counter-air operations by improving its situational awareness, resilience, interoperability, and innovation. Ukraine has demonstrated that robust air and missile defenses can impact an overall campaign and that air denial can be an effective interim solution—specifically for NATO members that lack offensive air capabilities—before NATO can bring its full offensive airpower to bear.[14]

Ukrainian operations in the maritime domain also provided important lessons. In the second year of the war, the rise of alliance capabilities (such as Finland and Sweden joining NATO and the Ukrainian Marine Corps separation from the Ukrainian Navy) significantly influenced the conflict in the Black Sea and Sea of Azov region. Likewise, 2023 maritime operations illustrated the need for the US Army, the US Marine Corps, and the US Navy to update doctrine to address warfare in deep blue, brown, and green water zones. Ukraine's effective use of smaller, more agile vessels and integration of fires and unmanned aerial systems to target and strike large Russian warships offers valuable insights into the types of vessels and technology worth US research and investment.[15]

The Battle for Information Advantage

The Russia-Ukraine War affords vital insights into how future conflicts will be influenced by the abundance of digital information and the maturation of artificial intelligence. For US Army Intelligence, a key aspect of the conflict is the emergence of an ecosystem of intelligence-like commercial services. Companies like Palantir, Planet Labs, BlackSky Technology, and Clearview AI are driving this ecosystem forward. Ukraine embraces these actors and

harnesses the potential of their services to make sense of ever-increasing amounts of information. Artificial intelligence is a critical development area, evident in applications such as targeting and battle tracking, facial recognition, voice recognition and translation, data management, autonomous flight, counter-disinformation efforts, and cybersecurity. Our intelligence team suggests four implications for US forces:

- First, the Russia-Ukraine War demonstrates the military significance of technological trends shaping the operational environment; even if the US Army intelligence enterprise chooses not to adopt them, they are available to allies, partners, and adversaries.
- Second, it shows how low-cost sensors and nodes can be integrated at the tactical and operational levels as part of a persistent and resilient collection network.
- Third, it shows how the US Army can leverage unclassified information sources to foster integration with allies and partners.
- Fourth, it reveals the versatility of unclassified information sources in terms of improving intelligence analysis, stimulating innovation, and forging connections with domestic and foreign audiences.[16]

The cyber domain has proven to be another critical battlefield for information advantage. The offensive cyber capabilities by Russia and Ukraine have demonstrated that cyber operations in armed conflict are becoming more destructive, emphasizing the need for robust cyber defense. As with fires, protection, and intelligence operations, AI-enabled cloud infrastructures have proven critical to cyberspace defense and cybersecurity—and, as with intelligence operations, are best achieved through the collaborative efforts of government with industry and international partnerships. Our cybersecurity team observes:

> Ukraine's cyber defense effort would not have been nearly as successful had it not been for the voluntary intervention of large US-based technology firms such as Google, Microsoft, Amazon, SpaceX, and several other technology companies. These corporations, however, intervened in the Russia-Ukraine War at a high cost to those organizations. This national collaboration can be improved and repeated with proper planning, funding, and policy development.

> Future cybersecurity strategies need to formalize private and commercial-sector contributions.[17]

The Future of Warfare—and Collective Security in Europe

Beyond the lessons learned outlined in this special commentary, how the war continues—and eventually ends—will be pivotal to European security and US national interests overseas. Continued security assistance from the United States and its allies—and unambiguous signaling on allied resolve—will be critical to bolster Ukrainian military efforts to roll Russia back and give it a stronger hand at the bargaining table as the war moves toward termination. Reaching war termination while Ukraine maintains maximalist war aims (recovering all territory occupied by Russia, including Crimea) would require a significant setback to Russian resolve. While Russia currently maintains an advantage in that regard, its resources are not absolute. As one of our researchers notes, its "artificially inflated economy, high inflation, shrinking population, growing discontent, and propensity to take significant losses for marginal gain" may eventually force Russia to negotiate. From Ukraine's perspective, any war termination agreement must consider a postwar Ukraine that has improved its security capacity, economic health, and political stability and be anchored firmly into transatlantic institutions such as NATO and regional associations in Eastern and Central Europe.[18]

As it has been since the war began in February 2022, continued military and diplomatic support by Ukraine's partners is critical. Some of the territory regained by Ukraine can be attributed to the battlefield effects of US- and NATO-provided systems (such as HIMARS and Leopard tanks) that showed support may tip the balance in Ukraine's favor. Providing weapons systems from many donor countries posed logistical challenges. As our research team's sustainment expert observes, the challenges faced by Russia and Ukraine have reiterated the need for the United States to "work across the whole of government and industrial base to build resiliency in the production of equipment and munitions to ensure the ability to increase production to the scale and in time required, maintaining a competitive advantage and ensuring secure supply chains in the future." Nearly as important as the weapons themselves, unified, unambiguous messaging on the systems as an enduring commitment to Ukraine is crucial to challenging Russia's resolve. Where tentative US signaling has so far managed escalation with Russia, it runs the risk of undermining the credibility of US threats, commitments, and assurances in the long run.[19]

Finally, this grueling year of the war reinforced the role that genuine leadership plays for morale and direction. As our research team's resiliency expert concludes,

Ukraine remained resilient against Russia's onslaught through its fabric of national identity, one knit together, at least partially, through its long history of generational trauma inflicted by its neighbor. Volodymyr Zelensky "leveraged that national identity and trauma to mobilize not only his military and fellow Ukrainians to resist . . . but also the western world to provide much needed training, funding, weapons, and equipment."[20]

The future Joint Force will require the sophisticated weapons, doctrine, training that TRADOC affords, and national will and resolve to fight and win the next war—one that may be as prolonged and arduous as the second year of this conflict has been for Ukraine. By studying the lessons observed, the US Armed Forces will be better prepared to deter and, if necessary, win that fight.

Michael T. Hackett

Michael T. Hackett is a foreign service officer at the US Department of State and served as the chief of staff for the integrated research project that studied the second year of the Russia-Ukraine War. He is a distinguished graduate of the US Army War College class of 2024.

John A. Nagl

John A. Nagl, the director of the Russia-Ukraine War integrated research project, is a retired Army officer and a professor of war-fighting studies at the US Army War College.

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Why the Afghan and Iraqi Armies Collapsed: An Allied Perspective

Colin D. Robinson

ABSTRACT: Rather than military factors, American and Western liberal ideas (ideological views) and politics explain many of the obstacles faced in rebuilding the Afghan and Iraqi Armies. Liberal ideas largely determined what options the coalition would use. Ideological factors help explain democratization and reconstruction challenges, partner leaders with divergent aims, military-cultural factors and the Western combat focus, politicization, corruption, and nepotism. This article reviews the differences between Western liberal democracies and partner states, the politics of counterinsurgency, and army accounts. This article will assist US practitioners in security cooperation, institutional capacity building, and security assistance.

Keywords: liberal peace, Afghan National Army, Iraqi Army, security sector reform, security force assistance

Within two years of the September 11 attacks, the United States found itself with substantial military forces in Afghanistan and Iraq. An enormous amount of foreign ideas and resources flowed into both countries. Security was crucial to any sustained reconstruction, so new armies were established in both countries. The two states became the largest examples of the West trying to rebuild armies amid counterinsurgencies (though from 2004 the process in the Democratic Republic of the Congo bears some similarities). Ensuring that both new forces were effective was crucial. At the higher strategic level, this process mostly became institutional capacity building, operationally and tactically, rebuilding efforts shaded into security force assistance

Both armies "mirrored" the fundamental features of the Anglo-American armies shepherding their rebirth. They were intended to be all-volunteer and virtually all light infantry. Making them all-volunteer cut across the Afghan and Iraqi previous conscript heritage of more than 70 years and their heavily

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mechanized history. Without strong foundations in their own histories, these mirror-image characteristics dissolved after US withdrawal. In Iraq's case, more than a third of the army collapsed within four years of the United States leaving; in Afghanistan, the whole state and army dissolved as the Taliban swept across the country. These failures echo the 1991 collapse of the Soviet-backed government in Afghanistan and the fall of South Vietnam in 1975. I have never found a contemporary case in which an outside liberal-democratic power that chose to fight an insurgency with its own forces in a big way has won. Indeed, such wars may not be "winnable."[1]

Several quick postmortems of varying quality followed the defeats in both countries. Corruption, theft, and tribal characteristics were often highlighted. Some US and allied shortcomings were discussed. Following the hasty exit from Afghanistan, a bipartisan Afghanistan War Commission is now gathering momentum in Washington, DC. Yet, while Carl von Clausewitz said commanders must "know the character, the feelings, the habits, the peculiar faults and inclinations of those" they commanded, thus far, thorough self-reflection on US and allied traits has been uncommon.[2]

The role of classical liberal thought, the "liberal conscience," is little considered when explaining Western military outcomes since 2001. Nonetheless, when its effects on Western attempts to build strong, effective, and accountable armies in conflict-affected states are considered, it explains many of the failures, especially in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The Liberal Worldview

The politics that drive people are crucial. The Department of Defense is only the standard-bearer for the United States—its government, people, and ideas—as a whole. The Founding Fathers' most important values—individualism, freedom, democracy with limited government, resistance to tyranny, reason, rationality (and, thus, progress), and justice—are classical liberal values. Classical liberalism prizes the individual and their rights, liberty, reason, and the consent of the governed. The existence of a state is fundamental. Western states are animated by their liberal conscience. Justice and reason should prevail. War is an aberration, but fighting wars may advance progress and justice. Using the word *liberalism* is not intended to highlight a left-wing viewpoint. Right-wing American politics also argues for freedom, justice, and resistance to tyranny, but with different priorities.[3]

Ideas influence technical decisions. For example, it was decided to change the Afghan and Iraqi Armies from conscript to all-volunteer forces. Political decisions influence an enormous number of technical processes.

It was not immediately obvious that rebuilding the Afghan or Iraqi Armies would involve exporting America's fundamental classical liberal values. If a clearly anarchist or communist idea such as a state takeover of all private enterprises was advocated as part of US assistance to partner armies, it would be instantly and clearly seen as part of an ideological agenda. Conversely, a bedrock classical liberal idea, such as ensuring all offenders against military law received a fair trial (flowing from the liberal idea of justice), is not identified as ideological. It is accepted, endorsed, and advocated—and strongly—as part of the natural order. This is because classical liberal values have so permeated US culture that their influence is hard to separate from Western civilization in general.[4]

Yet, in Afghanistan and Iraq, other values reigned supreme, and classical liberalism had hardly been seen before. Their politics, history, and culture were very different. When a determined America arrived, especially, perhaps, in the zeal of Ambassador L. Paul Bremer in Baghdad, a clash of values, and resistance, was inevitable.

Neither Afghanistan nor Iraq had any experience with liberal democracy. Instead, Afghanistan had seen war since 1977; Iraq, political turbulence and military intervention in politics dating to the 1930s, and Saddam Hussein's dictatorship since 1979. Politics were dominated by violent winner-take-all confrontations.[5]

When the new Afghan and Iraqi armies were created, almost all Western military features were adopted. They were to be all-volunteer, well trained, and mostly light infantry. These new features meant fundamental change, as both had previously been conscript, heavily mechanized forces with uneven levels of training and motivation. Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates later acknowledged that "too often we tried to build the Afghan force in our own image, not based on a more sustainable indigenous design." Yet, building and training indigenous armies in the image of the US Army ranked "high on the list" of failed counterinsurgency practices. The mirror-image approach created an addiction to US support. The advisory function was given little importance, and personnel were poor quality. Development of logistics functions in Iraq and Afghanistan was almost literally an afterthought.[6]

Without solid foundations in their own heritage, these mirror-image characteristics did not last. National factional struggles were imported into the new security forces as they were created. Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki began

to politicize all security forces, damaging their effectiveness. Iraqi falsehoods about their own effectiveness often deceived US personnel, and after the US withdrawal, the Iraqi Army lost much of the professionalism it had tried to instill. When the Islamic State's very small forces attacked, a third of the army collapsed, and two more divisions were badly mauled. As it was rebuilt, the army was supplemented by the Iranian-influenced Popular Mobilization Forces militias. By 2016–17, US military personnel concluded, "Afghan security forces . . . cannot succeed—or function—without . . . international[s]." Then, the entire Afghan Army and government dissolved with the Taliban advance in 2021. Neither army remained a strong, centralized force structured on Western liberal lines.[7]

Four Key Problems That Led to Large-Scale Collapse

Why did this collapse happen? Chance, friction, and technical program errors played a role, yet ideological and political choices set the overall conditions. Four key commonalities substantially affected these depressing outcomes.

1. The politicians and warlords in the two states had little or no interest in classical liberal democracy, including politically unified national institutions, government ministries, and militaries.
2. Afghanistan's and Iraq's education, health care, and other civilian agencies, worn down by constant repression and strife, could not provide anything like the preparation the US Army or Marines depend upon.
3. Western armies ultimately focus on regular warfare against organized opponents. Their culture, indoctrination, and internal politics have developed to meet that mission. They have never been intended, and are not well suited, to recreate social groups with very different values.
4. Corruption, nepotism, patronage, and politicization—neo-patrimonial dynamics, in academic terms—are real hindrances.[8]

"They Don't Want What We Want": Survival and Power, Not Liberal Policies

First, no important leaders in Afghanistan or Iraq had any particular commitment to liberal democracy. Westerners focused on achieving political settlements and emphasized holding elections. Regardless, no binding force impels cooperative politics to build stable nations. Bedrock liberal ideas—

that loyalties should be transferred from the illiberal clan or *qawm* to the state—were at the roots of both interventions. The United States and its allies created dilemmas about whom the Afghan and Iraqi peoples might trust by forcefully advocating a switch from clan or *qawm* loyalties to liberal ideology's loyalty to a sovereign state. Habits of violence were hard to break, and the stakes were far too high. Hamid Karzai's government in Afghanistan came to be seen as fundamentally corrupt. Beyond Afghanistan's presidential palace, the most powerful warlords and other strongmen used a variety of violent and coercive tactics to advance their interests.[9]

The same patterns developed in Iraq after 2003. A political free-for-all, often dependent on violence, replaced Saddam's tight control. Sunni-Shia relations broke down, extremism and resentment against foreign forces rose, and, in response, Shia, Sunni, and Kurdish communities became inward looking, arming to protect themselves from the others. Iraq's economics ministries "systematically [withheld] services from Sunni citizens while lavishing Western aid on programmes that benefited only Shias." Pakistani influence destabilized Afghanistan, while covert Iranian activities disrupted Afghanistan and Iraq. Finally, the insurgents had no interest in classical liberal ideas.[10]

Any sudden conversion to liberal-democratic processes would have been completely out of character. So, while surface forms changed, the underlying nature of often-violent politics did not. Warlords and political party leaders had little faith in democracy, so they perverted the new armies to suit themselves. Al-Maliki's government "became an instrument of sectarian warfare, . . . dominated by Shia militias which persistently prevented US forces from going after known Shia terrorists." In Afghanistan, political interference fanned ethnic factionalism. Unstable ethnic balancing damaged merit-based appointments—illiterate people were repeatedly placed in senior positions. Very different motivations meant, in turn, that neither strong governments, nor the strong civilian bodies that they create, existed to support the new armies.[11]

Key Preparatory Institutions Were Insufficient

Western states evolved strong governments that needed and slowly created the institutions necessary to support effective armies. Over hundreds of years, the vast majority of the European states that existed in the 1600s disappeared through war. As they repeatedly mobilized for war, the successful survivors evolved the supporting agencies that are vital to Western armies. Most Western European states also became genuine democracies (with upsets and aberrations, such as Germany from 1933 to 1945). Their military effectiveness developed to serve democratic aims and became dependent certain liberal-democratic features.

Today, democratic armies in Europe and North America cannot be effective without other bodies being effective:

- functioning democratic political systems;
- policing and justice systems to ensure social compliance and the habit of that compliance in recruits;
- well-functioning education systems to provide quality recruits;
- health systems to ensure recruits are healthy; and
- many other functions in different ways.[12]

Most of these supporting bodies evolved through *external* wars. The successful surviving states established a "monopoly of violence" across their entire territories. Bureaucracies were created to raise and train large conscript armies. These bureaucracies grew into civilian life, building roads and providing services like education. The American Civil War produced many similar effects (for example, the Legal Tender Act of 1862 led to the creation of a national currency for the United States).[13]

Afghanistan and Iraq were created differently, the product of lines drawn on maps by colonizers. They were wracked by *internal* wars. Arguably, no central authority capable of seizing the "monopoly of violence" across all of Afghanistan has ever existed. States like Iraq have dissolved into violence when strongmen-rulers like Saddam were removed. War did not force either government to create an effective army (or bureaucracy) with the alternative meaning the state might disappear. Instead, their frontiers generally stayed the same, while rebellious minorities like the Kurds remained. Overambitious boundary lines insufficiently supported by strong authorities, however, were pushed farthest in Africa. Soon after US efforts to re-raise the Afghan and Iraqi armies started, a similar plan, to create 18 brigades, began in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Later, the same type of collapse occurred when the new force was called on to defend Goma.[14]

When the US military arrived, Afghan and Iraqi government agencies were feeble, biased, or nonexistent. Afghan and Iraqi citizens often had little faith in their national governments, sometimes for decades. Building liberal democracies and free markets was also a tall order. This type of social engineering in "historically minute time frames" had little success since the Cold War ended. American sponsorship of key politicians attracted repeated criticism. Weaknesses in schools, hospitals, policing, and elsewhere badly harmed efforts to rebuild

the military. Recruit belief in the nation varied wildly, health often suffered due to lack of resources, and schooling had been disrupted. As a result, the potential for soldiering was often significantly diminished.[15]

The Decisive Battle—Combat Focus

Western armies focus on winning decisive battles against other armies that stand and fight. Other activities are secondary. Advisory tasks remain outside the main focus—high-intensity armored and mechanized combat. The US Army has "rarely given sufficient priority" to advisory teams for foreign forces.[16]

This lack of priority is underlined by how long it took to set up specialist advisory units after 2001. Sixteen years after the war in Afghanistan began, and three years after the transfer of military responsibility to the Afghan authorities, specialist security force assistance brigades were created. Despite advocacy stretching back to 2007, however, no separate administrative branch was formed, which would have raised the status of combat advisers. Advisers would only shift in and out of security force assistance units, rather than be permanently part of a branch. Ideally, the most experienced soldiers would staff the brigades, to ensure they could give good advice. To ensure the brigades' ranks were filled, however, the Army offered automatic promotion for volunteers, suspending professional military education requirements. In May 2021, the 5th Security Force Assistance Brigade had "its ranks stacked with poor performers with disciplinary baggage." Adviser jobs were not seen as career enhancing. Cash bonuses had to be offered to transfer into a brigade, and while the general supervising the brigades has now been made equal in rank to the "line" division commanders, the post hardly has the same prestige.[17]

Western armies' indoctrination builds teamwork and adherence to orders. The initial training focus is toward a positivist, optimistic approach so that a platoon leader is ready to lead 30–40 soldiers over the "last hundred yards," using hand-to-hand fighting, if necessary, to seize enemy positions. Officers are honed toward "gripping" a situation and taking action. British Army doctrine explicitly describes action as better than inaction. The resulting, often forceful personalities are attuned toward *breaking* things on the battlefield, however, not slow consensus building to *make* things in a starkly different culture. Choosing the dominant Western all-volunteer force option, rather than conscription, meant potential soldiers with key skills often found better-paying civilian jobs. As a result, Afghan and Iraqi soldiers often needed significant skill

development to operate effectively. Results were patchy and frequently disrupted. Foreign army officers were often tempted to take over and do tasks themselves.[18]

On September 11, 2001, the US Army had an officially approved counterinsurgency doctrine, though with some flaws. But it did not have a manual or existing terms for rebuilding an army from scratch. Comparable experiences in South Vietnam and South Korea were forgotten or set aside. The nearest applicable doctrine was foreign internal defense, which Special Forces used to help host states against insurgency. Nevertheless, the mostly "Big Army" soldiers tasked with overseeing the rebuilding processes had little or no foreign internal defense knowledge. The new security force assistance doctrine helped fill this gap at the tactical level. The strategic-level, organizational mechanics of creating whole new armies—now often termed institutional capacity building—were far less emphasized. Logistics and maintenance were developed late in Afghanistan and built to mirror US practices, and the United States provided most logistics in Iraq for many years. Institutional support structures were built late, ad hoc, or ignored. They had been hardly considered before 2001.[19]

Doctrine like security force assistance is frequently treated as a technical field, and doing so helps soldiers master the chaos of war. Repetition is the mother of clarity, and constant training improves execution and calms fears. Technical approaches are used to instruct soldiers on how to employ weapons. For example, there is a field manual on how to use an M2 Browning machine gun. To clean, clear, load, and fire a machine gun, one can preset routines and achieve fixed, predetermined outcomes. An engineering approach leads to controllable outcomes.[20]

The problem with treating many military activities as preset and technically achievable becomes clearer when one looks at tank company tactics field manuals. These manuals outline specific actions to maneuver tank companies to achieve success. Nonetheless, a 14-tank attack is not clearing and elevating a machine gun. Friction, human error, and plain luck can make or break it. It is not a malleable, controllable outcome. The same type of technical approach is visible, to some extent, at brigade-level, division-level, and higher-level doctrine. For example, Brigadier General Huba Wass de Czege, author of the 1980s AirLand Battle doctrine worried that some contemporary field manuals were taking "an engineering approach" to war. Technical inputs can fail because persuading other people is necessary—not just manipulating weapons in certain sequences. It is also nearly impossible to explain or predict how technical inputs

will alter recipient countries' social processes or individual behaviors. Training programs almost never change the recipients' values.[21]

Well-entrenched power players bitterly resisted Western attempts to seize control, and often succeeded (and continue to do so). They almost always succeeded because of the strength of personal connections, despite frequent technical or material disadvantages.

Personal and Familial Connections Defeated Institution Building

The coalition's failures testify to strong motivations of people to act for family, friends, or other personal connections—patron and client networks, in academic terms. Professionalism became meaningless; patronage and corruption grew. Patronage networks affected senior Afghan Army appointments until the final moments. Afghan National Army supplies sales were often mentioned "as a major factor in demotivation." Rumors emerged of Afghan Army personnel involvement in the drug trade and positions being sold for cash. Soldiers sold Military equipment. For al-Maliki in Iraq, the security forces' "hard-won-professionalism . . . meant they could not be trusted to do his bidding . . . [and] he began to systematically politicize [them] to ensure [they were] wholly subservient to his will." After the US withdrawal in 2011, "political, tribal and family favouritism expanded out of control. The most senior positions in the military were run by unqualified persons . . . many focused on avoiding work and making money through corruption." These incompetent senior officers also stopped training the troops. The eventual result was large-scale collapse.[22]

Recommendations

Many often-theoretical ideas have been discussed above. What relationship do they have to soldiering where the rubber hits the road? What can this article contribute for curious captains, majors, lieutenant colonels, or senior noncommissioned officers, who are now frequently focused on Russian battalion tactical groups, not insurgents?

Our liberal values help explain much of our armies' successes—and failures. Western armies may almost always be superior in the tactical fight, but at the strategic level, many influential power players, almost always men, around the world do not share our liberal values. Western domestic constituencies understand little of this reality. If the problems were more tactical, they would have been more fixable. American and British reluctance to reflect on the successes and failures in Afghanistan and the almost hasty turn toward the new Russian regular threat risk repeating the willful forgetting of Vietnam.

Nevertheless, the demand for irregular deployments will probably increase as the century continues. Worldwide political reluctance to take major steps to fend off climate change will result in natural disasters and conflict, weaken many allies and partners, and likely lead to an increase in deployment requests.[23]

The Federal Government

The first set of recommendations sits at the national level. The first, second, and fourth factors identified above are not best addressed by the Department of Defense—neither by the military departments nor combatant commanders. Neither have much expertise in these matters. They are better addressed by other parts of the federal government.

When Western military expeditions (or UN peace operations driven by the same liberal ideas) are dispatched, they face a vast gap in understanding and, often, sustained resistance. The political problems that spark expeditions are often left half finished. Influential power players in these places fear reforms that will reduce their power.[24]

A first change seems obvious and has already been partially implemented. Do not go. Fewer interventions should be launched. Robert S. McNamara regretted his actions looking back at Vietnam; Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger, and Colin Powell working for him, tried to limit interventions. There was diminished enthusiasm for an international security force to Libya. British Chiefs of Defence Staff have described trying to fend off such expeditions, including to Zimbabwe. With much greater knowledge, France tried to influence events in the Sahel with significant forces since 2013, but political changes in 2022–23 destroyed much of their efforts.[25]

Second, the Department of State is present worldwide and has the US government lead for relationships with other nations. For many of these human rather than overhead-imagery problems, the Department of State is the reconnaissance asset already in place. There should be more consideration for, cooperation with, and resources for the Department of State. As Secretary of Defense James Mattis said, "if you don't fund the State Department fully, then I need to buy more ammunition." The Department of Defense and, in effect, the Department of the Army should not lead these efforts. They should be backing off. "Militarizing" a challenge can go horribly wrong. These activities are not technical ones to be planned, managed, or solved. The impulse to write a program plan and push it through should be avoided at all costs.[26]

The first course of action should be to initiate discussions with the correct bureau in the Department of State. The Department of State's political knowledge

should shape and dictate the outlines of any military assistance or larger Army reconstruction program because it will have a significantly greater chance of achieving overall federal government goals. The more that indigenous partners shape activities, the more sustainable the results will be. After the program's outlines are set, it is perhaps the United States Agency for International Development that has a better chance of successfully implementing programs. The Department of the Army, combatant commands, or the Department of Defense should be just *one* US agency involved in such efforts. To achieve program success in different cultures, they should not be *leading*. The Department of State should virtually always *lead*. The United States Agency for International Development and the Department of Defense can *execute* under the Department of State's control. A well-executed example of this type of interagency program was the Bosnia Train and Equip Program of the late 1990s.[27]

Third, if forces go overseas, expectations should be severely tempered; expecting strong Westphalian states is not realistic. More local input and listening more to locals' ideas—and less insistence on liberal ideas—will produce a more sustainable peace their way and waste less effort. The impact of an intervention will diminish over time, whatever Western actors do.[28]

Fourth, if regional security is the paramount aim, then liberal programs can be obstacles. "Too often we arrive thinking we know better than the locals and [foist] on communities a series of programs they neither want nor need." A clear example was the enlistment of women that led to one in eight female Afghan National Police officers being sexually abused. Refuges for battered wives were sometimes unwelcome in Afghanistan. Liberal ideas need only be pushed as far as they advance the overall aim. Are we only replicating our own models instead of choosing options that might work? Tribal, ethnic, "hybrid school," and non-state solutions ought to be considered again and again.[29]

The Military

Military departments, not civilian ones, are regularly asked to take on responsibilities more properly civilian in faraway lands or are called upon to "win," despite formidable political compromises. Irregular warfare should be a major priority, which promotions and preparation should reflect.

Two major starting points for the US Army are clear. First, the US Army should prepare for regular, conventional, *and* irregular warfare, giving irregular tasks perhaps 40 percent of its effort. A framework for implementation is readily available: the 2005 directive prioritizing stability operations equally with combat. Second, personnel is policy. Promoting ready adapters to the senior ranks is vital. After Secretary of Defense Gates signed off on an unusual promotion list,

H. R. McMaster did attain the rank of general. Chief of Staff of the Army Raymond T. Odierno followed up on some of this in 2011–12, drawing up new rules for the Army's promotion boards. Then momentum was lost, and, so, more needs to be done. For example, virtually no one is considering offering John Nagl reinstatement within the active Army at the rank of major general. The point is not the names of the individuals written above; it is that the Army needs people in the senior ranks who can adapt better.[30]

What about institutional capacity building lower down the hierarchy? Here, a modified version of David Kilcullen's "28 Articles" may prove useful:

- Fundamentally civilian responsibilities should be mentored by civilians. For uniformed officers, the focus should be on the higher-level personnel because the military works by hierarchy. A lower-level focus may just build more capable human rights abusers.
- Get to know one's turf—the country, government, and previous military and security assistance efforts, grievances, and history—as much as possible.
- Unorthodox, innovative approaches (as mission command allows) can be very effective and will sometimes be vital.
- Balance the potential conflict between your instructions, what the partner headquarters wants, and needs for one's specific area of operations or task (derived from article 22). What approaches will produce sustainable effects—even if they are not quite what our values would prefer? What will the result look like if one imagines the effects after five years? Will the mission be closer to success?[31]

Conclusion

Much of the world's influential decisionmakers do not share the Western liberal conscience. Many have bitterly resisted Western attempts to impose liberal solutions. The general Western aim in the developing world is regional stability, preventing large-scale conflict. Climate change will increasingly make Western activities in the developing world harder and, long term, will force some sort of managed retreat. To achieve regional stability, it will often be best to reduce program aims that are too obviously, plainly, liberal.

The crucial importance of ideas—liberalism and its values—underpinning the whole approach taken by the US Army and its close partners to irregular operations has hardly been grasped. This article focuses on the strategic level and draws heavily from the political science literature. To help chart a better way forward, several areas of future study could be explored profitably: confirmation of this research at the operational and tactical level, from much more on-the-ground data; division- and brigade-level confirming cases across Afghanistan and Iraq; an examination of related challenges, such as United Nations peace operations, with the large-scale army reconstruction effort in the Democratic Republic of the Congo an obvious first choice; and the study of liberalism's effects on police and paramilitary assistance programs.

What are the potential consequences of ignoring the failures canvassed in this article, most starkly clear in the collapse of US and allied hopes in Afghanistan in 2021 and in South Vietnam in the early 1970s? If the US Army does not change its habits of thinking, it risks further large-scale failures. Just over 25 years after South Vietnam was lost, the Army was drawn into what became another large-scale counterinsurgency fight in Afghanistan. Thousands of US lives were lost, with many more wounded, to say nothing of Afghan and allied casualties; trillions of dollars were spent; and now, many returned veterans are left to wonder if their comrades' deaths really counted for anything. If the Army does not change itself, it risks repetition—in a century in which Chinese and Russian power may exact much more of a price than the consequences that followed Afghanistan. For example, in southern Somalia, repeating the current failed approach over and over again brings Islamic insurgents there within striking distance of repeating the Taliban's large-scale victories. The US Army needs to take irregular warfare much, much, more seriously, if it wants to avoid future defeats.

Colin D. Robinson

Dr. Colin D. Robinson lectures on defense leadership and management at Cranfield Defence and Security, Shrivenham, United Kingdom. He began his tracking of Operation Enduring Freedom while at the Center for Defense Information in Washington, DC, in 2002. He has worked for the New Zealand Ministry of Defence, the New Zealand Defence Force, and the United Nations, has assisted in military advisory efforts, and, academically, was attached to Massey University in New Zealand, the University of Liberia (2016–17), and the eSchool of Professional Military Education, United States Air Force Air University (2020–22).

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Restoring Priority on Cultural Skill Sets for Modern Military Professionals

Daniel W. Henk and Allison Abbe

ABSTRACT: The Department of Defense has failed to distinguish and sustain cultural education relative to foreign language and regional expertise, putting servicemembers at a competitive disadvantage in developing skills to engage other cultures. This article draws on recent retrospective publications and multidisciplinary social science perspectives but goes beyond them to argue for social science approaches to culture, department-wide efforts to revive culture education, and an improved transition of sociocultural research to practice. Policy and military practitioners will benefit from understanding how culture-general skills complement other important skills in the human domain and from implementing its recommendations.

Keywords: culture, human domain, cross-cultural competence, military education

Participation in the war on terrorism obliged America's military professionals to confront complex human relations challenges. In contrast to their world-class instruments of annihilation, they were ill-equipped to deal with the trenchant human relations issues they regularly faced. They lacked the abilities to communicate effectively, recognize patterns and cues of social dynamics in unfamiliar cultural circumstances, understand cultural implications for mission success, and draw from a conceptual inventory of options for action. Even at the lower end of the conflict spectrum, these deficiencies could have lethal consequences (for example, the US failure to distinguish an Afghan rural wedding procession from an insurgent convoy or an earlier UN failure in Bosnia when a Dutch battalion failed to anticipate, recognize, or prevent a genocidal spree by Bosnian Serb militias in Srebrenica in 1995).[1]

When confronted with the cultural challenges of early twenty-first-century conflict, America's military leaders reacted with initiatives to acquire new and badly needed intercultural capabilities. Yet, just as those initiatives matured after a decade of effort, official attention and resources shifted again, and much of what had been built was dismantled. This was the third time in 75 years that almost the same process had occurred. Gifted Marine Corps University scholars

Kerry B. Fosher and Lauren Mackenzie chronicled the latest story in an edited work that leaves an unsettling sense of what might have been, and they suggest the process will be repeated in the future when sophisticated cross-cultural skills are again recognized as essential and missing military capabilities.[2]

Within a dynamic security environment, the need for cross-cultural competence has not diminished, and the US military continues to concede a competitive advantage in the human domain. This article advocates for a restart of the early twenty-first-century culture initiatives, with an emphasis on culture science. There are two key implications of this argument. First, it is possible to provide America's military professionals with conceptual tools that will allow them to get inside the heads (and decision cycles) of friends, uncommitted onlookers, and foes and understand, anticipate, and impact behavior for mission success. The second implication is that this expertise is not dependent on language skills or detailed prior knowledge of a foreign society, even though those skills add critical value.

This article describes how the US military has tried to come to grips with culture skills, has distinguished them from language and regional expertise, yet has seemingly abandoned culture skill to a trajectory of terminal decline. It then outlines the continuing importance of culture skills and offers recommendations for restoring the lost initiative. Rather than attempt a comprehensive historical review of cultural capability programs, this article focuses on educating and training military forces to understand and navigate other cultures.

General Background

In the aftermath of the al-Qaeda attacks on September 11, 2001, the United States faced novel threats, a situation worsened by the Iraq War two years later. Working in coalitions of partners with diverse organizational cultures and agendas presented challenges that were not new to the American military experience yet were problematic.[3]

Adversaries from America's long and painful conflict in southeast Asia were barely remembered. The new opponents were often amorphous, difficult to define, and increasingly skilled in asymmetric warfare against their technologically superior foes. They grew competent at information operations and the manipulation of modern media. They proved clever at exploiting ties of ethnicity, kinship, affinity, class, ideology, historical narrative, and educational cohort. They rarely fielded conventional military forces and could shift allegiance in reaction to important events and actors. They committed atrocities to intimidate local populations and energize attentive publics. While fluid,

opposition alliances and networks were often transnational, and host-nation civilians' all-important "hearts and minds" proved elusive.[4]

Problems on the ground prompted initiatives across the Department of Defense (DoD). At first, America's military leaders established a new vision and strategy to acquire and manage language skills, promulgating a *Defense Language Transformation Roadmap* in early 2005. While commendable and necessary, the roadmap never satisfied demands from the field for greater foreign language capability. By the time of its publication, the services had concluded they needed something more.[5]

By 2007, all the services had inaugurated programs, including service culture centers, to generate the skills they believed they needed, and they engaged relevant experts in intensive cross-service communications and conferences to share ideas, expertise, experiences, and findings. The centers played a central role in service culture initiatives for more than a decade, but each service embarked on a different approach.

The Marine Corps emphasized pre-deployment training and integrated culture and regional studies in a career-long education program. Its Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning also harnessed a robust and effective effort to gather and integrate lessons learned from ongoing operations. The Navy's Language, Regional Expertise, and Culture (LREC) Program and the Army's TRADOC (Training and Doctrine Command) Culture Center also emphasized pre-deployment training, but the Army invested its efforts into integrating contracted culture experts in tactical units in Afghanistan and Iraq—the Human Terrain System. Although resource intensive, the Human Terrain System proved controversial in academe and struggled to recruit qualified subject matter experts. After modest achievements, the program ended in 2014. The Air Force also offered pre-deployment culture training, through the Air Force Culture and Language Center. By 2009, the Air Force had also embarked on a remarkable long-term program to infuse its entire professional military education (PME) suite with culture content through an Air University Quality Enhancement Program.[6]

Through the culture centers, all the services expanded their emphasis from "just-in-time" pre-deployment training to long-term education of the entire force through PME programs. Accompanying directives from the Office of the Secretary of Defense and Joint Staff mandated culture education and established a framework for assessing and managing culture skills.[7]

By 2015, the US service culture programs had matured, but the centers faced significant obstacles. Senior leader support was, at best, inconsistent within PME establishments. The centers struggled to recruit culture scientists to operationalize and teach culture skills. At the outset, they also lacked empirical assessment methods to show learning achievement. Over time, the Air Force and Marine Corps culture centers progressed in developing and applying assessment tools, but the results were preliminary when the work ended.[8]

Although they did not meet all the hopes of their supporters, the culture centers achieved a much better definition of human relations challenges and a clearer understanding of the "art of the possible" in meeting them. Some new culture education had appeared in professional military education. The new curriculum seemed permanent and likely to produce some enhanced capability at the foundational level. Nevertheless, this early promise did not convince the skeptics and sustain the needed resources to progress to skill set maturity. By 2024, much of what was built had vanished. The sole remaining service culture center is the Air Force Culture and Language Center, which, among other roles, conducts an annual symposium to sustain collaboration within the LREC community.[9]

The Arrival of the Language, Regional Expertise, and Culture Rubric

One change in military skill development after 2010 was a new interest in culture "at the top," regarding policy. In 2011, the Office of the Secretary of Defense embraced a novel rubric for a range of necessary new skills—language, regional expertise, and culture. Direction from the Office of the Secretary of Defense (supplemented by Joint Staff documents) established the new skill sets as critical military resources, charging the military departments and combatant commands with developing and reporting on their availability—though they lacked methods to assess capabilities other than language and to hold the services accountable.

The Office of the Secretary of Defense mandates applied the oversight infrastructure established in the 2005 *Defense Language Transformation Roadmap*, making the foreign language infrastructure responsible for regional expertise and culture. The Department of Defense's embrace of these new skills suggested promising future capabilities. The documents identified specific skills, desired outcomes, and proficiency levels in the different skill set categories, acknowledging variation in different servicemembers' needs and abilities.[10]

The Office of the Secretary of Defense's LREC formula outlined a triad of separate-but-related skill sets, a useful distinction, since each set develops through different processes and produces different outcomes. Each "leg" of the LREC triad has a different history in academe and the Department of Defense. Language and regional expertise communities long predated the arrival of cultural skill sets, so two of the three "legs" already had influential constituencies (detailed below). The culture community's constituency was—and is—nascent, small, dispersed, and vulnerable. Although desirable and the most lacking at the outset of the war on terrorism, culture skills were the easiest to snuff out as senior leader attention waned, priorities shifted toward Asia-Pacific threats, and little advocacy remained after the United States withdrew forces from Iraq in 2011.[11]

The vulnerability of the culture skill set within the Department of Defense can also be attributed to the dearth of culture scientists with the requisite incentive and skills to navigate the complex DoD policy infrastructure or to collaborate across the distinct social and behavioral science disciplines. Few behavioral science graduate programs share a vision for this type of praxis or encourage students to seek out these opportunities to serve. Some academic disciplines have an aversion to government service from a historical narrative of morally questionable government-academic involvements (for example, the use of social science for counterinsurgency in Project Camelot in the 1960s).[12]

Distinguishing Culture in the Language, Regional Expertise, and Culture Triad

Before arguing for the importance of culture skills and noting reasons for their institutional vulnerability, we first compare the status and roles of the different LREC skill sets.

Language

Foreign language had a secure and influential DoD constituency before the war on terrorism, which grew following the promulgation of the *Defense Language Transformation Roadmap* in 2005. A flag-level senior language authority (SLA) directly subordinate to the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness oversees DoD language equities. The senior language authority chairs a Defense Language Steering Committee with participation by senior representatives in the services, combatant commands, and national intelligence agencies. In the LREC world, language gave an early and clear impression of being first among equals.

The Department of Defense's world-class Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center has produced a steady stream of language-enabled service

personnel for decades. After 2005, in compliance with the roadmap, the Department of Defense also increased its emphasis on recruiting native speakers, encouraged language learning in pre-accession and service education, and increased financial incentives for servicemembers who maintained their language skills.

Fluency in foreign languages is a critical military resource at all levels of rank and across the entire conflict continuum. Notwithstanding the efforts to acquire and manage language resources more effectively since 2005, America's military has struggled to produce and distribute militarily qualified foreign language speakers, and many of them are absorbed by the Intelligence Community. Given the intelligence agencies' requirements and limitations of personnel assignment processes, this situation is unlikely to change soon. The impossibility of predicting future language requirements with precision and the length of the language learning process make it difficult to build a sudden "surge" capability to produce militarily competent speakers of newly needed languages.[13]

Language may be a critical resource, but its inventory and distribution limitations suggest a need for other communication options. Service personnel engaged in no-notice contingency operations may benefit from emerging machine translation technologies. Other options include proficiency in working with interpreters and mature cross-cultural communications capabilities, which are foundational culture skills.

Regional Expertise

Before the war on terrorism, regional expertise, like language, was already a present and valued skill set with several different DoD constituencies. Regional expertise is a detailed familiarity with a particular geographic region and an ability to use this understanding effectively in military roles.

Foreign area officers (FAOs) formed the most visible US military community of regional experts in the early twenty-first century. These officers were carefully selected, mature specialists developed by each of the services. Their expertise was built on a foundation of language learning, graduate education, and on-site regional exposure, a multiyear educational process. Embassies, intelligence agencies, and high-level staffs valued this small community. The 2005 *Defense Language Transformation Roadmap* and later DoD policy emphasized the importance of the FAO specialists. The Department of Defense also had small communities of officer and enlisted regionalists in intelligence and special operations roles.[14]

The new LREC mandates signaled that regional expertise was not limited to the specialized communities and, while lauding the FAOs, implied the source of regional expertise was not critical. They identified a need for the expertise, specified the levels of capability, and noted the expected performance at each level.

While the Department of Defense values regional expertise, it also has limits. Understanding regional dynamics does not imply an ability to engage in more granular levels of analysis and navigate interpersonal interactions effectively. Additionally, familiarity with a particular region does not necessarily translate beyond geographic boundaries. For example, FAOs with expertise in Central America cannot necessarily apply that expertise in Central Asia. No matter how many regional experts a planning staff has, research has shown that experts are unskilled at anticipating a future contingency environment. Nor can one assume the US military will be able to find experts for all contingency environments in a timely manner.[15]

In future foreign interventions, America's expeditionary military will likely deal with unanticipated microcultures for which advanced preparation was impossible. This scenario is not the only context in which regional skills may be stretched. One can imagine a general war scenario featuring a temporary NATO command node containing Allied counterpart personnel from Finland, Italy, Portugal, Slovenia, Türkiye, and the United Kingdom. Cross-cultural leadership in that context would be challenging and critical to strategic success. The only realistic preparation for such circumstances would be a kit of universally applicable conceptual tools—a culture-general skill set.

Culture: The Missing Piece

After 2005, the Department of Defense placed renewed emphasis on language and regional expertise. In doing so, it could fall back on solid constituencies in the department that were already sold on the value of these skills. It could also activate a well-established developmental infrastructure. Nevertheless, the experiences of America's service personnel suggested the most glaring missing capability was the ability to deal with the human relations challenges they regularly encountered. While greater foreign language capability would have helped, the deployed forces also needed better conceptual tools to understand and deal with people, individually and collectively, for mission success. These culture skills had no prior DoD constituency and had little educational content in service education before 2005.

The missing constituency would presumably have comprised a critical mass of behavioral and social scientists to define and operationalize culture skills,

apply them to service personnel's needs, and infuse them in development programs from pre-accession education through the senior service colleges. This community did not exist in 2005; today it exists only as a dispersed group in limited numbers.[16]

Beyond the defense context, the broader culture science community applies behavioral and social science tools to understand and enable interaction with multiple cultures. Culture science draws from the anthropology, sociology, psychology, cultural geography, and communications disciplines, among others. Culture is suited to scientific inquiry because human belief and behavior occur in repeatable patterns worldwide, making them amenable to scientific analysis, categorization, and prediction. Someone familiar with those patterns who can interpret observed cues and has an inventory of potential responses should be able to apply that expertise anywhere without prior exposure to a region.

While cultural patterns and cues can be learned, applying that expertise in security settings requires a foundation of personal attributes such as self-awareness, cognitive flexibility, and empathy and the ability to adapt without adopting and suspend judgment while maintaining a firm handle on cross-cultural communication skills. Fosher and Mackenzie's culture-general guidebook provides a recent compilation of necessary operational skills military personnel can develop through education and experience (see table 1).[17]

Table 1. Foundational culture-general skills

Foundational Culture-General Skills
Suspending judgment
Developing self-regulation
Cultivating perspective taking
Developing intercultural communication skills
Building rapport
Managing culture shock
Working with an interpreter

These attributes require development over time and are the prerequisite tools in the culture kit. It is difficult to use the more advanced tools without these foundational attributes. Most of the culture content in military education remains at this foundational level—a significant improvement over the situation in 2005, but still far from the skill set's true potential.

The more advanced culture skills address cultural dynamics that impact the strategic or operational environment and include the ability to use cues

to recognize patterns of thinking and behavior (or find them through astute questioning); draw from an inventory of approaches to build relations; solve problems; and impact behavior for mission success. See table 2 for examples of the relevant cultural dynamics that advanced observers would seek out. The patterns could include the local cultural norms of leadership, authority and legitimacy, local decision-making processes, patron-client networks, information networks, sources of local instability, ideological commitments, and degrees of resistance to change.

Table 2. Dynamics for advanced culture-general skills

Dynamics for Advanced Culture-General Skills
Social ties, including kinship, affinity, residential proximity, religion/ideology, recreation, class, and political connectedness
Local conceptions of prestige, legitimacy, and exercise of authority
Nature and characteristics of local elites
Male-female relations and societal gender tensions
Recent social upheaval (if any) and prevalence in local society of pathologies such as narcissism, psychopathy, and sociopathy
Processes of individual and collective decision making and the degree to which individual decisions are embedded in community consensus
Patron-client networks, including obligations and expectations
Information networks, including the identity/nature of information gatekeepers and influence brokers
Circumstances and sources of local grievance, resentment, insecurity, and instability
Local conceptions of threats to lives, livelihoods, and values
Tolerance of change and the nature of resistance to change
Role of the supernatural, sources and nature of evil, sorcery, and taboos
Local conceptions of disease, health, and healing

Cross-cultural competence is a shorthand expression for a set of interrelated culture-general skills. Typical, mature individuals can be expected to have an intuitive grasp of their society's norms, values, and expectations. These individuals are "culturally competent" in their society. Individuals who can also function in the social environment of a second society could be described as "cross-culturally" or "inter-culturally" competent. That kind of culturally generalizable competence was among the goals of some culture programs. Rather than a narrow focus on culture-specific knowledge for one country or culture, culture-general skills can be applied anywhere, in combination with relevant culture-specific preparation, in any circumstance. Such skills might

include the ability to recognize local conceptions of authority, the connections that bind individuals and groups in webs of obligation, degrees of autonomy in individual choices, and the local processes for collective decision making. That recognition would be accompanied by an inventory of techniques for intercepting those processes for mission success.[18]

These cultural skills are distinct from the regional studies that were well established in service education by the turn of the century. Regional studies, often taught by international relations scholars, familiarize students with the details of US interests and involvements, other nation-states and their interests, international organizations, regional and local conflicts, regional histories, politics, societies, natural environments, economies, and other similar topics. Cross-cultural competence, the province of behavioral scientists, addresses getting inside the heads and decision cycles of groups with culturally distinctive norms and values. The two domains draw from different lines of scholarship and produce different educational outcomes (specifically, more knowledge outcomes for regional studies versus skill outcomes for cross-cultural competence). Professional military education has sometimes conflated culture-specific and regional studies, defaulting to regional studies alone and describing that as culture education.[19]

Fusion of Language, Regional Expertise, and Culture

Culture skills warrant a greater emphasis in service education to equip service personnel with a capability that fully complements language and regional understanding. Professional military education should support advancing military personnel beyond the foundational to the more advanced culture skills the operational environment requires. Given the Department of Defense's range of consumers, some may be more interested in language skills, others in regional expertise, and still others in culture skills. Regardless, most military practitioners would be more effective if they could combine each LREC skill set appropriate to their missions and roles.

Where Are US Defense Institutions on Culture Now?

Reduced resources for culture followed a decline in US strategic emphasis on counterinsurgency and stability operations in the Middle East. The implications of reduced resources and senior leader attention are apparent in the current state of culture in defense education and training institutions. Advocacy for, and subject matter expertise in, culture show these losses.

Advocacy

When the services began reducing resources for their culture programs after 2012, they did not discard all the tangible accomplishments. Instead, the loss of focused attention the service culture centers had provided slowed the previously vigorous development efforts. Other organizational sources of cultural expertise similarly dissolved. Although the Air Force Culture and Language Center remains, the Army closed the TRADOC Culture Center, the Asymmetric Warfare Group, and its University of Foreign Military and Cultural Studies (Red Team Education). The burden of advocating for the skills, guarding the content, and developing it further shifted onto the small and dispersed PME community of subject matter experts. Funding for culture initiatives did not last long enough to establish the DoD constituencies characteristic of the language and regional expertise communities.[20]

Content and Expertise

This critical problem was more profound than adding new professors or including more content in service education. Sadly, a comprehensive, mature inventory of conceptual culture tools did not exist. Usable curriculum content and exercises for military education were foundational at best. The full potential of this resource was far from realization. The culture initiatives had not been pursued long enough to muster enough experts to develop and refine a tool kit. While the culture content in professional military education had improved in scope and quantity, the community could no longer push beyond foundational skills. The service culture centers had many limitations, but they had served as laboratories for marrying culture science to DoD consumers' requirements for the expeditionary military by assembling subject matter experts willing to collaborate and share results among the culture communities.

As funding for culture centers declined, the availability and capacity of culture-oriented social scientists to influence policy also declined, resulting in a misalignment of culture skill sets in different defense-wide policies. Where there had been an emerging consensus around the aims of culture education, fragmentation reemerged. The collaborations across services and social science disciplines plummeted as organizations sponsored fewer formal opportunities to meet, advance, and disseminate research and best practices. Cultural skills models had proliferated without corresponding developmental recommendations or methods to assess gaps or strengths in servicemembers' abilities.

Culture-related DoD efforts have not equipped the expeditionary military with the ability to understand the cultural environment of an operational area quickly, establish rapport with supporters and noncommitted local societies, influence local elites, disincentivize opposition, and disarm hostile elements. In the US military's shift from irregular warfare toward large-scale and precision combat, the potential of culture remains unfulfilled, and opportunity is slipping away again.[21]

Across the spectrum from competition to conflict, the human domain is critical. Cultural capability holds the promise of a skill set as useful as any other wielded by America's military professionals, material or conceptual, and may be critical to their success in a complex, information-driven world. Within the conceptual capacities of its personnel, the Department of Defense must incorporate and sustain the cultural skill set required to achieve intellectual and competitive overmatch.

Where Do We Go from Here?

A focused and lasting approach to a military cultural skill set cannot be achieved without close attention to management, curriculum content, and the translation of research to practice. To succeed, several critical features are needed to ensure focus and alignment, including high-level sponsorship, an updated strategic plan, a culture talent pipeline, and a Defense Culture Center.

High-Level Sponsorship

The Department of Defense places responsibility for overseeing LREC (including culture) on a senior language authority in the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, who, in turn, chairs a Defense Language Steering Committee responsible for reviewing and providing recommendations on "foreign language, regional expertise, and cultural capability training, education, personnel, and financial requirements." Although policy requires the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness to produce an annual review to ensure DoD components meet the capability needs in each LREC subfield (language, regional expertise, and culture), the steering committee's focus prioritizes foreign language. The subordination of culture to foreign language program management within the Defense Human Resources Activity may render the culture equities too distant to impact professional military education or operational culture requirements.[22]

The Department of Defense needs a senior-level advocate for culture. It may be too much to suggest creating a senior *culture* authority (SCA) as a counterpart

to the senior language authority, but perhaps a position of that description could serve as a permanent deputy to the senior language authority. The role of a visionary advocate "at the top" with appropriate background and authority would make a tremendous difference to culture in the LREC paradigm.

An Updated Plan

The 2005 *Defense Language Transformation Roadmap* was (as the title claims) a transformative approach to language. It provided a vision and a strategy—ends, ways, and means. A similar instrument is needed even more for the culture domain of LREC.

The Department of Defense published the *Strategic Plan for Language Skills, Regional Expertise, and Cultural Capabilities, 2011–2016*, followed by an implementation plan in 2014 but has not updated it as of this writing. Including culture under an LREC umbrella has not resulted in demonstrable progress. A credible and effective *Defense Culture Transformation Plan* should include collaboration among scholars and military practitioners with the passion and experience to connect requirements with solutions from culture science. An updated plan should also emphasize sustainable actions and oversight in a resource-constrained environment.[23]

Talent Pipeline

The vulnerability of LREC's culture component is partly due to the difficulty of recruiting culture scientists. This shortage has retarded the development of conceptual tools and assessment methodology and has prevented "culture" from developing the kind of constituency found in the language and regional communities. Policymakers and academia must prioritize recruitment and allocate positions for culture scientists. It will be a hard sell for current academics, and problems with recruiting behavioral and social scientists may continue. Funding for military officers to attend graduate civilian education in the cultural and social sciences would ensure the Department of Defense does not rely solely on civilian academe for a consistent talent pipeline. If the Department of Defense wants good culture scientists and can afford some patience, it may have to grow its own.[24]

A Defense Culture Center

Whatever other proposals leadership considers, a Defense Culture Center should be the capstone. Only a national center with its own funding could permanently garner, maintain, and protect the expertise needed to implement

the shared vision of a culturally competent military. This center would enable the Department of Defense to assemble the culture expertise necessary to integrate research with professional development. The center can pick up where previous efforts stalled by advancing methods to assess culture skills in education and training settings—a necessary step for service compliance with existing policy mandates.

This center could lead efforts to involve civilian academic institutions on educational approaches and talent pipelines, freeing and supporting the services to conduct education and professional development. Additionally, the center could participate in outreach to ensure transparency and gather input from external stakeholders. The military must engage the public and the academic community to avoid the pitfalls of its previous use of social and behavioral science (such as Project Camelot and the Human Terrain System).

A Defense Culture Center could combine science and praxis in a way never previously packaged for delivery to military consumers. The Department of Defense has allocated approximately $20 million per year in funding to social science researchers through the Minerva Research Initiative. The program has struggled, however, to disseminate research to practitioners and educators. A Defense Culture Center could bridge that gap by soliciting the best science, marrying it to service needs, and creating the conceptual tools best suited to user requirements. A key role would be to tailor instructional material to PME institutions and pre-accession education. Future roles might include informing policy and offering faculty development. Partnering with existing centers or institutions like the Air Force Culture and Language Center or the Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute may help advance an integrated LREC education and research center while building on past lessons.[25]

Conclusion

In this article, we provided examples of organizational achievements to enhance military cultural skill sets and have argued for reviving those efforts. Cultural capability is important across the competition and conflict continuum, and the Department of Defense can build on service culture centers' efforts to address the LREC skills military personnel need to work effectively across cultural boundaries, whether during conflict against an adversary or in interoperability with allies and partners. Had the military culture programs of the past 75 years continued, they would have harnessed the relevant science, perhaps pushed it further, and found better ways to operationalize it.

For American military life, partnerships and coalitions will be the norm for the foreseeable future. Cross-cultural competence is a prerequisite for productive relationships with allies and demands anticipatory, deliberate force development. Likewise, the ability to perceive "reality" as seen by opponents or societies in a conflict environment may be key to intelligent management of violence at all levels of engagement—not to mention conflict resolution. Success in that future will likely depend on cross-cultural skills—from the rifle squads to combatant commanders and their staff. Regarding culture skills, partial implementation and inconsistent resourcing represent missed opportunities to prepare servicemembers for future foreign military involvements across the continuum of conflict. We cannot make the same mistakes again.

Daniel W. Henk

Colonel Daniel W. Henk (US Army, retired) holds a PhD in social anthropology. A multilingual Army Foreign Area Officer, he served in armored cavalry units in the United States and South Vietnam before serving in intelligence assignments at the tactical, operational, and national levels, including diplomatic accreditation as a defense attaché. He taught strategy and regional studies in senior service colleges for two decades and has researched and lectured widely in the United States, Europe, and Africa. His research interests include peace operations, human and environmental security, and civil-military relations. He was the founding director of the Air Force Culture and Language Center.

Allison Abbe

Dr. Allison Abbe is professor of organizational studies and the Matthew B. Ridgway Chair of Leadership Studies at the US Army War College. Her research focuses on development of leadership and intercultural skills in national security leaders. She previously worked as a research psychologist and program manager in defense and intelligence organizations and holds a PhD in social and personality psychology from the University of California, Riverside. She speaks and teaches about strategic leadership, inclusive leadership, organizational climate, and diversity. Her work has appeared in *Parameters*, *Military Review*, the *Journal of Investigative Psychology and Offender Profiling*, *Joint Force Quarterly*, *Government Executive*, and War Room.

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Operating Successfully within the Bureaucracy Domain of Warfare: Part Two

Jeff McManus

ABSTRACT: This article is the second part of a two-part series. Part one outlined how viewing bureaucracy as a domain of warfare can assist policy professionals in navigating its processes and procedures and then described the first three fundamentals (Politics, Personalities, and Pressure), which are externally imposed and must be navigated carefully. Part Two describes the last seven fundamentals (Principles, Perspective, Prediction, Persuasion, Privacy, Programming, and Permanence), which are internally influenced and controlled and can be developed and deployed as a foundation for enhancing success. Mapping the fundamentals for success in the bureaucratic domain will enable policy professionals to address and balance the complexities of the policy-making process to the benefit of US national security.

Keywords: bureaucracy, fundamentals, policy, politics, strategy

This article is the second part of a two-part series addressing the *bureaucracy domain* of warfare and the fundamentals of the "10 P's of Policy." As highlighted in part one, the *bureaucracy domain* of warfare is as real as the other military war-fighting domains of land, sea, air, space, and cyberspace. There, I defined the bureaucracy domain of warfare as the intellectual space in national security where policy professionals develop, coordinate, and recommend courses of action or statements of guidance for the US government to review, approve, and implement through national-level strategies, policies, and programs to achieve national objectives. For both articles, the term *policy professional* refers to "US federal civil service career members or US military officers assigned as policy advisers to mid-level or senior government decisionmakers in the US executive branch."[1]

Part one addressed the first three fundamentals of the 10 P's of Policy—Politics, Personalities, and Pressure (see figure 1 below). These three fundamentals are externally imposed on policy professionals and must be understood and navigated carefully for success. The remaining seven fundamentals—Principles, Perspective, Prediction, Persuasion, Privacy, Programming, and Permanence—are internal, over which policy professionals have control, and can be developed

and deployed as a foundation for enhancing success. They are addressed below to complete the second part of the series.

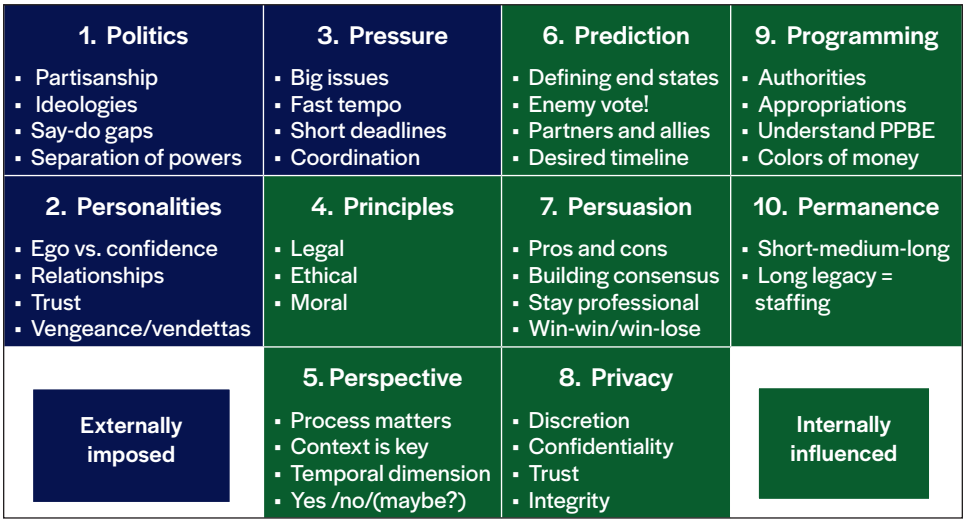

Figure 1. The 10 P's of Policy: fundamentals for successfully operating in the bureaucracy domain of warfare (Source: Created by author)

Holistically, the fundamentals of the 10 P's of Policy enable policy professionals to maintain trusted access to senior decisionmakers; provide solid, objective advice; give realistic options and recommendations; and speak truth to power, in a manner that will be well received, to the benefit of US national security.

Principles

Principles are personal redlines that should not be crossed for any reason. Policy professionals are well served when they have reflected on legal, ethical, and moral issues in their personal and professional lives, know where these boundaries lie, and understand how these challenges will be addressed, should they arise. Challenges to principles are best dealt with from a strong foundation rather than rushed, improvised decisions.

While similar in that they constitute personal and professional boundaries, each principle is unique and draws its basis from different foundations. Illegal activities are defined as "not according to or authorized by law" and are thus determined by society. Policy professionals must know, understand, and abide by statutory authorizations and appropriations (for example, those that define military activities under US Code Title 10). Unethical activities are defined as activities that are "not in accordance with the standards or rules of conduct for a profession." For federal civilian employees within the executive branch,

the Code of Federal Regulations Title 5, part 2635, formally outlines a range of issues that could interfere with the fulfillment of the civilian oath to "well and faithfully discharge the duties of office." Military officers serving as policy professionals have similar standards of conduct. Specifically, Executive Order 10631 provides ethical guidance for their activities. Finally, immoral activities are defined as "not conforming to the patterns of conduct usually accepted or established as consistent with principles of personal and social ethics." Moral lines are defined individually and, like a compass, provide a solid and constant course on which to steer one's personal and professional journey.[2]

Conversely, policy professionals must know when proposed or real policies and actions do not cross legal, ethical, or moral boundaries. Policy making often occurs in gray areas, and policy professionals will likely encounter situations they consider unwise, ill considered, or imprudent that are not necessarily illegal, unethical, or immoral. Policy professionals may find these situations difficult to manage, and they must mitigate the risks from decided courses of action.

Lives are at stake in many senior-level national security policy discussions and decisions, and zero-risk options rarely occur for military professionals. Policy professionals must clearly communicate with colleagues and seniors when they assess that legal, ethical, or moral lines are being approached (or crossed), but they should never conflate personal core principles with other situations that, while uncomfortable or even risky, do not cross legal, ethical, or moral lines. Policy professionals who make unnecessary objections to a policy on principle risk undermining their policy advice or professional reputation. Prior reflection on where one's personal redlines are, therefore, ensures that policy professionals stay on the correct side of these lines.

Perspective

Perspective is the primary value added by thoughtful policy professionals when providing advice to senior decisionmakers. The context for every potential situation is key and depends upon where one sits. While it may be true that "all politics is local," other views and equities should always be considered. Beyond the local view or impact are the bilateral aspects of how the situation or subsequent decision will affect the relationship between the United States and the local population. Each bilateral relationship is also nested within a broader regional structure. What may benefit or harm one partner or adversary may affect the whole region. Regions are dynamically situated in a global environment, so geostrategic perspectives also matter when balancing the costs-benefits calculus for evaluating potential policy recommendations. Additionally, the ongoing evolution of capabilities and dependencies within the new space

and cyberspace domains moves the geostrategic context beyond the terrestrial and adds complexity.[3]

Policy professionals can address the complexities of context primarily through framing or reframing. Framing is the ability to view a particular situation with proposed policy options through multiple lenses. The national security policy-making enterprise is essentially designed to bring disparate stakeholders together to force the synchronization of multiple bureaucratic lenses. This enterprise (bureaucracy) provides many views from different angles, each with its own stakeholders who have unique interests and equities. Framing should also address the historical and temporal dimensions. No situation is static, and no policy solution will last in perpetuity without impact or the need for reevaluation. Every policy prescription will have immediate, mid-term, and long-term ramifications.[4]

Addressing temporal perspectives can assist policy professionals to frame potential options through the lens of impacts over time and is a worthwhile approach for developing rapid policy options. Three potential options are available if policy professionals consider a short-term, medium-term, and long-term approach. The short-term option might involve a course of action that moves resources and forces quickly, within days or weeks, to confront the given challenge. The medium-term option would be a course of action that could continue for weeks to months, allowing time to mass capabilities or forces to address the challenge, possibly in conjunction with allies and partners. A long-term course of action, obtaining resources or forces strategically and deliberately over time, could take months or years to resolve the challenge. The short-, medium-, and long-term optionality allows policy professionals to consider the pros and cons of each approach and gives senior decisionmakers a trade space to consider the risks and benefits.

Perspective is undermined if policy professionals attempt to simplify context—or ignore it altogether—by leveraging so-called throwaway courses of action. Senior decisionmakers see through attempts to oversimplify situations or box them into predetermined outcomes. The classic scenario for throwaway courses of action would be recommendations regarding available policy options for senior decisionmakers as follows: Option A is global thermonuclear war; Option B is what the policy adviser wants the senior decisionmaker to choose; Option C is complete capitulation and total surrender. Policy professionals who attempt to pass off throwaway courses of action would likely only make this mistake once, as their credibility and objectivity would be immediately undermined and they would likely find themselves outside the policy option process for future challenges.[5]

A final aspect regarding perspective is that policy professionals must be keenly aware of when their senior decisionmakers may communicate a decision by not making an overt decision. Said another way, this scenario is when not saying "yes" is another way of communicating "no." Sometimes no decision is actually a decision and occurs when senior decisionmakers are comfortable with the status quo. This situation can be frustrating to novice policy professionals who do not understand the fundamental nuances of policy making and may be inclined to push senior decisionmakers to make a decision. The status quo is usually an option, whether or not it is specifically stated as one. Policy professionals must be sensitive to when the "no decision" situation is in play, not only for themselves, but also to be able to communicate these situations carefully and tactfully with other stakeholders.[6]

Prediction

The *prediction* aspect of policy development involves assessing how key stakeholders will react to the policy options under consideration. Beyond the perspective element, prediction entails more than just understanding and appreciating the stakeholders' views. Prediction involves assessing how these stakeholders will react and the actions they are most likely to take in response to a given situation. It is important to remember that the enemy always gets a vote in policy implementation. Prussian Field Marshal Helmuth von Moltke reportedly said no plan survives first contact with the enemy. The difficulty with prediction neither translates into not planning nor thinking about what the enemy might or can do. Rather, it is the active role the enemy will play in response to US actions. A key function of intelligence is to help the policy professional consider the enemy's intentions and capabilities and help predict possible responses.[7]

When dealing with prediction, policy professionals should be aware of the linkages between the classic ends, ways, and means model. While it would be best to determine the desired end state before starting to develop policy options, this step is often easier said than done in the interagency policy-making process. To create well-grounded policy options, policy professionals and senior decisionmakers must define the desired end state and answer the "what" and "why" questions at the beginning of a policy challenge. Clarity on the desired end state up front will help avoid confusion later in the policy-making process or wasting time considering options that may lead to undesired results.[8]

Friends, partners, and allies will also react to policy options under consideration, and their responses must also be accounted for, since they, too, have critical roles to play. American national strategy and policy has long positioned partnerships and alliances as fundamental for achieving US strategic goals. Recent examples include the United States leveraging NATO regarding Russia and Ukraine or the US approach with the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (the "Quad") regarding China and East Asia. Allies' and partners' potential responses can be determined in numerous ways, such as asking them outright about their plans, when appropriate, or analyzing and assessing them through other methods when not. Determining how well potential US policies align with partners' and allies' unique interests or their policy objectives is key. Common interests and objectives lead to greater consensus and stronger support—and the opposite is true where interests and objectives potentially do not align.[9]

Finally, like perspective, prediction also has a temporal aspect. Are decisionmakers seeking a result in days, weeks, months, years, decades, or longer? Prediction is never easy. Its difficulty expands exponentially the longer policy professionals look into the future. Yogi Berra, the famous baseball-playing philosopher, reportedly said, "It's tough to make predictions, especially about the future." Prediction is an art, not a science, but policy professionals have several valuable analytic approaches available to them.[10]

Persuasion

At their core, policy professionals must employ *persuasion*. Colin Powell famously advised policy professionals to "promote a clash of ideas" and "be prepared to piss people off," but there is a time and place for being aggressive in policy making. The best idea or proposal will not matter if policy professionals cannot persuade peers, colleagues, and, ultimately, senior decisionmakers to approve their recommendations. The goal of persuasion is to build consensus and coalitions toward a recommended option or decision. Consensus in the policy-making bureaucracy is like force in the physical world, which Albert Einstein defined as mass times acceleration, or $F = ma$. Translated into bureaucracy domain terms (see figure 2 below), the overall strength of a policy option or proposal (the "force") equals the sum of the overall number of supporting stakeholders and organizations with equities (the "mass") multiplied by the intensity of the consensus or agreement across these stakeholders and organizations (the "acceleration").[11]

Comparing "Force" between the Physical World and the Bureaucracy Domain	
"Force" in the Physical World	**"Force" or "Strength" in the Bureaucracy Domain**
$F = M * A$	$S = O_n * I_c$
Where:	Where:
F = Force	S = Strength of the Policy Option
M = Mass	O = Number of Organizations in Support
A = Acceleration	I = Intensity Level of Consensus

Figure 2. Comparing "force" between the physical world and the bureaucracy domain
(Source: Created by author)

To be persuasive, policy professionals should focus on pros and cons of options, not on right or wrong options. Using only qualitative terms in policy debates risks moving the discussion from professional considerations into more personal or emotional spaces. Policy is mostly about gray areas; black-and-white situations rarely occur. Often, the only available policy solution is the so-called least bad option. A risk-based analytic framework addressing suitability, feasibility, and acceptability can help policy professionals articulate the optionality of proposals or considerations in a way that allows senior decisionmakers decision space within which to balance risks.

- Suitability – Are the recommended options appropriate to the situation?
- Feasibility – Do capabilities exist and are forces available to support the recommended options?
- Acceptability – Will the US public, allies, and partners support the recommended options?

By addressing these or other risk factors regarding policy options in recommendations to decisionmakers, policy professionals can strengthen proposals through analysis and logic.[12]

Policy professionals also enhance their persuasion capabilities by remaining professional. It is important to remain calm and avoid making policy-related issues and disagreements personal. The policy issues being discussed in the upper

levels of the national security environment already have serious aspects and significant complexities without adding unhelpful factors to the conversation. Power within the bureaucratic domain is fungible; it waxes when policy positions are selected and wanes when they are not. Policy professionals know that, while it can be difficult for their seniors to lose policy debates over substance, negative consequences magnify if real or perceived personal aspects are involved. Part one stated that losers never forget, which is as true for maximizing persuasion as for *politics* and *personalities*. Effective policy professionals, therefore, seek options that will result in win-win solutions between senior decisionmakers and their respective departments or agencies. "Win-lose" situations can also occur but should be avoided, as burning bridges will only complicate the winner's situation in the inevitable future policy battles.[13]

Policy professionals must also know when and when not to challenge their seniors on particular ideas and positions. This aspect of persuasion should be calibrated based on the personalities within policy professionals' environments. Different senior decisionmakers have different styles of leadership, which must be understood. Some senior leaders have a collaborative style and are not threatened by hearing different approaches or ideas presented in the decision-making process. Other senior leaders are less open, and differing views or ideas must be presented carefully so as not to appear as challenges to their expertise or experience. Policy professionals can also use periods of evaluation or debate to refine, modify, or change aspects of policy proposals. Once senior decisionmakers settle on a course of action, however, policy professionals must direct their full energy toward implementing that decision (unless it crosses a legal, ethical, or moral redline). To do otherwise would undermine the policy-making process.[14]

Finally, policy professionals must maintain perceived objectivity inside and outside the office. Social media poses significant dangers to maintaining perceived objectivity, as policy professionals' posts, likes, and comments on Facebook, Instagram, X, and LinkedIn can reach a much broader audience than intended. Perceived objectivity and professionalism are vital to persuasiveness. Like a reputation, objectivity must be established over time and actively protected. Openly questioning policy positions or attacking specific policy decisionmakers publicly via social media has consequences. These activities place policy professionals on a side and undermine their ability to provide objective advice and recommendations. Policy professionals who want to be taken seriously should minimize or refrain from social media engagement.

Privacy

Privacy is and always will be necessary for the national security enterprise. For policy professionals, privacy means having a solid foundation of trust with their superiors. Thus, a relationship of trust between policy professionals and the senior decisionmakers they report to is necessary to avoid friction or miscalculation and to allow for a safe environment to share ideas and develop policy. Trust is the "reliance on the integrity, strength, ability, surety etc., of a person or thing." Trust between bosses and subordinates matters in the national security enterprise, as do individual honor and integrity. Trust allows for open and frank discussions on issues, challenges, options, potential solutions, and risks. Trust in policy making is a central coin of the realm, enabling colleagues to depend on each other and avoid the fear of unknown positions or hidden agendas. A lack of trust between policy professionals adds friction and risks miscalculation in policy development due to narrow views, or sometimes groupthink, that may not be well informed from a broader constituency. Without their superiors' trust, policy professionals will not be in the room for important discussions and will be unable to provide their perspectives and advice actively. Trust in policy making stands on two legs—confidentiality and discretion.[15]

Confidentiality is the principle that one will not disclose privately shared information. Maintaining confidentiality with information privately discussed with superiors or closest policy colleagues preserves options and decision space until all the internal issues are debated, assessed, and resolved. Confidentiality entails more than what normally relates to protecting classified information and includes keeping political, organizational, reputational, or otherwise sensitive discussions with your seniors private. Leaks are cancerous to confidentiality. They significantly undermine the policy-making process in general and are particularly harmful to national security. Leaks undermine overall trust in the process and call the integrity of all policy players into question. Leaking is unethical based on the code of conduct for federal employees (and military officers). Policy professionals may disagree with a course their superiors select or consider a decision unwise, unsound, or ill considered, but they must remember and respect the differences in responsibility between themselves as policy advisers and their superiors as policy deciders.[16]

The second leg of trust is discretion, more specifically, granting one's superiors the ability to decide or act according to their judgment. Discreet policy professionals protect their superiors, the office, and the broader organization. Discretion shields an office or organization, allowing internal consensus to be built appropriately while minimizing external influence or pressure until the

proper time in the process. At its core, policy making is a process, and while levels of transparency are required, complete transparency with every step and facet of the process undermines the development of sound policy. Policy professionals must provide policymakers the time necessary to work through the predecisional space and develop positions in a manner that will result in policy decisions based on sound analysis and judgment, not partisanship or pressure.[17]

Programming

Having the resources necessary to implement any policy decision is key, and policy professionals must account for *programming* issues and impacts when they assess situations and prepare options and recommendations for their leaders. The term *programming* in this context refers to the process the Department of Defense (DoD) uses to consider and assess resources. Policy professionals must carefully consider resource implications as they prepare their advice and recommendations for senior decisionmakers. Vision minus resources equals hallucinations, and saying something does not necessarily make it so. Besides money, resources include people, materiel, and capabilities.[18]

Many of the resourcing considerations are addressed when answering the legal or "may we" element of policy making. Lawyers across the interagency assist policy advisers in determining whether Congress has authorized or appropriated the options under consideration. Policy advisers are sometimes accused of practicing law without a license because they work with (and sometimes push) legal counsel staff to flesh out the scope and scale of what may be possible. As such, effective policy advisers are knowledgeable of and conversant in statutory authorities and appropriations. Having congressional authorization and appropriation is best for any option being considered, since they provide departments and agencies with permission and money. Having only an authorization is next best, as it provides congressional permission but forces departments and agencies to find and reprogram money from other accounts—which requires approval from the Office of Management and Budget and Congress. Congressional connections with staff in the authorizing and appropriations committees are leveraged, as required, to maximize policy flexibility for senior decisionmakers.

Within the Department of Defense, the most effective policy advisers also know, understand, and leverage the programming, planning, budgeting, and execution (PPBE) process. Established under Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara in 1961, the PPBE process is the internal methodology used to allocate resources to provide capabilities deemed necessary to accomplish DoD missions. It runs on an annual schedule, linking future budgets to discrete requirements that span multiple future years to provide (theoretically) sound and synchronized budget decisions.

This methodology also involves numerous "colors of money," an unofficial term referencing official appropriations categories: research, development, test, and evaluation (or RDT&E); procurement; operations and maintenance (or O&M); military personnel (or MILPERS); and military construction (or MILCON). Depending on the policy option being considered, these different appropriations categories can provide the financial resources necessary to enable DoD action. Understanding and leveraging the PPBE process, when needed, within the Department of Defense strengthens policy advisers by giving senior decisionmakers the financial resources to carry out potential policy recommendations.[19]

Permanence

Policy professionals must understand and appreciate the temporal aspects of the proposed policy recommendations they submit to their senior leaders for a decision. More specifically, they must ask: what degree of permanence does the decision require? *Permanence* drives the means that policy advisers and their senior decisionmakers use to enshrine a decision. Some decisions only need to last a few days or weeks, and in these cases, an e-mail or verbal order may suffice. Consider, in recent memory, the impact of a tweet as a mechanism for passing guidance and decisions.[20]

For decisions to last months or a year beyond the immediate time frame, the mechanism policy professionals should use is a letter or memorandum, allowing senior decisionmakers to sign it for the record. Other signed documentation examples include strategies and implementation plans. Signed documents allow decisions or guidance to be promulgated within and across executive branch departments and agencies, drive action through official mechanisms, and act as formal references.

Experienced policy professionals know that within the Department of Defense the documents with the longest legacy are official issuances. Issuances are the directives, instructions, manuals, directive-type memoranda, and other administrative instructions that most formally establish and implement DoD policies. These documents outline roles and responsibilities across DoD components and organizations and drive fundamentals related to doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership (and education), personnel, facilities, and policy, collectively referred to in the Department of Defense as DOTMLPF-P. Due to their impact and longevity, issuances also take the most time to develop, coordinate, and finalize. As such, organizations are sometimes biased against using issuances to further policy goals. Still, issuances can last years,

and policy professionals who successfully help senior decisionmakers navigate and negotiate this bureaucratic process enable them to leave a lasting legacy.[21]

Conclusion

As highlighted in part one, policy professionals in the defense community should approach bureaucracy as a sixth domain of warfare because, in doing so, they can successfully handle its processes and procedures. Representing a federal department or agency at an in-person Interagency Policy Committee meeting or making policy proposals to senior decisionmakers behind closed doors can have a significant strategic and operational impact on US national security. To be successful, policy professionals must navigate the critical elements of the bureaucracy domain. This two-part article described the nuances of this domain, spanning externally imposed fundamentals and internally managed and controlled fundamentals. Although imperfect and inefficient, the bureaucracy domain, a part of the necessary fabric of the US system of government, ensures that policy decisions and actions align with the law, ethical standards, and the public's best interest. While the dynamic aspects of the bureaucracy will evolve, the fundamentals will remain the same.

> History suggests that several obstacles will remain in the path of significant changes in the interagency process, which itself will be required to work better and faster in the years ahead. Current organizational models geared around departments and agencies will need to be increasingly flexible to integrate the various tools of national power, particularly at the strategic and operational levels, to cope with new transnational challenges . . . facing every nation.[22]

Learning these 10 policy-making aspects and operating within their nuances and complexities, policy professionals can maximize their individual impact with senior decisionmakers, peers, and subordinates across the US national security policy-making enterprise. Policy professionals will face the challenge of addressing and balancing the complexities of the 10 P's of Policy fundamentals simultaneously, maintaining trusted access to senior decisionmakers, providing solid and objective advice, giving realistic options and recommendations, and speaking truth to power in a manner well received by decisionmakers, to the benefit of US national security.

Jeff McManus

Dr. Jeff McManus is an assistant professor of strategic studies in the Department of Distance Education at the US Army War College. In this capacity, he educates and develops civilian and military leaders for service at the strategic level while advancing their knowledge in the global application of Landpower. He is an experienced policy professional who has worked in the Department of Defense for 36 years, including more than two decades as a civilian policy professional within the Office of the Secretary of Defense.

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The Fallacy of Unambiguous Warning

Regan Copple

ABSTRACT: The Indications and Warnings subfield of intelligence has traditionally divided warnings into a dichotomy of "ambiguous" and "unambiguous" that gives policymakers a false sense of security. This article examines how unambiguous warning has been conceptualized and why it has become an inadequate planning tool that can lead to dire consequences in the quest for certainty. Using the 1973 Yom Kippur War and the Pearl Harbor attack as case studies, the article shows unambiguous warning is an inadequate planning tool that can lead to dire consequences in the quest for certainty. The article concludes with observations about the role of intelligence and the future of military planning.

Keywords: intelligence, military planning, warning, decision making, strategic planning

Two years ago, I attended a series of planning discussions with members of the US military. During one session, an officer suggested the plan should define the term *unambiguous warning* for future readers. Everyone agreed, and the officers each described what they believed constituted a clear, unmistakable, and unambiguous indicator of an impending conflict. All the officers at the table contested their colleagues' definitions. After more than 90 minutes, the debate grew more acrimonious. At the end of the meeting, the planners were no closer to a shared understanding of unambiguous warning. If anything, the officers held stronger and more divergent views about what constitutes a clear and universally understood signal of impending war.

This anecdote exemplifies the difficulty in identifying precisely when a war will begin. While it may seem obvious that it is impossible to know when and how wars will begin, the fallacy that the Intelligence Community will provide clear, infallible details about this topic pervades the Department of Defense.

The Indications and Warnings subfield of intelligence includes three main categories of warnings. The highest-level political and strategic evidence of adversary preparations for war is known as *strategic warning*. Once preparations become clearer and additional evidence is gathered

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on military preparations, intelligence professionals can identify *operational* or *ambiguous warning*. Within the final days before a conflict when it is clear that war will begin and final adversary preparations are underway, the Intelligence Community will theoretically provide *unambiguous* or *tactical warning* to policymakers and military decisionmakers.

When perfectly executed, indications and warnings from the Intelligence Community can provide decisionmakers valuable information and potential advantages. If not clearly recognized or vaguely communicated to decisionmakers, each type of warning provides limited benefits to the planning process. Missing one link in the chain, a plausible outcome, has happened repeatedly. Douglas Borer, Stephen Twining, and Randy P. Burkett explain that the Intelligence Community successfully developed unambiguous warning for the Tet Offensive, the Korean War, and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Nevertheless, the respective presidents and Department of Defense leadership did not widely recognize these warnings due to their pursuit of alternate and sometimes contradictory policies.[1]

Historical analyses ranging from World War I to the Rwandan genocide of 1994 all entail stories of surprise and organizations claiming they should have known about impending attacks. If the current warning system—more specifically, the progression from high-level strategic warning to operational ambiguous warning and unambiguous tactical warning—should have worked in these cases, why has it failed to predict military actions so often? The answer lies in the quest for truly unambiguous warning.[2]

Military planning processes and analyses underpinning US military strategy must avoid the danger of conflating unambiguous warning with certainty. In a world of blurred lines between peace and conflict and sophisticated tools for deception, unambiguous warning has become a fallacy. It is time for US leadership to consider creating plans that do not require unambiguous warning. Instead, decisionmakers should use ambiguous warning when constructing military plans based on an adversary's posture and readiness to initiate war. To that end, this article examines the warning system's taxonomy in general and unambiguous warnings within a contemporary context in depth. It then analyzes two historical cases where reliance on unambiguous warnings as the foundation for military planning had catastrophic consequences. Lastly, it offers observations about the future of warfare in an era in which crystal-clear warnings are not guaranteed.

What Is Considered Unambiguous?

Warning is less of a quest to divine specific event predictions and more of a structured intellectual and bureaucratic process for analyzing and understanding intelligence. The United States has constructed a complex system for collecting, analyzing, and disseminating warning intelligence. Still, the nature of interactions between the Department of Defense and the rest of the executive branch has created a multistep process in which individuals with diverse roles view information before it finally reaches policymakers with the authority to enact decisions. Consequently, multiple places in the warning process could generate incorrect perceptions or estimates that may impede the ability to recognize threats and act on warnings successfully.[3]

To generate strategic, operational, or tactical warnings, Thomas G. Mahnken identifies a four-part chain the Intelligence Community and the decisionmakers must follow.

1. Initially, there is an enemy action, which a state's intelligence apparatus can either collect or fail to observe.
2. If collected, the data will be sent to intelligence analysts for processing, evaluation, and analysis. In this step, the analysts will either interpret or misinterpret the data based on their understanding or misunderstanding of the enemy's action or motivation.
3. Subsequently, the interpretations are presented to decisionmakers who can choose to take action—or not.
4. Lastly, decisionmakers who decide to act can take he correct action that benefits them, the incorrect action, or no action at all, which may create additional damage when an attack occurs.

Even if information moves from collection to a correct and actionable decision, it is not designed to predict specific events. Once a piece of information goes through Mahnken's process, the Intelligence Community assesses the probability of the intelligence leading to conflict according to three levels of confidence: high, moderate, or low. High confidence is associated with unambiguous warning. Moderate- and some low-confidence assessments are correlated with ambiguous warning.

Any assignment of warning, whether ambiguous or unambiguous, is subjective. The Intelligence Community specifies its level of confidence to avoid providing policymakers and military leaders with a false sense of precision in its estimates.

This terminology creates opacity between intelligence professionals and the rest of the national security community, which often does not understand the difference between a moderate- and high-confidence assessment. Hence, there is usually room for interpretation and varying views on the significance, impact, and meaning of most Indications and Warnings intelligence.[4]

The Russia-Ukraine War shows how all the pieces of Indications and Warnings intelligence work together to inform decisionmakers properly and predict the beginning of conflict correctly. American and British intelligence services warned their respective governments of a Russian attack on Ukraine three months in advance. Coupled with open Russian public statements about its desire to annex Ukrainian territory, the strategic warning was clear. Russian mobilization and mass military movements from the central and western military districts toward the Russia-Ukrainian border constituted operational ambiguous warning. Then, on February 19, 2022, days before the initial artillery and rocket bombardment, the setup of field hospitals near the border constituted a tactical warning of impending Russian invasion.[5]

The US Intelligence Community lauded its predictions about the Russia-Ukraine War as the ideal case study of intelligence collection and analysis. The intelligence process and bureaucracy worked correctly and provided leaders with an accurate picture of Russian war preparations. In the terminology of *Joint Intelligence*, Joint Publication 2-0, the doctrinal document governing intelligence operations, the US Intelligence Community provided "timely, accurate, [and] useable" assessments of what was about to happen in Ukraine. Based on this knowledge, the Russia-Ukraine War appears to be an intelligence success story. At the same time, however, while the United States successfully predicted when the invasion would begin, states like Germany and France were caught off guard due to their refusal to believe Vladimir Putin was serious about invading Ukraine. The warning system led to success in Ukraine but failure almost two years later in Israel. It is not the idea of unambiguous warning that is dangerous but the conflation of unambiguous warning with certainty that removes critical thought.[6]

Of the historical cases in which regional or global powers expected to receive unambiguous warning, two deserve special attention. The Yom Kippur War provides an example of when a militarily powerful state (Israel) had abundant evidence that its adversary (Egypt) intended to initiate a war but failed to look for the correct tactical indications of conflict. Next, the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor highlights how one of the global powers of the era misread the strategic environment and ruled out an attack, despite several internal warnings from US Navy staff.

The Yom Kippur War and the Erosion of Normalcy

The Yom Kippur War is traditionally referred to as a case of "strategic surprise" in which Israel failed to recognize Egyptian preparations for a major war on its southern border. Before 1973, Israel assumed Egyptian forces would provide 48 hours of unambiguous warning via observable actions, allowing Israel time to call up and mobilize the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) reserves and transport them to the border. To some extent, the surprise attack reflected a psychological pathology within Israel more than a failure of warning.[7]

Government analysts and leaders failed to predict when the war would begin because they could not combine and synthesize information in a way that would reveal Egypt's capabilities and intent. The earliest indication Egypt was interested in resolving its political disputes by military means came near the end of 1972, when Egypt began a force buildup focused on acquiring additional fighter aircraft, surface-to-air missiles, and anti-tank missiles from the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, an increase in military acquisitions alone is not an effective indicator of when a war will begin.[8]

Often, a more effective means of determining a state's readiness to initiate a war is to examine what preparations and movements the state is undertaking in accordance with its military doctrine. Egyptian doctrine, based on Soviet doctrine, required a comprehensive bombing campaign aimed at disabling an enemy's airpower to begin any conflict. The goal behind this strategy was to knock out Israel's advanced tactical airpower before it had the chance to take off and inflict damage on the Egyptian Air Force. Consequently, IDF Intelligence Director Major General Eli Zeira monitored image-based and human intelligence reports of Egyptian airfields for signs of preparations for a sweeping bombing campaign. Given Egypt's extensive use of air strikes during the opening hours of the Six-Day War in 1967, Zeira believed the Egyptian Air Force unable to execute any action until winter 1973 at the earliest. What Zeira did not know was that Egypt planned to deviate from its previous doctrine after judging the strength of Israel's air defense network and assessing Egypt's Air Force would take unacceptable losses to conduct a strike. Instead of launching a bombing campaign against Israeli airfields, Egypt planned to cross the Bar-Lev Line with ground forces before executing a breakout across the Sinai Desert.[9]

To accomplish this plan without raising Israel's suspicions, Egypt began holding its yearly Tahrir exercises (that depict an invasion of Israel near the Bar-Lev Line adjacent to the Suez Canal) beginning in the late 1960s. The goal of the exercises was to normalize the presence of Egyptian forces near Israel's southern border and to condition Israeli intelligence to expect yearly surges of troops to the border without generating a response from the Israel

Defense Forces. Over time, Egyptian Army officials lulled Israeli intelligence analysts into a false sense of security by creating a new military pattern of life, even as preparations to move more troops and materiel to the border for the October exercise were underway.[10]

In addition to altering their pattern of life, Egyptian military officials sent mixed signals to Israel to obscure its estimates of Egypt's preparation timeline. Approximately one week before the war began, Egypt announced the mobilization of four divisions of reservists to participate in its yearly exercises at the Sinai border. While this information would have been a significant warning any other time of year, Egypt had issued a public notice that 20,000 reservists had been released from their reserve call-up one week later, seemingly signaling that Egypt was conducting an exercise, not planning for imminent war.[11]

Egypt's plan to deceive Israel into complacency was an operational success. The IDF's senior leadership only realized Egypt would not conduct another yearly exercise when additional infantry brigades and munitions were already en route toward the Suez Canal on October 5. By then, it was too late. Israel issued a partial reserve call-up the morning of October 6, an action it had previously planned to take at least two days before the beginning of a war.[12]

The failure of IDF and Mossad intelligence to provide an unambiguous warning can be attributed to two factors. First, IDF intelligence was looking for the wrong actions, causing them to miss indicators of an upcoming attack. Concentrating on the Egyptian Air Force's readiness levels caused IDF intelligence to overlook more significant signs that alternative war preparations were underway. Interpretation, the second step in the warning development process, was equally disadvantaged, due to "the Concept" that was accepted as reality within Israeli intelligence services. The Concept was an informal and broadly accepted checklist of actions that, when combined, would constitute warning. This checklist dictated that Egypt would not go to war unless it had a long-range aerial strike capability and sufficient Scud missiles to prevent an Israeli counterattack deep into Egypt.[13]

In this case, Israeli intelligence fell victim to the first two steps within the Indications and Warnings process by not collecting the correct types of actions and misinterpreting the actions upon which it had collected intelligence. Furthermore, entrenched biases—including the belief that the Israeli military would deter Egypt de facto because Anwar Sadat knew the Israeli forces were superior to Egyptian forces—meant Israeli leadership was not attuned to the right signs that war was on the horizon in the first place.[14]

Next, the long-standing deceptive pattern of life created a benign explanation for Egyptian war preparations and primed Israeli intelligence analysts to misinterpret signals. Rather than attributing Egyptian exercises to preparations for war from the start, Israel assumed these actions fit the pattern of yearly exercises—a pattern it believed would continue until Egypt became stronger and confident enough to mount an invasion. The dismissal of the Egyptian reservists on October 4 offered an additional piece of contradictory information to sow doubt and generate uncertainty among Egypt-watchers in Israel. The Egyptian Army knew it did not have to pull off a complete surprise attack, it simply had to generate enough contrary information to prompt Israel to misinterpret warning signals and thus fail to issue a reserve call-up two days before the invasion.[15]

Israel's inability to achieve unambiguous warning did not lie in a lack of information but in confusion about the information the Israeli intelligence apparatus had observed. The active steps Egypt took to deceive the Israeli military generated doubt about Egyptian plans and intentions among a set of intelligence analysts and policymakers. Egyptian behavior before October 6 did not fit the IDF's predetermined archetype about what an Egypt preparing for war would look like, and this oversight generated the opportunity Egypt exploited in the opening days of the Yom Kippur War.

Fifty years later, Israel suffered from the same mistakes when Hamas launched a barrage of thousands of missiles coupled with paragliders and an armored breakthrough of the wall between Israel and Gaza in its October 2023 Operation Jericho Wall, Hamas's armed incursion into Israel and hostage-taking operation. Much like the Egyptian attack against Israeli positions in the Sinai, officials within Unit 8200 dismissed Operation Jericho Wall. They deemed the intelligence report "aspirational" and "totally imaginative" 14 months before the attack caught Israel by surprise.[16]

Much like the Yom Kippur War, Israel collected intelligence in advance of the October 7 attacks that was misinterpreted and not considered unambiguous warning. The prevailing assumption within the Israeli Intelligence Community—that Operation Jericho Wall was beyond Hamas's sophistication and was implausible due to the likely Israeli response—did not factor in what Hamas believed it could gain from the attacks, nor did the Israeli Intelligence Community consider that Hamas's perception of rationality could look different from its own.

After the Yom Kippur War concluded, Israel initiated the Agranat Commission to internalize lessons from the war and generate policy recommendations to prevent similar surprises. One conclusion from the commission's report was that Israel should institute reforms to allow for more diverse perspectives and dissenting opinions within intelligence analysis. Fifty years later, the same institutional pathologies reemerged and led to a similar surprise that left the Israeli prime minister and military leaders scrambling to craft a response.[17]

World War II and Pearl Harbor

In contrast to the Yom Kippur War, the two weeks preceding the Japanese air raid on Pearl Harbor demonstrate the possibility for military intelligence to do almost everything right—from collecting signals to receiving warnings from higher command echelons—but still fail to achieve the correct type of unambiguous warning. On November 27, 1941, the US Navy issued a war warning order, cautioning that Japanese naval forces appeared postured for a "sudden aggressive move in any direction," though Navy intelligence analysts in Hawaii predicted any aggression from Japan would take the form of an assault on the British territory of Malaya.[18]

The Army G-2 within the Hawaiian Department also tracked Japanese movements and identified threats to the Hawaiian Islands. Unlike the Navy, the Army had significantly less warning because the Navy's war warning was not shared with the Army G-2. While General Walter Campbell Short, commander of the Army Hawaiian Department, knew of the war warning message, he and Admiral Husband Edward Kimmel were under strict orders to disseminate the warning to the fewest number of individuals necessary to maintain the security of their intelligence sources.[19]

Three days after the Navy issued its war warning, Imperial Japanese forces changed their radio call signs to obfuscate communications American forces intercepted. As the Imperial Japanese Navy sailed toward Hawaii, the fleet engaged in radio silence, and land-based naval forces continued to transmit false radio traffic to confuse American intelligence analysts monitoring the location of all Japanese aircraft carriers. After the attack, Lieutenant Commander Edward T. Layton revealed that he did not take the lack of radio traffic as an indicator and assumed the Japanese carriers were still in home waters since carrier groups underway displayed different patterns of behavior and radio communications than those of ships in port.[20]

The final warning came one hour before the attack. Army Air Warning Service radars on Oahu picked up a group of aircraft moving toward the island at 7:02 a.m. After radar operators called into Fort Shafter to report the event, Kermit Tyler, the Navy lieutenant on duty, told the two privates manning the radar they were seeing a flight of B-17 bombers returning to base from the mainland and instructed them to disregard what they were seeing. Tyler did not make radio contact with the incoming aircraft to confirm if they were friendly.[21]

All these signals amounted to ample warning, but the United States continued to search for unambiguous warning before acting. The United States had observed several clear actions from Japan, from readying their carrier groups in home waters to the Japanese destruction of their diplomatic codes to identifying incoming Japanese aircraft on radar. Navy intelligence had correctly predicted since October 1941 that Japan was preparing for war, likely to launch an initial attack sometime in early December. The two decisionmakers in Hawaii, Kimmel and Short, could have taken action but waited for additional information that would have further dispelled ambiguity and illuminated what actions to take.[22]

Furthermore, military leaders in Washington and Hawaii should have already been mentally primed for the possibility of a Japanese air raid. War Plan Orange war games at the US Naval War College and in Washington began with the Red team, playing Japan, attacking Pearl Harbor via carrier-based aircraft. On December 30, 1940, Rear Admiral Claude C. Bloch, commandant of the Naval Forces in Hawaii, submitted a memo to Navy leadership cautioning that the first blow from Japan against the United States would likely be an air strike on Pearl Harbor. The surprise at Pearl Harbor demonstrates that even in scenarios in which there has been extensive planning and forethought about a possible attack, it is difficult for an action to make it through the entire warning process to generate the correct actions from decisionmakers.[23]

Additionally, the miscommunication between the Army and the Navy in the weeks leading up to the Pearl Harbor attack highlights an important tension operating in the background of the warning process. The Navy intentionally did not share its war warning message or its discovery of Japanese code burning at diplomatic outposts, often a sign that a country expects to abandon its consulates and embassies on short notice within days. At the same time, even though it turned out to be a false flag, the Army did not share with the Navy their knowledge of the "winds code," a hypothesis that certain phrases in Japanese weather broadcasts were covert orders indicating where Japan would attack next.[24]

The Army and Navy were under directives from Pentagon service leaders to share their information with the minimum number of intelligence officers

necessary to maintain operational security and protect sensitive intelligence sources. In Pearl Harbor's case, however, the Navy kept relevant information from the Army G-2, which would have cued the Army that sabotage on Oahu was not Japan's most likely course of action. While protecting intelligence sources and compartmentalizing intelligence are key to maintaining secrecy from an adversary, the same security protocols can harm organizations with the same goals from doing duplicative work or misinterpreting actions due to a lack of evidence.[25]

Conclusion

Indications and Warnings intelligence conveys predictions and probabilities, however, there is an increasingly common sentiment in Washington below the flag officer level that unambiguous warning will always occur with sufficient time to undertake final military preparations, movements, and posture modifications. While US intelligence capabilities are some of the most advanced in the world, that advantage does not mean military and civilian decisionmakers will correctly interpret, understand, and act on the information received.

For every Ukraine, there have been dozens of Yom Kippur War, Jericho Wall, and Pearl Harbor scenarios. The Department of Defense must now shift its planning processes to expect a lack of unambiguous warning. While the recent shift from the "ambiguous" and "unambiguous" taxonomy toward a corresponding "warning of war" and "warning of attack" framework is a step in the right direction, it still leaves room for misinterpretation and wishful thinking.

Military doctrine and technology have changed since the end of World War II, but the potential for surprise is equal, if not even greater, today. Surprises like the October 7 attack in Israel should remind US leadership and military planners that miscalculations and failure to identify warnings of impending wars will continue. The Intelligence Community must continue to collect, analyze, and properly interpret information and clearly present it to decisionmakers who can choose to take action—or not—before an impending attack occurs. Recognizing signals of conflict in hindsight does not constitute an effective strategy.

Regan Copple

Regan Copple is a research associate at the Institute for Defense Analyses in Alexandria, Virginia, where her work focuses on strategy development and war gaming. She is also an incoming doctoral student at George Mason University.

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Eisenhower as Supreme Allied Commander: A Reappraisal

Richard D. Hooker Jr.

ABSTRACT: This article argues that the historical assessment of Dwight D. Eisenhower as Supreme Allied Commander of the Allied Expeditionary Force in World War II lacks objectivity and balance. It identifies several strategic errors and missteps attributable to Eisenhower, which resulted in severe casualties and prolonged the war in Europe. The conclusions can help US military practitioners and policymakers assess the background and qualities required for successful theater command during wartime and senior commanders' performances.

Keywords: Dwight D. Eisenhower, World War II, strategy, command, Joint

Dwight D. Eisenhower rose from obscurity soon after the United States entered World War II in 1941 to achieve dizzying heights, first, as Supreme Allied Commander of the Allied Expeditionary Force in the victorious campaigns in Europe and, later, as the Chief of Staff of the Army, Supreme Allied Commander Europe of NATO, and president of the United States. His infectious grin, folksy persona, and consistently favorable press made him beloved at home and abroad. As a coalition commander with numerous fractious allies, Eisenhower possessed diplomatic skills that contributed to victory in World War II. History has endowed him with a wartime reputation unmatched by any other World War II commander, including Douglas MacArthur. A closer examination, however, stripped of the positive bias that often accompanies victorious commanders in wartime and after, suggests Eisenhower committed serious mistakes that may have lengthened the war and led to major and unnecessary loss of life. Eisenhower's errors slowed the campaign and led to tens of thousands of deaths, which more skillful and decisive leadership could have prevented.

Eisenhower on the Rise

Like many of his United States Military Academy class of 1915, Eisenhower was relegated to training duties during World War I and did not see combat overseas. Although not an academic standout at the academy, he gained

a reputation as a superb staff officer in the interwar period, serving successively under Generals Fox Conner, John J. Pershing, and MacArthur. After the German invasion of Poland in 1939, Eisenhower returned from the Philippines and served brief stints as a battalion commander, regimental executive officer, and corps and field army chief of staff. Following the Pearl Harbor attack, he was assigned to the War Plans Division in Washington, DC, where he was closely associated with Chief of Staff of the Army General George C. Marshall and formed a strong relationship that lasted throughout the war. Largely through Marshall's patronage, Eisenhower was catapulted from lieutenant colonel to four stars in 23 months—without the combat or command experience required of most other senior commanders.[1]

Based on Eisenhower's performance in the War Plans Division, Marshall nominated him to command all US and Allied forces in North Africa, Sicily, and Italy and, later, to command the Normandy Invasion in 1944. This rapid ascent meant Eisenhower never commanded at the brigade, division, corps, field army, or army group level. With no previous wartime service or experience in command of large formations, Eisenhower suffered setbacks in North Africa. His support of pro-Vichy French Admiral François Darlan caused a political firestorm, and the initial US defeat at the Kasserine Pass tarnished his reputation. Nevertheless, British success at the Battles of El-Alamein and the growing strength of US forces drove German troops out of North Africa in May 1943. With strong land, air, and sea superiority, Allied forces took Sicily in five weeks. Most German forces escaped to the mainland, however, and stymied the Allied offensive in Italy for months with their stubborn defense.[2]

In December 1943, President Franklin D. Roosevelt named Eisenhower Supreme Commander of the Allied Expeditionary Force, a position he held until the war's end. On June 6, 1944, the campaign commenced with the Normandy Invasion and ended with the surrender of all German forces on May 7, 1945. Throughout this period, Eisenhower commanded enormous forces: the British 21st Army Group (First Canadian Army and Second British Army), the US 12th Army Group (First, Third, Ninth, and, later, Fifteenth Armies), the 6th Army Group (Seventh Army and French First Army), the First Allied Airborne Army, the US 9th Air Force (tactical), and the British 2nd Tactical Air Force. Strategic bomber forces based in the United Kingdom and substantial Allied naval forces also came under Eisenhower's command for the initial invasion phase. Ultimately, Eisenhower commanded 91 divisions (61 infantry, 25 armored, and 5 airborne). Unlike the Germans, who still relied heavily on horses for transport, all Allied artillery and supply trains were motorized or mechanized, and all US infantry divisions were typically supported

by an independent tank battalion and tank destroyer battalion—making them, at this stage of the war, the equivalent of German panzer divisions.[3]

After the Normandy Invasion

In June 1944, Eisenhower faced 58 German divisions, including 33 low-quality static or reserve divisions with minimal transport, 9 panzer divisions, and 1 panzer grenadier division. Most German artillery was horse drawn. The Luftwaffe had been virtually destroyed, giving the Allies crushing air superiority. By 1944, the US industrial base functioned at near-maximum capacity, while German fuel and ammunition supplies ran short due to ceaseless Allied bombing and the demands of the far larger Eastern Front. While talented German commanders did exist in the European theater, five years of intense warfare had bled many German formations white, with huge numbers of junior and mid-level leaders dead or in captivity.[4]

The Battle of the Atlantic tilted decisively in the Allies' favor, and US convoys now crossed back and forth at will. Allied air forces in Europe included 13,000 aircraft, compared to fewer than 2,000 serviceable German planes (most of which remained in Germany to defend against the Allied strategic bombing campaign). By early 1945, the German Army in the west possessed the equivalent of 26 divisions, with more than 200 divisions facing the Soviets in the east. Britain's Ultra project also conferred an enormous advantage by providing the Allies with high-level signal intelligence. Eisenhower possessed overwhelming superiority over his German opponents in combat power, logistics, materiel, intelligence, airpower, and sea power. Only in combat experience did the Germans enjoy some superiority.[5]

The campaign began with successful landings in Normandy in early June 1944, enabling the Allies to put strong forces ashore. For weeks, a stout German defense held up the Allies in the hedgerows, but by mid-August, the Allies had broken through in Operation Cobra. Here, they missed the first great opportunity to deal a fatal blow to the Wehrmacht in the west. By August 8, 1944, US forces from the south and British and Canadian forces from the north encircled German Army Group B (Fifth Panzer Army and Seventh Army) in the Falaise pocket. In the ensuing battle, up to 10,000 German soldiers were killed, and 50,000 were captured, but perhaps 200,000 escaped.

For decades, British and American commanders and historians have argued over who is to blame. No senior Allied commander pushed to exploit the opportunity and close the gap. Eisenhower, still in England, deferred to General Bernard Montgomery, commander of 21st Army Group and, at that stage,

the overall ground commander, who moved cautiously, while General Omar Bradley, commander of 12th Army Group, worried about a "broken neck" at Falaise. German forces were weakened, especially in artillery and armored vehicles. Although they had lost most of their equipment, the German soldiers who escaped the pocket eventually manned new formations and confronted the Allies in fierce fighting for months.[6]

Eisenhower's deference to Montgomery, far more senior and combat experienced, would play out for much of the campaign, with doleful consequences. Vainglorious and egoistical, like George Patton, Montgomery exhibited little of Patton's daring and aggressiveness, preferring to conduct set-piece battles with overwhelming force. Tasked to open the port of Antwerp, vital to campaign logistics, Montgomery dithered, contributing to a supply crisis that nearly stopped Allied forces in their tracks in early fall 1944. When in full operation, Antwerp reduced the travel distance from the port to advanced depots (the channel ports were up to 400 miles away, Antwerp only 65) and increased logistical throughput; 54 divisions could be supplied, as opposed to only 21 from Cherbourg.[7]

Advanced British units captured the port in early September, its port facilities intact. Nevertheless, Antwerp lay approximately 55 miles up the Scheldt River estuary, and that terrain controlled access to the port from the North Sea. With the German forces in Normandy in full retreat, the capture of Antwerp and its approaches raised the possibility that the war in Europe could end in 1944. Logistical support for the campaign relied on access to the port, and the area was not defended by strong German forces. As he explained in his memoirs, Montgomery considered it more "worthwhile" to press on toward the Rhine River and the Ruhr. Eisenhower did not press the point. The Germans sped reinforcements through the hastily assembled First Parachute Army and Fifteenth Army (originally posted near the Pas-de-Calais, where Hitler expected the invasion to occur) to secure the Scheldt River's northern and southern banks. A rapid advance by Montgomery's lead elements across the Zuid-Beveland peninsula would have trapped the 86,000 soldiers of the Fifteenth Army, but the 21st Army Group would not clear the approaches until late November. By then, logistical shortages had crippled the advance, giving the Germans time to regroup.[8]

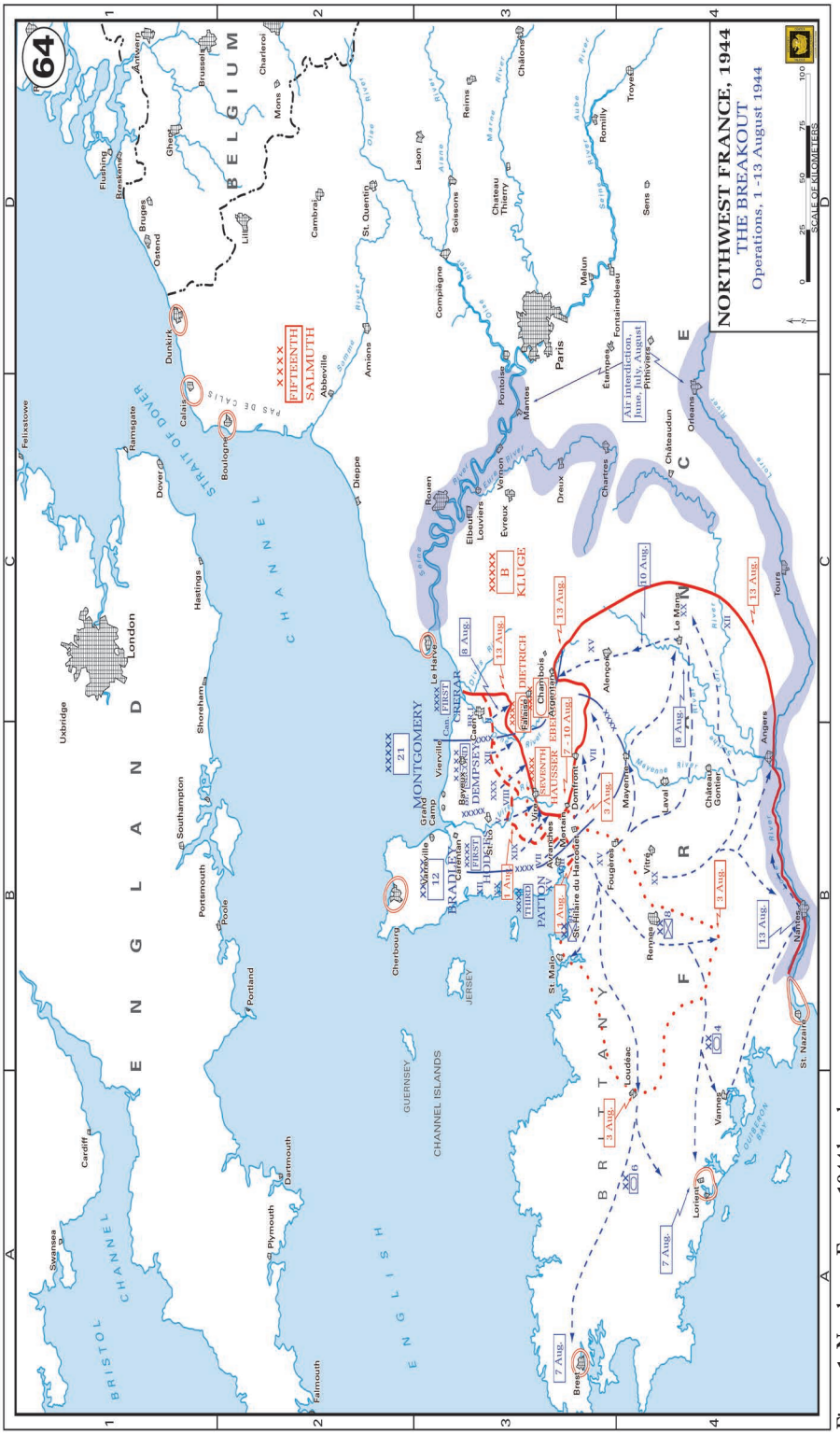

Figure 1. Northwest France 1944 breakout
(Map courtesy of the Department of History, United States Military Academy, New York)

The historical record clearly shows that Montgomery considered his drive on the Ruhr more important than securing the approaches to Antwerp, though any chance of finishing off the fleeing remnants of the German Army depended on it. So did Eisenhower, who later wrote,

> . . . [M]y decision to concentrate our efforts in this attempt to thrust into the heart of Germany before the enemy could consolidate his defenses along the Rhine had resulted in a delay in opening Antwerp and in making the port available as our main supply base. I took full responsibility for this, and I believe that the possible and actual results warranted the calculated risk involved.[9]

On September 1, 1944, Eisenhower took command of all ground troops, in addition to his responsibilities as Supreme Commander, against Montgomery's strong objections. Even as he struggled with Montgomery, he approved Operation Market Garden, the failed attempt to vault the Rhine River by seizing the bridges at Arnhem with the 1st Allied Airborne Army. Conducted from September 17 to 25, 1944 (and executed despite Bradley's objections), Operation Market Garden fell short of its ambitious goals. The British 1st Airborne Division was destroyed, while the US 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions also took high losses, as the British XXX Corps fell far behind schedule in linking up with the airborne forces. The diversion of hundreds of C-47 transport aircraft for Operation Market Garden also hampered theater logistical support. The smaller and more lightly equipped US airborne divisions were left in the line as conventional infantry for many weeks, sapping their battle worthiness. Described by Pulitzer prize–winning author Rick Atkinson as "a poor plan with deficient intelligence, haphazard execution, and indifferent generalship," Operation Market Garden proved inordinately wasteful in time, resources, and lives—for little gain. Another author describes the defeat as "absolute and terrible." German forces would hold Arnhem until mid-April 1945.[10]

As Operation Market Garden foundered, more tragedy unfolded to the south, in the Hürtgen Forest, in the US First Army's zone of attack. Located between Aachen and the Ruhr River, the densely wooded Hürtgenwald was ideal for defense, studded with pillboxes and heavily mined. It was the longest single battle the US Army ever fought, in terrain where American advantages in airpower, artillery, and armor could not be brought to bear. In mid-September, General Courtney Hodges, First Army's commander, ordered the 9th Infantry Division to enter and clear the forest, ostensibly to prevent the German forces there from reinforcing the

Aachen defenders to the north. One month later, the 28th Infantry Division replaced the 9th, which had suffered grievous losses. At this point, the 28th was the only division in the 12th Army Group engaged with the enemy, warranting a visit from Eisenhower and Bradley on November 8, 1944. In four weeks of bitter fighting, the 28th was effectively destroyed. The 1st, 4th, 8th, and 83d Infantry Divisions assumed its mission, all of which suffered cruelly. Ultimately, the US Army sustained more than 50,000 casualties in the battle. The Hürtgenwald was not cleared until mid-February 1945. The official Army historian describes the battle as "a misconceived and basically fruitless battle that should have been avoided."[11]

Hodges was largely to blame for the headlong bludgeoning that marked the Hürtgen battle. Corps and division commanders conducted little reconnaissance, and First Army intelligence reports underestimated the strength of the German defense. The forces committed lacked the combat strength to achieve their objectives, but First Army reinforced failure with the piecemeal replacement of divisions one after another. Hodges rarely left his headquarters in Spa, a Belgian resort town. A famously toxic leader, he relieved 10 corps and division commanders during the campaign—far more than any other US Army commander. In Atkinson's words, Hodges was "the wrong general to command First Army . . . peremptory and inarticulate." Despite his catastrophic losses, Hodges survived the disaster and commanded the First Army through the end of the war.[12]

As these events unfolded, General Jacob L. Devers's 6th Army Group rapidly moved up the Rhone River valley after it invaded southern France in mid-August 1944 in Operation Dragoon. With logistical support from the ports in Marseille and Toulon, 6th Army Group advanced 300 miles in 26 days, linking up with 12th Army Group on September 15, 1944, and coming under the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force's (SHAEF) control. After tough fighting in the Vosges Mountains, the First French Army took Strasbourg on November 23, 1944. The next day, Lieutenant General Alexander M. Patch's Seventh Army reached the Rhine River.[13]

In a face-to-face meeting with Eisenhower in Vittel on November 24, 1944, Devers pleaded for permission to cross the weakly defended Rhine River. The 6th Army Group boasted 350,000 troops and had trained for the river crossing. Seven crossing sites were prepared, and an intact bridge at Rastatt, 25 miles north of Strasbourg, led directly to Karlsruhe and a striking opportunity to trap the German 1st Army between Patton and Patch, drive to the Saar industrial basin, and rupture the Western Front. With support

from the experienced Patch and Brigadier General Garrison H. Davidson, the Seventh Army engineer, Devers based his views on reconnaissance, assessment of the terrain, and weak enemy opposition. Patton also thought the operation propitious. Yet Eisenhower demurred.[14]

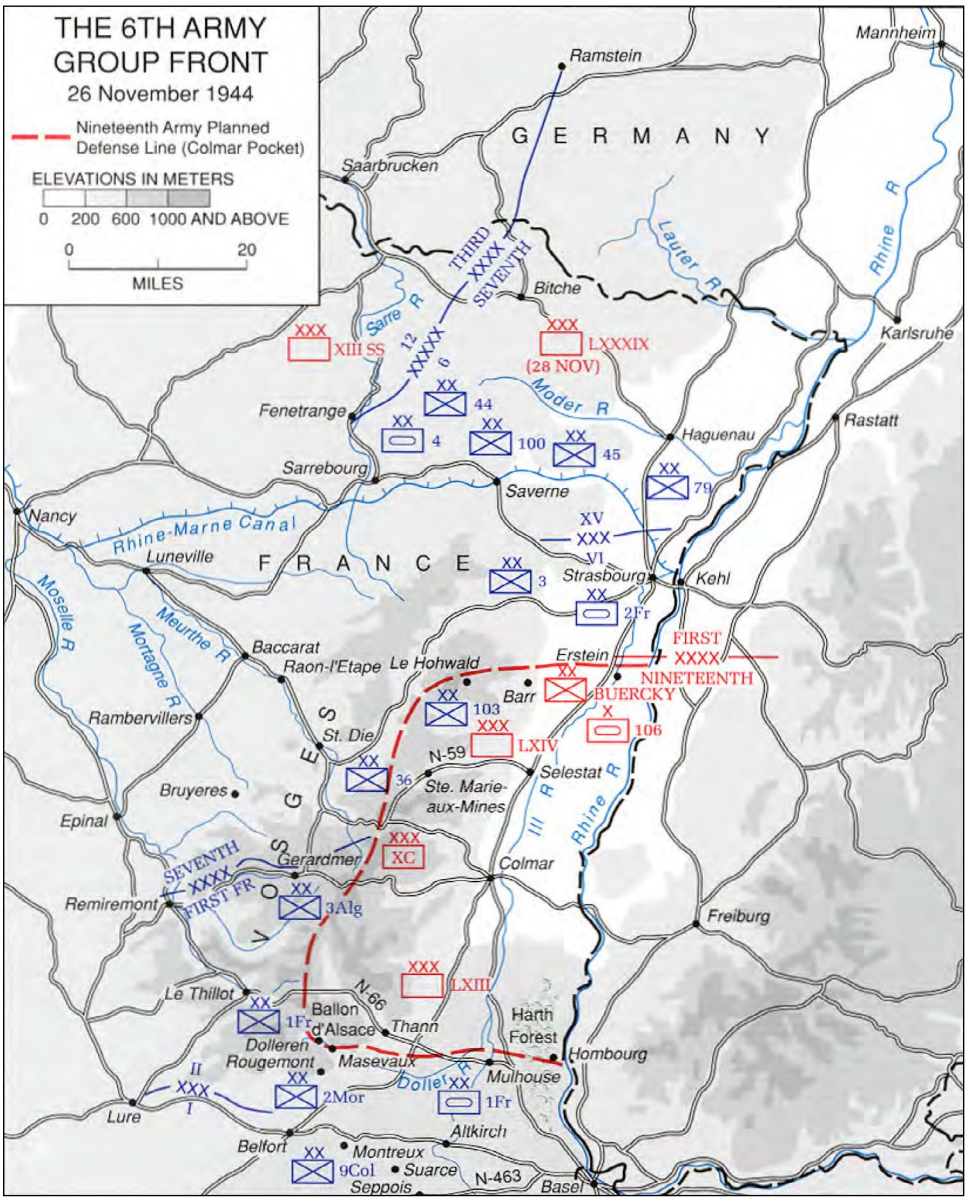

Figure 2. 6th Army Group front
(Source: Map 30 from Jeffery J. Clarke and Robert Ross Smith, Rivera to the Rhine [Washington, DC: Center of Military History, United States Army, 1993])

Inherent caution and a desire to proceed methodically along the line may explain Eisenhower's views, but a well-documented personal antipathy undoubtedly played a role. Devers was another of Marshall's protégés, and he and Eisenhower were rivals. Like many others, Devers was senior to Eisenhower at the outbreak of the war and achieved general's rank before him. Affable and competent, Devers commanded the European theater of operations in England in 1943 and, in that capacity, denied Eisenhower's request to send four bomber groups to Italy, a decision Marshall and the Combined Chiefs of Staff seconded. A petty animus developed; in a confidential ranking of general officers Eisenhower submitted to Marshall late in the war, Devers appeared near the bottom. Eisenhower's decision to halt Devers and forego a Rhine River crossing in November 1944 prevented a viable chance to end the war in early 1945.[15]

Less than one month later, 30 German divisions burst from the Ardennes to split the Allies and drive for the logistics hub at Antwerp. Although SHAEF believed the Germans incapable of major offensive operations, the logistical challenges that stalled the campaign and the tens of thousands of German veterans who escaped the battle for Normandy provided time and manpower for one last German push. The heavily forested Ardennes was left weakly defended, a rest and training area for green or exhausted divisions, though the Germans had used it as an invasion route in the 1940 Battle of France. The Ardennes counteroffensive (the Battle of the Bulge), in scope and scale, would later be seen as the greatest intelligence failure of the war in Europe.[16]

The irruption of German forces from the Ardennes on December 16, 1944, came as a stunning surprise. Undetected by Allied intelligence, the Germans amassed more than 1,200 tanks and assault guns and more than 4,200 artillery and anti-tank guns in assembly areas east of the Rhine River. The German Fifth Panzer and Sixth Panzer Armies spearheaded the assault, supported by the Fifteenth Army on the northern flank and the Seventh Army on the southern flank. Within days, a 60-mile "bulge" in the Allied lines opened. Poor flying weather grounded Allied air forces, which helped the Germans press toward the Meuse River crossings. The US 99th Infantry Division at the Elsenborn Ridge and the US 7th Armored and 101st and 82nd Airborne Divisions at Bastogne and St. Vith slowed the German advance with heroic resistance, aided by low German fuel reserves and improved flying weather. By December 23, 1944, it was clear the attempt to cross the Meuse River would fail.[17]

At the height of the Battle of the Bulge, Eisenhower ordered Devers to give up forces to Bradley, attack north with Patch's Seventh Army, and attack south to clear out the Colmar pocket with Jean de Lattre de Tassigny's First French Army. This dissipation ensured neither operation went well. More was to follow. On December 26, 1944, SHAEF ordered Devers to withdraw 40 miles west,

give up Strasbourg, and "hang on" until the fight in the Bulge stabilized. A furious Charles de Gaulle, now the political head of France, ordered French forces to disregard all such orders and to make Strasbourg "another Stalingrad." Lieutenant General Walter Bedell "Beetle" Smith, Eisenhower's famously acerbic chief of staff, dismissed Devers's protests as evidence of "disloyalty." The political crisis escalated and threatened to engulf the Allies until Winston Churchill brokered a meeting with de Gaulle and Eisenhower, after which the Supreme Commander rescinded the order.[18]

Meanwhile, a large salient remained in 12th Army Group's defensive sector. In a controversial decision, Eisenhower detached the US Ninth and First Armies and placed them under Montgomery's control on the northern shoulder, leaving Bradley with only the Third Army. Protesting that his communications remained reliable, Bradley threatened resignation, further stoking coalition frictions. By late December, an opportunity existed to pinch off the northern and southern shoulders of the Bulge—now approximately 40 by 60 miles—and kill or capture the 400,000 German soldiers inside the pocket.[19]

As at Falaise, this attempt was stillborn. Although pushed aggressively by Patton, Eisenhower could not move Montgomery to attack. German forces were pushed out of the Bulge from west to east, instead of being trapped in converging attacks from north to south, as US doctrine called for at the time. While German losses were heavy, two German field armies escaped, lengthening the war by months. From December 16, 1944, to January 25, 1945, US casualties totaled almost 90,000, including more than 19,000 dead and 23,000 taken prisoner. The Battle of the Bulge accounted for 10 percent of all US casualties in World War II.[20]

Through February and March 1945, Eisenhower's three army groups approached the Rhine River and began preparations to cross. By late March, Allied forces were established on the east bank of the Rhine River and moving forward. The end was in sight. As Soviet forces approached Berlin from the east, German forces in the west began to disintegrate, though small enclaves of fierce resistance remained. The Ruhr pocket collapsed on April 18, 1945, with a staggering 325,000 prisoners taken. Hitler committed suicide in the Führerbunker on April 30, 1945, and hostilities ceased on May 8, 1945. The victory was Eisenhower's. But at what cost?[21]

Hindsight

The campaign in Northwest Europe from June 1944 to May 1945 resulted in 780,860 Allied casualties, including 165,590 killed in action. Of that total, the United States suffered 523,110 casualties, with 109,820 killed or missing

in action, 356,660 wounded, and 56,630 US soldiers taken prisoner. Ninety days into the campaign, the infantry regiments in US divisions had suffered heavy casualties, precipitating a severe manpower crisis in early fall 1944. In December that year, SHAEF was forced to break up the infantry regiments in the 42nd, 63rd, 69th, and 70th Infantry Divisions from 6th Army Group for use as infantry replacements in other divisions. By the war's end, 13 US divisions had suffered 100 percent casualties, with 5 more divisions suffering 200 percent casualties. American forces lost 11,000 tanks—the equivalent of almost the entire armored force in the European theater of operations. In 10 months of campaigning, the combat echelon of Eisenhower's forces was destroyed and reconstituted.[22]

Throughout the campaign, Eisenhower insisted on an orderly advance across Northwest Europe as his armies closed on the Rhine River—the much debated "Broad Front" strategy. Given SHAEF's logistical difficulties, supplying all three army groups in a general advance from Normandy to the Ruhr and beyond was more challenging than the alternative—a single main effort, with supporting attacks on the flanks.[23]

Montgomery opposed Eisenhower's decision against this course of action and pressed for primacy for 21st Army Group in the north with priority for logistics and additional US forces. Bradley and Patton, 12th Army Group's spearhead, and Devers—who was denied an early opportunity to leap the Rhine River—also opposed the decision. Phase line by phase line, the armies advanced in tandem, foregoing opportunities to break open the front or exploit opportunities in a more fluid war of movement. Worried about exposed flanks, sensitive to national considerations, and lacking Montgomery's confidence and Patton's boldness, Eisenhower proceeded cautiously. This safer but slower approach gave a resilient German Army opportunities to rally and reconstitute. Admittedly a British partisan, Chester Wilmot was probably correct when he observed:

> In the role of Supreme Commander [Eisenhower] had shown himself to be the military statesman rather than the generalissimo . . . [H]e was conscious of his lack of experience in the tactical handling of armies, and this gave him a sense of professional inferiority in dealing with men like Montgomery and Patton who had been through the mill of command at every level.[24]

Given these shortcomings, why was Eisenhower retained in command? The answer must be speculative, but Marshall's firm support was likely overriding. Roosevelt relied on Marshall's judgment throughout the war and never intervened unilaterally to remove senior military leaders. The negative

impact of replacing the Supreme Commander mid-campaign also must have weighed heavily. The administration and the War Department had invested in Eisenhower as the American face of the war in Europe. His relief would have reenergized British calls for Montgomery to assume overall control—an unacceptable option. A different selection in late 1943 or early 1944 would have been politically and militarily feasible, but after D-Day, only an outright military disaster could have justified Eisenhower's relief.

Conclusion

We cannot know if other generals would have outperformed Eisenhower. Montgomery's battle experience and seniority did not produce striking results in 1944–45. The results of the campaign in northwest Europe in 1944–45 suggest, however, a more senior and experienced American would have enjoyed more prestige and credibility with the British and perhaps provided more forceful and aggressive leadership. Several leaders were available, all senior to Eisenhower at the outbreak of war and with superior professional résumés.

These leaders included:

- Devers, commissioned in 1909, with command experience at the division level and of the Armored Force and the European theater of operations by 1943;
- Patch, commissioned in 1913, with World War I combat experience and regimental-, division-, and corps-level command experience by 1943;
- Robert L. Eichelberger, commissioned in 1909, with combat experience in Siberia in 1920 (where he was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross) and regimental-, division-, and corps-level command experience by 1943;
- and Walter Krueger, commissioned in 1909, with World War I combat experience and command experience at the regimental, brigade, division, corps and field-army level by 1941. (At one point, Krueger wore three stars with then-Colonel Eisenhower as his chief of staff. Krueger also spoke French and German fluently).

All were noted as aggressive and successful senior commanders who worked well in coalition settings, served with great distinction in World War II at the army- or army-group level, and achieved four-star rank.[25]

Given his relative youth, inexperience, and meteoric rise, Eisenhower faced immense challenges, and leading the Allies to victory was no small achievement in the greatest war in history. The cost was high, however, and Eisenhower's learning curve was steep. Given his advantages—overwhelming force, crushing air dominance, superior intelligence, secure sea lanes of communication, near-limitless industrial capacity, and the diversion of German resources to the far larger Eastern Front—an Allied victory by summer 1945 seemed inevitable. Most scholarship on Eisenhower's generalship is laudatory and deferential. The few, often indirect critics of his leadership as Supreme Commander pass blame or responsibility for strategic missteps onto the War Department, Eisenhower's staff, or subordinate commanders—but Eisenhower's responsibility as Supreme Commander cannot be fairly deflected onto others. As he admitted, "No major effort takes place in this Theater by ground, sea or air except with my approval and no one in the Allied Command presumes to question my supreme authority and responsibility for the whole campaign." Eight decades later, a more balanced assessment is in order.[26]

Richard D. Hooker Jr.

Richard D. Hooker Jr. is a senior fellow with the Atlantic Council and senior associate at the Harvard Kennedy School's Belfer Center. He is the former National Security Council senior director for Europe and Russia. He authored *The High Ground: Leading in Peace and War* (Casemate, 2023).

Endnotes

1. Marshall presumably elevated Eisenhower over others with stronger qualifications because of his perceived excellence as a planner and staff officer, his loyalty and sense of obligation to Marshall, and his similar career arc; like Eisenhower, Marshall was principally a staff officer without credentials as a senior commander. See Merle Miller, *Ike the Soldier: As They Knew Him* (New York: Putnam's Sons, 1987). **Return to text.**

2. Of the five officers who commanded field armies in Europe (Courtney Hicks Hodges, George S. Patton, Alexander M. Patch, William Hood Simpson, and Leonard T. Gerow), all saw combat during World War I; 16 of 34 US corps commanders were World War I combat veterans. Robert H. Berlin, *U.S. Army World War II Corps Commanders: A Composite Biography* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: US Army Command and General Staff College [CGSC], Combat Studies Institute, 1989), 7. Eisenhower's performance in North Africa and Sicily is described in Stephen E. Ambrose, *Eisenhower,* vol. 1, *Soldier, General of the Army, President-Elect, 1890–1952* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), 210–21. See also Don Cook, "Eisenhower," in *The War Lords: Military Commanders of the Twentieth Century,* ed. Michael Carver (Boston: Little, Brown, 1976), 515–22. **Return to text.**

3. The 6th Army Group came under the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF) on September 15, 1944, after the successful invasion of southern France. The German Panzer Division was authorized two tank battalions in late 1944, but most operated well below establishment due to battle losses and the difficulty of replacement. Assault guns were often substituted for main battle tanks. Matthew Cooper, *The German Army 1933–1945: Its Political and Military Failure* (New York: Stein and Day, 1978), 488. See also Army Ground Forces Historical Section, *History of the Armored Force, Command and Center*, Army Ground Force Study no. 27 (Fort Leavenworth, KS: CGSC, 1951), 4, 47, https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/citations/ADA955008; and Christopher R. Gabel, *Seek, Strike and Destroy: U.S. Army Tank Destroyer Doctrine in World War II*, Leavenworth Papers no. 12 (Fort Leavenworth, KS: CGSC Combat Studies Institute, September 1985), 56, https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/ADA532138.pdf. **Return to text.**

4. Richard P. Hallion, *D-Day 1944: Airpower over the Normandy Beaches and Beyond* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1994), 2. **Return to text.**

5. These disparities included 425 German fighters in Western Europe in June 1944, compared to more than 13,000 Allied aircraft supporting SHAEF. German Air Ministry, *The Rise and Fall of the German Air Force (1933 to 1945)* (London: Air Ministry, 1948), 333. See also Gordon A. Harrison, *Cross-Channel Attack*, Center of Military History (CMH) Publication (Pub) 7-4, *United States Army in World War II: The European Theater of Operations*, ed. Kent Roberts Greenfield (1951; repr., Washington, DC: US Army CMH, 2002), 242, https://history.army.mil/books/wwii/7-4/7-4_contents.htm. The figure of 200,000 escaped German soldiers is from Martin Blumenson, as cited in William Weidner, "The Falaise Gap: Ike vs. Monty and a Failure of Command," *WWII Quarterly* 3, no. 3 (Spring 2012): 66–79, https://warfarehistorynetwork.com/article/the-falaise-gap-ike-vs-monty-and-a-failure-of-command/; "*Kriegsmarine* in Normandy: Battle of Normandy," D-Day Overlord (website), n.d., accessed July 22, 2024, https://www.dday-overlord.com/en/d-day/german-forces/kriegsmarine. **Return to text.**

6. "The supreme commander had proven an indifferent field marshal in Tunisia, on Sicily, and during the planning for Anzio; now, at Falaise, he continued that deficiency, watching passively for more than a week without recognizing or rectifying the command shortcomings of his two chief lieutenants." Rick Atkinson, *The Guns at Last Light: The War in Western Europe 1944–1945* (New York: Henry Holt, 2013), 163. "General Bradley, to avoid colliding with the British forces coming from the north, firmly ordered Patton to halt at Argentan." Forrest C. Pogue, *The Supreme Command*, CMH Pub 7-1, *US Army in World War II: European Theater of Operations*, ed. Kent Roberts Greenfield (1954; repr., Washington, DC: CMH, 1989), 214, https://history.army.mil/html/books/007/7-1/CMH_Pub_7-1.pdf. See also Omar Nelson Bradley, *A Soldier's Story* (New York: Henry Holt, 1951), 377; and David Eisenhower, *Eisenhower at War 1943–1945* (New York: Random House, 1986), 410. **Return to text.**

7. Commissioned in 1908, Montgomery served throughout World War I and was severely wounded. He commanded a division in the battle for France, a corps in England, and, later, the British 8th Army in North Africa, Sicily, and Italy. Operation Market Garden, daring to the extreme, appeared to be an exception to Montgomery's customary caution. The airborne forces employed, however, were SHAEF's strategic reserve and not part of 21st Army Group. The importance of Antwerp is discussed in Raymond E. Bell Jr., "The Allies' Biggest Blunder?," *WWII Quarterly* 8, no. 2 (Winter 2017): 16–27, https://warfarehistorynetwork.com/article/the-allies-biggest-blunder/. **Return to text.**

8. "In retrospect it can be seen that the failure to clear the [Scheldt River] estuary . . . was the most calamitous flaw in the post-Normandy campaign." John Keegan, *The Second World War* (Norwalk, CT: Easton Press, 1989), 437. Consistent with his generalship throughout the campaign, Montgomery aggressively refused to tie down more than a bare minimum of his troops to deal with the defenders of the Scheldt River estuary. Russell F. Weigley, *Eisenhower's Lieutenants* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981), 293, 351. See also Bernard L. Montgomery, *The Memoirs of Field Marshal Montgomery* (Cleveland, OH: World Publishing Company, 1958), 250. **Return to text.**

9. "Until the middle of October, the enemy could have broken through at any point he liked, with ease, and would then be able to cross the Rhine and thrust deep into Germany almost unhindered." Siegfried Westphal, *The German Army in the West* (London: Cassell, 1951), 173–74. See also Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Eisenhower's Own Story of the War: The Complete Report by the Supreme Commander on the War in Europe from the Day of Invasion to the Day of Victory* (New York: Arco Publishing Company, 1946), 68. **Return to text.**

10. Norman F. Dixon, *On the Psychology of Military Incompetence* (London: Pimlico, 1994), 148. See also Pogue, *Supreme Command*, 287; and Atkinson, *Guns at Last Light*, 286, 288. In another major blow to theater logistics, 261 C-47s were lost. **Return to text.**

11. See Thomas G. Bradbeer, "General Cota and the Battle of the Hürtgen Forest: A Failure of Battle Command?," *Army History* no. 75 (Spring 2010): 35–36, https://history.army.mil/armyhistory/AH75(W)_replacement.pdf. See also Charles B. MacDonald, *The Battle of the Huertgen Forest* (New York: J. B. Lippencott, 1963), 205. **Return to text.**

12. Atkinson, *Guns at Last Light*, 311. **Return to text.**

13. The 6th Army Group's operations in November 1944 are discussed in detail in Jeffrey J. Clarke and Robert Ross Smith, *Riviera to the Rhine*, CMH Pub 7-10, *United States Army in World War II: European Theater of Operations*, ed. Stetson Conn (Washington, DC: CMH, 1993), 363–445, https://history.army.mil/html/books/007/7-10-1/CMH_Pub_7-10-1.pdf. **Return to text.**

14. Clarke and Ross, *Riviera to the Rhine*, 445. After the war, opposing German commanders agreed that the Allies missed a major opportunity to shorten the war due to Eisenhower's decision. David P. Colley, *The Folly of Generals: How Eisenhower's Broad Front Strategy Lengthened World War II* (Philadelphia: Casemate, 2021), 142. See also Atkinson, *Guns at Last Light*, 373–76; and Martin Blumenson, *The Patton Papers, 1885–1940* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974), 583. **Return to text.**

15. Rick Atkinson, "Eisenhower Rising: The Ascent of an Uncommon Man" (Harmon Memorial Lecture 55, United States Air Force Academy, El Paso County, CO, March 5, 2013), https://www.usafa.edu/app/uploads/Harmon55.pdf; and James Scott Wheeler, *Jacob L. Devers: A General's Life* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2015), 227. See also Colley, *Folly of Generals*, 145; and Omar N. Bradley and Clay Blair, *A General's Life: An Autobiography* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1983), 390. **Return to text.**

16. Carlo D'Este, *Eisenhower: A Soldier's Life* (New York: Henry Holt, 2002), 640. **Return to text.**

17. Hugh M. Cole, *The Ardennes: Battle of the Bulge*, CMH Pub 7-8-1, *US Army in World War II: European Theater of Operations*, ed. Stetson Conn (1965; repr., Washington, DC: CMH, 1993), https://history.army.mil/html/books/007/7-8-1/CMH_Pub_7-8-1.pdf. **Return to text.**

18. Atkinson, *Guns at Last Light*, 476–81. "Eisenhower's relations with Devers had none of the warmth or patience of the Supreme Commander's dealings with his friends in the 12th Army Group. Instead, there was a too-ready willingness to adopt an accusatory tone at the least hint of anything going wrong." Weigley, *Eisenhower's Lieutenants*, 551. See also Wheeler, *Jacob L. Devers*, 372. **Return to text.**

19. In his memoirs, Eisenhower writes, "the command plan worked and there was generally universal acceptance of its necessity at the time." Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe* (New York: Doubleday, 1948), 395. In contrast, Bradley reported his reactions as "dumbfounded . . . shocked . . . [and] a slap in the face." Bradley and Blair, *A General's Life*, 363. **Return to text.**

20. Keith Huxon, "The Battle of the Bulge," National WWII Museum (website), December 18, 2019, https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/battle-of-the-bulge. See also Gary W. Whitehead, "Missed Opportunity: Reducing the Bulge" (Strategic Research Project, US Army War College, Carlisle, PA, 2001), 12, https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/tr/pdf/ADA390604.pdf. The 21st Army Group recorded 1,400 casualties with 200 killed in action in the Bulge. Donna Miles, American Forces Press Service, "Battle of the Bulge Remembered 60 Years Later," CMH (website), December 14, 2004, https://history.army.mil/html/reference/bulge/DoD-BotB-60-years-later.html. **Return to text.**

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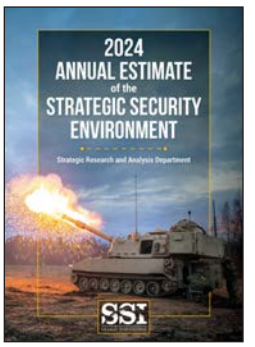
Resources Designed to Promote Professional Discourse

Brennan Deveraux

Keywords: *Annual Estimate of the Strategic Security Environment*, professional discourse, Department of Defense, Harding Project, professional military education

The Army provides its servicemembers with Army regulation, doctrinal, and organizational publications to accomplish essential tasks—from training and leading units to conducting military operations. Professional discourse is no exception. The US Army War College and Army University Press recently published resources to help the force prioritize professional discourse. These documents provide a starting point for aspiring researchers and a reference guide for individuals and organizations. Combined, these new publications will help the force to take up Chief of Staff of the Army Randy A. George's charge to revitalize professional discourse in the Army.[1]

Annual Estimate of the Strategic Security Environment



Inspiration is a prerequisite for professional discourse. Finding a research topic or a debate to support is the first step in joining the conversation. This task, however, can be challenging. I struggled to select a research topic while attending the Naval Postgraduate School for my professional military education. I floundered about the library, grabbing random military history books and wondering how I could add to the literature. Eventually, an instructor showed me the Army's Key Strategic Issues List (or KSIL), an organized compilation of strategic questions requiring research. While the list was overwhelming, it provided a starting point.[2]

The Strategic Studies Institute has modernized this product with a focus on usefulness for researchers, rebranding it in 2022 as the *Annual Estimate of the Strategic Security Environment*. This resource provides short narratives that fit into four themes: Regional Challenges and Opportunities, Domestic Challenges, Institutional Challenges, and Challenges to the US Strategic Advantage. The 2023 version set the foundation for this new construct, and the 2024 version builds on that analysis by examining "how the environment is trending and

highlights challenges likely to impact the Department of Defense significantly in the near future."[3]

The organized list of questions that defined the KSIL still exists but has been updated. Now, the narrative is supplemented by more than 100 questions directly from senior Army leaders and organizations that familiarize researchers with pressing problems and offer insights into matters affecting defense organizations. Overall, the *Annual Estimate of the Strategic Security Environment* "is designed to guide the collective defense community to research and write about critical national security challenges." In this context, the US Army War College has sparked interest in professional discourse. Inspiration, however, is only the first step.[4]

The *Military Review* "How-To" Guide

While having an idea can initiate the professional discourse process, there should be a clear path for developing it. Writing a paper or crafting a unit program can seem daunting. The Harding Project team spearheading the Army's professional discourse revitalization efforts reached similar conclusions and announced in spring 2024 its partnership with Army University Press to publish a *Military Review* "how-to" special edition. After opening with the history of professional journals and commentary on why soldiers must write, the reference guide is divided into three categories that outline the publication process.[5]

The section for individuals provides guidance on tackling writing projects, including how to write articles and book reviews and transform professional military education papers into publishable documents. It also offers rewriting tips and a short discussion about the nuances of dissenting professionally.

The section dedicated to leaders developing unit-wide professional discourse programs shares personal experiences and presents tools and recommendations for authors. These articles cover methods for building online forums, creating unit writing programs, and employing speech tools (like debates and TED Talks) in the unit professional development programs.

In the last section, editors at the Modern War Institute and *From the Green Notebook* share tips for working with editors. Additionally, the last section emphasizes teamwork, outlining successful methods for coauthoring articles and highlighting the importance of building a professional network as a foundation for professional discourse.

This how-to guide will equip the force to enter the conversation. Individuals can leverage the publication to action their ideas, leaders across the force can learn from their peers, and those who succeed in publishing their work can help shape the force.

Conclusion

The Chief of Staff of the Army has made the revitalization of professional discourse one of the top priorities for the force. Consequently, soldiers and researchers interested in tackling the biggest challenges facing the Army should look to the service's educational institutions. The *Annual Estimate of the Strategic Security Environment* addresses the important issues confronting the service, and the special edition of *Military Review* provides the tools to begin the researching and writing process. Combined, these essential resources will operationalize professional discourse.

Brennan Deveraux

Major Brennan Deveraux is an Army strategist serving as a national security researcher at the US Army War College Strategic Studies Institute.

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The Military and the Election: Thinking through Retired Flag Officer Endorsements

Carrie A. Lee

Keywords: political endorsements, retired general officers, non-partisanship, norm-based approach, civil-military trust

With fall approaching, we as Americans find ourselves in the midst of another presidential election. While we are not typically in the business of debating or commenting on the country's domestic politics here at the US Army War College, the civil-military landscape today requires us to think seriously about how military service is used and leveraged during campaigns—and how that use may draw the military into partisan politics. We already see the ways political leaders and candidates portray the military (the lone remaining federal institution with an approval rating above 50 percent) as supportive of their leadership. From campaigns that publish lists of retired general officer endorsements, to advertisements that highlight political candidates' military service, to politicians who use visits to military bases in reelection literature, observers have no shortage of civil-military events to study and discuss as the election draws near.

This issue's column focuses on a prominent—and much-remarked-upon—feature of election cycles today: the prevalence of retired general and flag officer endorsements. Every election cycle, presidential campaigns release lists of former senior military leaders who endorse their candidacy and, in many cases, use them as surrogates on the campaign trail to discuss national security priorities. In some high-profile cases, retired general officers have delivered speeches at partisan national conventions, highlighting their military credentials while advocating for presidential candidates. I chose to focus on this phenomenon because it has generated significant attention from civil-military relations scholars over the last several years. There is, therefore, both existing research to evaluate and opportunity to advance our understanding of how, when, and why these endorsements may (or may not) matter for healthy civil-military relations today.

The debate, on the surface, is relatively straightforward. Should retired general officers participate in partisan politics by endorsing political candidates? Is it a celebrated exercise of free speech, or do endorsements undermine civil-military relations and unnecessarily politicize the military? The debate, however, is also complicated. After all, there are many different ways and degrees to which retired flag and general officers may advocate for political candidates. There are also various ways to discourage participation in partisan politics. To date, stewards of the profession have relied on informal social norms among the retired general officer corps to discourage political endorsements, but these norms are weakening and increasingly contested.[1]

Some prominent military leaders like Joseph F. Dunford Jr. and Martin E. Dempsey have advocated for a renewed norm-based approach, while others have proposed enforcing the existing limitations on speech (up to and including Uniform Code of Military Justice action) or even introducing new language into the UCMJ that further restricts retired officers' ability to exercise partisan political speech. Yet most proposed solutions also lack a sense of the scale of the problem. Indeed, it is reasonable to expect that additional restrictions on the First Amendment rights of retired general officers should be informed by compelling evidence that such partisan political speech does, in fact, significantly harm the institution.[2]

So, what does the public know about general officer participation and its impact on civil-military relations? The answer, I would argue, is not as much as we should. Thanks to terrific recent research by Risa A. Brooks, Michael A. Robinson, and Heidi Urben, we know the norms against partisan endorsements are weakening and are contested among the retired general officer community. Moreover, there is evidence that retired flag officer partisan speech also correlates with other types of political behavior, like monetary donations, suggesting there is a type of "political" officer—and research from our own war college faculty reveals that those monetary contributions skew toward one political party. We also know from survey research spearheaded by Peter D. Feaver, Kyle Dropp, and James Golby that general officer endorsements of policy—whether retired or active duty—are only effective under certain conditions.[3]

Evidence also suggests that the risk of politicization is real. We know from recent research that military cues harm the public perception of the military as a nonpartisan entity, Americans are largely unable to distinguish between the retired and active-duty general officer corps, and the public's commitment to military norms of non-partisanship norms are weak at best. However, these findings are also not definitive. In a recently republished *Parameters* article, Zachary E. Griffiths argues the existing evidence does not

support claims that partisan speech by retired general officers significantly damages civil-military relations.[4]

It appears, therefore, that we have a gap between theory and empirics worth investigating further. While the studies Griffiths cites are a good start, a more systematic investigation of how different types of speech and endorsements by retired general officers may impact public perceptions of military partisanship is needed. Moreover, a closer look at how endorsements sway elite civil-military relations—perhaps a survey like the one fielded by Brooks, Robinson, and Urben or a more thorough set of interviews like those conducted by Todd Andrew Schmidt in his book on civilian control—would shed additional light on the ways in which retired general officer behavior may or may not undermine civil-military trust.[5]

Finally, we should evaluate the ways retired flag officer partisanship affects the profession and, in particular, the next generation of military leaders. Do retired general officers' political actions undermine non-partisanship norms among active-duty officers and cadets? We should strive to answer these empirical questions if we want to develop a policy that appropriately balances retired officers' rights with their continued responsibility to the profession of arms.

There is also a set of normative questions that deserve further attention. First and foremost, is it even appropriate to try to limit retired general officer speech? Should promotion to general officer come with a lifetime restriction on one's right to free speech? And, if so, what is the right way for retired general and flag officers to engage in the political process, if at all? When I address this topic with new one-star general officers, I ask them to consider three questions when deciding whether to participate after retirement:

- Are you being asked because of your personal experience or because of your title?
- What impact do you think your endorsement will have?
- What example do you hope to set?

There is no guarantee that this approach is the right one, however, and it is largely informed by a better-safe-than-sorry mindset. To get it right, we must do more theoretical and empirical work.

Carrie A. Lee

Carrie A. Lee is the director of the US Army War College Civil-Military Relations Center and chair of the Department of National Security and Strategy. Her award-winning research and writing have appeared in publications such as *Foreign Affairs*, *Texas National Security Review*, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, War on the Rocks, and the *Washington Post*. She is a term member with the Council on Foreign Relations, a contributing editor for War on the Rocks, and an adjunct fellow with the Center for a New American Security. She received a PhD in political science from Stanford University and a bachelor of science degree from MIT.

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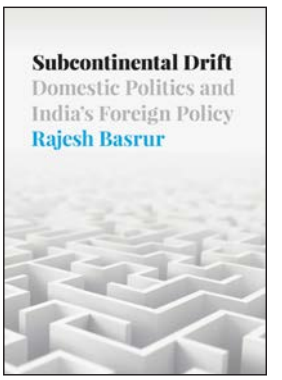
Exploring Strategy in India

Vinay Kaura

Keywords: international relations, neoclassical realism, Indian foreign policy, Indian domestic policy, India-Pakistan relations

Subcontinental Drift: Domestic Politics and India's Foreign Policy

Rajesh Basrur in *Subcontinental Drift: Domestic Politics and India's Foreign Policy* draws on substantial theoretical literature on international relations to discuss India's foreign and security policies. Basrur is a senior fellow in the South Asia Program at the S. Rajaratnam School International Studies in the Nanyang Technological University in Singapore and the author of *South Asia's Cold War: Nuclear Weapons and Conflict in Comparative Perspective* (Routledge, 2008) and *India's Nuclear Security* (Stanford University Press, 2005). He has relied upon neoclassical realism, incorporating domestic factors to explain India's foreign policy—a remarkable achievement, as explanations of India's foreign policy from structural realism often ignore domestic factors.



Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2023
264 pages
$44.95

The book's key argument is that, despite India's long-standing aspiration to achieve great-power status, policy drifts have thwarted the country's ambitions. Basrur highlights the prevalent features of India's political system and explains how they have impeded its decision making to shape the external environment. Domestic politics influenced critical foreign-policy choices—the Indo-US nuclear deal, India's involvement in Sri Lanka's civil war, India's nuclear strategy, and the response to cross-border terrorism from Pakistan. In each case, India's decisionmakers responded to external factors, but the domestic political dynamics influenced the implementation of these policies.

The 2008 Indo-US nuclear deal separated India's civilian and military nuclear reactors while legitimizing its clandestine nuclear weapons program. This notable agreement bypassed the rules of the nonproliferation regime, indicating India's "shift from the margins of the central dynamics of the

international system to a key position in its strategic politics" (41). The deal was strategically advantageous for India as it contributed directly to the deepening of bilateral ties between India and the United States. Apart from the many challenges faced at the international level, India's party politics presented a classic case of neorealism (72). The subsequent negotiations between New Delhi and Washington became entangled in India's domestic coalition politics as the opposition party, the Bharatiya Janata Party, opposed the nuclear deal, not on ideological grounds, but to create political trouble for the coalition government led by the Congress Party. The enthusiasm generated after the nuclear deal fizzled out as political tensions soared. Eventually, Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh went ahead with the deal through a two-level negotiating strategy—one with his domestic interlocutors and another with the United States.

The second case is India's disastrous military intervention in Sri Lanka's civil war. India's intervention to assist the Sri Lankan government in its fight against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) was seriously constrained by the domestic politics in India. India's then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi involved India in the conflict, partly due to New Delhi's concerns about Sri Lanka's growing closeness to external powers and apprehensions that other players could have intervened in the region (78). The Indian government hoped that sending a peacekeeping force aimed at disarming the LTTE would also expand the country's regional influence. The LTTE later rearmed, however, and inflicted heavy casualties on India's peacekeeping forces. India's policy drift in Sri Lanka was also dictated by the country's domestic politics—the provincial government of Tamil Nadu, an Indian state home to a substantial number of Tamil people, harbored reservations about India's attitude toward Tamils living in Sri Lanka. This situation led to failure of military intervention and created animosity between India and Sri Lanka, paving the way for China to expand its foothold there. Basrur highlights three incidents in which India's domestic politics forced the government to refrain from assisting Sri Lanka—declining assistance to Sri Lankan troops in 2000, the inordinate caution about signing the Defense Cooperation Agreement with Sri Lanka, and New Delhi's reluctance to assist Colombo in its final phase of the civil war against the LTTE (90). He showcases "how the system driven policy preference has been faced with serious obstacles by the distribution of domestic political power in India" (106).

The third case study deals with India's nuclear strategy, as Indian policymakers were calling for minimalistic nuclear deterrence without answering the question of what exactly minimal deterrence is (116). To explain this idea, Basrur includes the views of prominent Indian strategic thinkers and defense luminaries such as Shivshankar Menon, Shyam Saran, B. S. Nagal,

Arun Prakash, and Prakash Menon. The analysis of their views demands a maximalist rather than minimalist approach (139–41). In India's case, its nuclear policy drift has sustained the cost calculus. It is yet to be seen whether it will reach a tipping point (147).

Basrur's excellent analysis demonstrates that multiple institutional problems, including the contested nature of Indian federalism and bureaucratic lethargy, affect the quality of Indian policy making. According to Basrur, it is a case of policy drift that may be responsible for India's persistent inability to frame a coherent policy to counter Pakistan's decades-long sponsorship of terrorist groups against Indian interests. India has failed to inflict sufficient harm on Pakistan, as illustrated by Basrur's discussion on the 2008 terrorist attack in Mumbai. In light of the multiple terrorist attacks emanating from various Pakistan-based terror groups, India long refrained from taking hard measures against Pakistan, given the fear of a catastrophic nuclear conflict in the region (153). The most odious terror attack in the last two decades occurred in 2008 in Mumbai and caused two problems—how to respond to the external and internal challenge mounted by Pakistan-sponsored terrorism. Various governments at the center have attempted to look toward the external threats of cross-border terrorism and have neglected the internal factors (179). Besides other factors, a lack of coordination between different agencies was responsible for India's failure to ward off the attack.

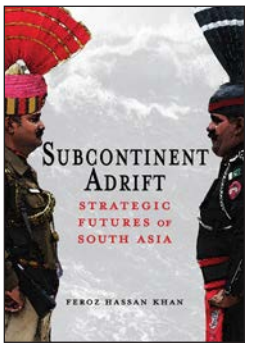
Basrur's book highlights institutional infirmities that have hindered India's foreign and security policies as organizational decision making remains ad hoc and idiosyncratic. Many examples of policy drift mentioned in the book emanate from the dynamics of coalition governments dealing with allies' short-sighted demands. Through these cases, Basrur explains why India's foreign policy has been characterized by multiple hesitations, delays, and diversions (181). India's desire to secure major-power status therefore currently stands on a shaky foundation, partly because of its inability to implement crucial security policies (193).

Subcontinent Adrift: Strategic Futures of South Asia

The book *Subcontinent Adrift: Strategic Futures of South Asia* by Feroz Hassan Khan explores the dynamics of Indian-Pakistani relations and the way the two nuclear-powered neighbors are shaping the political order in South Asia—an important geographic region of three nuclear-armed countries (China, India, and Pakistan) that share a history of geopolitical and ideological rivalry.

Khan had a long career in the Pakistan Army, where he served in the strategic planning division. He now teaches at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey,

California, and authored *Eating Grass: The Making of the Pakistani Bomb* (Stanford University Press, 2012). With remarkable objectivity, Khan clarifies the internal variables that have thwarted the neighbors from resolving their dispute and normalizing their bilateral relationship. Khan identifies cognitive bias, strategic enclaves, and right-wing religious nationalism as key variables.



Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2022
280 pages
$44.99

Unearthing the unfathomable layers of Pakistan's strategic culture, Khan argues that Pakistan views everything through its deeply embedded India-centric lens; it views itself as the underdog and India as the regional hegemon set to inflict a fatal blow to Pakistan's survival. He writes that both countries are hostages to a stubborn fixation on competition; even after developing nuclear capabilities, these fixations continue to aggravate at a time when the rest of the world is moving toward economic interdependence, connectivity, and regional integration (xi). Two phenomena fuel the Indian-Pakistani relationship—cognitive bias and unresolved issues—and without a structural framework for peace and security, distrust continues (1).

To Khan, cognitive bias results from continuous tensions and frequent military conflicts. While both Indians and Pakistanis at the most common level are affected by it, the military personnel of the two countries are particularly in its grip. This cognitive bias has also been passed to generations of Indians and Pakistanis who have had no contact with each other. Pakistan's obsession with seeking parity with India has exhausted the state economically and strategically. Khan justifies Pakistan's nuclear development on the pretext that, with India's growing global stature, Pakistan perceived the West-dominated international system as tilting toward a stronger India, rather than toward a weaker Pakistan (26).

To understand the irritants in the bilateral ties further, Khan brings in a "levels of analysis" approach to identify systemic, bilateral, and domestic irritants (36). An interesting variable leading to the subcontinent's drift is the existence of "strategic enclaves" in India and Pakistan. According to Khan, these enclaves have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo, sabotaging the normalization efforts between the two estranged neighbors and enhancing nationalist sentiments (36). Regarding country-specific domestic factors contributing to subcontinental drift, India's dominating strategic enclave, its rigid bureaucratic structures, politics of regional parties, and competing visions of realism and idealism have caused India "to suffer from incoherent grand strategy" (42),

which may approximate to what Basrur calls "the lack of incisive policy making and the tendency of important policies to drift uncertainly."

Mohammad Zia-ul-Haq, Pakistan's military dictator in the late 1970s and 1980s, abandoned the secular ideals of Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the country's founder, and transformed Pakistan into a narrow-minded state where religious fanaticism was sanctioned by myopic policies. Pakistan's overt and covert support to Islamist extremism led to terrorist attacks in the Kashmir valley and, later, in many parts of India. Pakistan also long used the Afghan crisis to finance and train anti-India terrorists. This risky strategy backfired when these jihadist terror outfits once trained for sub-conventional wars turned their guns on their erstwhile benefactors (47). Thus, modern-day Pakistan is a state where religious extremism continues apace, and the economy depends on external aid (50). It is debatable, however, whether Pakistan has learned its lesson and is trying to roll back its support for terror groups, as Khan claims.

While discussing India's search for a grand strategy from Indira Gandhi to Manmohan Singh, the book briefly highlights various policy approaches undertaken by India's political leadership until 2014. All these efforts failed when Pakistan undertook the Kargil misadventure in 1999 and when the 2008 Mumbai attack was traced to Pakistani soil.

On the other hand, Pakistan's grand strategy is centered on ensuring its viability against numerous threats emanating from internal and external factors and creating alliances to counter India's attempts to isolate Pakistan globally (118). The key dilemma before Pakistan is whether to resist India's hegemonic pressure or give up the fight and become a vassal state of India (103). For Pakistan, the India-Afghanistan ties have been of serious concern as those ties could create a two-front situation in the future (114). While Khan rightly expresses Pakistani frustrations over the United States condemning it for its covert support of Islamist extremism and terrorism, he seems to duplicate Pakistan's unsubstantiated allegations of Indian intelligence's covert support to the independence movement in Balochistan.

The 1986–87 Brasstacks Crisis was the outcome of India's biggest military exercise as a message to Pakistan's growing interference in India's internal matters, such as the Khalistan movement led by radical Sikh elements. The doctrine of India's then Chief of the Army Staff Krishnaswamy Sunderji delivered the message that India had the military muscle to secure its national interests (127). Equating General Sunderji with Pakistani General Mirza Aslam Beg, Khan regards both as thinking generals for conceiving "military modernization plans" and for showing "non conformist tendencies" (133). The new Indian Cold Start doctrine, which became public in 2004, aimed at swift military action

by a combined strategy of the Indian armed forces following any provocative incident at a time when political and domestic anger is high and when no international intervention has taken place (131). Pakistan became concerned about the implications of the Cold Start doctrine only after the 2008 Indo-US nuclear deal. In response, Pakistan reshaped its army doctrine in 2011. Thus, India's conventional advancement pressured Pakistan to restructure and reposition its conventional forces (146).

Following India's nuclear test in May 1998, Pakistan declared its nuclear weapons potential. Nuclear weapons have also led to an arms race, which has seriously impacted Pakistan's economic development. The current scenario seems outdated for India's Cold Start doctrine and Pakistan's tactical nuclear weapons. Khan mentions that India's fifth-generation doctrine, as the defensive-offense doctrine of National Security Advisor Ajit Doval calls for the use of gray-zone warfare against terror outfits in Pakistan, offers an example—the 2019 Balakot surgical strikes against Pakistan-based terrorist hideouts (159). In the era of modern-day hybrid warfare and gray-zone warfare, India and Pakistan are modernizing their conventional forces (182). Since American forces have left Afghanistan, Washington's dependence on Pakistani support has declined substantially, Indo-US ties have strengthened, and Pakistan is deepening its ties with China.

Talking about the future, Khan describes three options—"the Good, the Bad and the Ugly" (198). The "Good" future requires enlightened leadership in both countries that can perceive the dangers of continued conflict. Due to the Indian military's acquisition of sophisticated technologies, the imbalance between India and Pakistan will increase, to Pakistan's disadvantage. In the "Bad" future, both states embrace a mini–Cold War, with their international borders resembling a new iron curtain, and the prospects of rapid escalation will rise. Under the "Ugly" option, India waits for Pakistan's collapse, forcing Pakistan to acquiesce to India's terms for peace on the subcontinent. Khan concludes by arguing that the prospects for peace, détente, and stability in the near future seem out of reach. The India-Pakistan rivalry will likely grow, and the advancement of disruptive technologies such as the autonomous weapons system will exacerbate the instability in South Asia, whose future is inevitably linked to what happens between India and Pakistan. While external events may not interfere with India's internal politics, the Indian government would do well to address the criticism of its policies toward minorities as it could affect India's image in neighboring countries. If India's ruling politicians fail to connect domestic elements with their long-held ambition to play an important global role, they will remain largely unfulfilled. Khan argues forthrightly that both countries

cannot do anything about each other's domestic political phenomena, and the only way to overcome the impasse is the 1999 Lahore Declaration.

In conclusion, Basrur and Khan have authored vivid accounts of the Indian subcontinent's drift. They agree on the oversized role of the Pakistani military in India's national politics, where most security and foreign policy decisions are directed toward Pakistan. Both books significantly outrank others that often deal with great-power South Asian policies rather than with the two nuclear-armed neighbors locked in a hostile relationship and constantly drifting from crisis to crisis. These books are relevant for senior members of the defense community and will remain an indispensable reference for South Asian security for years to come.

Vinay Kaura

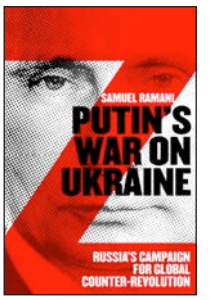
Dr. Vinay Kaura is an assistant professor in the Department of International Affairs and Security Studies and the deputy director for the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies at Sardar Patel University of Police, Security and Criminal Justice, Rajasthan, India.

Russia-Ukraine War

Putin's War on Ukraine: Russia's Campaign for Global Counter-Revolution

by Samuel Ramani

Reviewed by Dr. Lionel M. Beehner, senior Russia analyst, Foreign Military Studies Office, and senior editorial director, Columbia University School of International and Public Affairs



Samuel Ramani deserves praise for tackling the complex and fast-moving target of the ongoing Russia-Ukraine War in his well-researched tour de force, *Putin's War on Ukraine*. His book details tactical and operational military decisions, even though Ramani is a professor of politics and international relations, not a military historian. He relies heavily on primary and secondary sources from local press, social media apps like Telegram, Russia's pro-Kremlin punditry, and his extensive interviews with experts. I appreciated his attempt to capture the confusion in Moscow ahead of the February 2022 Ukraine invasion and his blow-by-blow account of the war's opening phase, revealing the ugliness of the war effort and why it faltered. For wonks who follow the war closely, the book might feel like familiar terrain, but its insightful analysis and colorful quotes make it a must-read for diplomats and defense experts.

The book's central argument describes why Russia invaded Ukraine in 2014 and 2022. Spoiler alert: it was not fear of NATO encirclement but of regime change and popular revolution from within. What motivated the Kremlin is what Ramani calls "counter-revolution." Anything with a whiff of revolutionary fervor is anathema to Vladimir Putin's brand of authoritarianism.

Ramani then gives readers a front-row seat to the war. Military historians should skip to chapter 4, which provides an intriguing overview of the botched battle of Kyiv and should be required reading at war colleges. The book decently details the Russian military's operational blunders and strategic setbacks throughout 2022. Ramani points to the Russian armed forces' "hierarchical rigidity," a legacy of its Soviet predecessor (129). Followers of Ukraine will appreciate how the author recalls incidents that may be buried in readers' memories. For example, I had largely forgotten about the fusillade of cyberattacks Russia carried out against Ukraine in the years before 2022.

Ramani also reminds readers how Europe nearly escalated the war beyond Ukraine. On February 27, 2022, Putin ordered his military to place its strategic nuclear forces on a "special mode of combat duty" (117). Calling the move an "unacceptable escalation," the United States and its NATO Allies ramped up arms shipments to Ukraine (117). Early on, the United States and NATO feared Russia would target supply nodes in Poland and Romania, and Russia's deputy foreign minister called such depots "legitimate targets," raising the real risk of a direct confrontation between NATO and Russia (117). Another Russian defense analyst called the NATO-supplied weapons "additional trophies that will fall into our hands and will be used against their former owners" (117).

Remarkably, NATO called Russia's bluff. No shipments were targeted on NATO soil. No advanced weapons ended up as "trophies" in Russia's hands. The war was a romp in the beginning, but in ways Western analysts failed to predict. Too bad Ramani did not take to task those experts who overhyped Russia's military prowess and modernization efforts.

Still, I got misty-eyed rereading about those halcyon early days of the war when all the breaks were going Ukraine's way. Ukrainian intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance allowed snipers to pick off senior Russian commanders one by one. Ditto reading again about the sinking of the *Moskva*—the first time a Russian flagship had been sunk since the 1905 Russo-Japanese War—which dealt a symbolic blow to Russia's naval capabilities. Ukraine's anti-ship weapons, with help from radar targeting supplied by its Bayraktar TB2 drones, pushed Russia's famed Black Sea fleet further offshore, reducing its antiaircraft cover. Even the Russian saboteurs sent to assassinate Volodymyr Zelensky and "create 'maximum panic'" in the capital could pull off neither (135).

I had to chuckle at the Chechen paramilitaries, known as Kadyrovtsy, sent to conquer Kyiv, whose poor military discipline earned them a bruising moniker, the "Tiktok [sic] Army" (132). Ramani reaffirms the importance of the Black Sea fleet to Russia's planned conquest of Ukraine and the seizing of Mariupol to create Russia's land bridge to Crimea. He reminds readers of the iconic images of the Russian convoy beset by fuel and food shortages, which became a sitting duck for Ukraine's Bayraktar drones and Javelin missiles. The war's initial phase, to paraphrase the title of Gordon M. Goldstein's popular 2008 book about another botched war, was a "lesson in disaster."

Russia soon rebounded. The Kremlin appeared to downsize its military objective, moving from demilitarizing (and "denazify[ing]") Ukraine to a Donbas-centric campaign confined mostly to the east (121ff). The war's next phase saw the usual nuclear saber-rattling, a ramping up of what Russians refer to as NATO's "total hybrid war," and a repression of so-called "fifth columns" within Russia

as dissent was put down internally (152). The country was no longer mobilized for a "special military operation" but for war (178). More than 300,000 Russians—mostly poor young men from the provinces—were hurriedly rounded up, trained, and sent to the front line. Many never returned home.

The book masterfully shows the chaos within Russian leadership circles near the invasion. Only a handful of Russian leaders were privy to these plans, which led to logistical failures (for example, not taking any cold-weather gear into battle). The "military's bureaucratic nature and culture of risk aversion" reflected Russia's struggles with a multidimensional war (129). I only wish the book delved more into the Ukrainian armed forces' culture, doctrine, and civil-military frictions.

The Kremlin's information operations were ham-fisted (though strangely more effective in the Global South). For example, after the Bucha massacre, Russian propagandists accused the United Kingdom of staging the killings because "Bucha" sounds like "butcher" in British English (167). After Russia's April 2022 bombing of the Kramatorsk railway station, media surrogates in Moscow alleged the Tochka-U missiles that destroyed the terminal were obsolete—but months earlier, Channel One Russia had praised local pro-Russia militias for having Tochka-U missiles (and noted Russia's 8th Combined Arms Army possessed them, too). Its information operations were always clumsy, half-empty gestures teeming with contradictions.

The main value of Ramani's book is the contextualization of Russia's foggy rationale for the war. The Kremlin claimed it invaded to "denazify" Ukraine (121). Never mind that the *Z* symbol of pro-war Russians bore an uncanny resemblance to the Station *Z* gas chamber at Nazi Germany's Sachsenhausen concentration camp (144). Without justifying the claim, Ramani likens it to "Ukrainian Russophobia," "denigration of the legacy of the Soviet Union's triumph in the Second World War," or "pro-Europeanism"—though newscasters in Russia frequently point out all the supposed Nazis within Ukraine's rank and file (125, 172). The "special military operation" was popular among everyday Russians, perhaps partly driven by the latent ethnic nationalism pervading their society. Putin is probably a centrist in this regard, if one compares his statements to Vladimir Zhirinovsky's. Even Aleksey Navalny, Putin's opposition candidate who died in prison, once said, "I don't see any difference at all between Russians and Ukrainians" (21).

One quibble with the book is the semantic confusion around its subtitle and central thesis that Russia is on a quest for "global counter-revolution" (12). In international relations, we equate revolutionary regimes like those in China, Iran, and North Korea with revisionist powers. Applying this rigid definition to Russia, however, would misidentify it as a status quo power (and the abovementioned revolutionary

regimes are its allies in upending the current global order). Ramani's use of "counter-revolution" presumably refers to the Kremlin's suspicion of foreign-backed regime changes from below or Western-led hybrid war tactics, which can be lumped together as "color revolutions" (305n1). The war in Ukraine is thus a manifestation of Russian support for counterrevolution there.

Ramani further acknowledges that "Putin's counter-revolutionary agenda stemmed from his desire to reassert Russia's hegemony over Ukraine and promote his brand of illiberalism within the post-Soviet space" (8). This illiberalism is a means to maintaining Russia's great-power status and challenging the US-led rules-based liberal order. Moreover, Ramani's argument implies the *casus belli* the Russian elite and American scholars like John J. Mearsheimer mentioned are demonstrably false. Domestic factors motivate Putin—specifically, he wants to unite Russians around a set of common values to secure his power. In this regard, "counter-revolution" can become a catchall term for anything anti-Russia. In this interpretation, even Imre Nagy would be considered a "fascist" and "Hitlerite" (11). Ramani labels most Russian interventionism abroad "counter-revolutionary"—whether discussing Wagner mercenaries sent to Sudan in 2018 or air support to Syria in 2015. This categorization ignores many other dynamics at play. Many of the places where Russia intervenes are security vacuums, meaning what might be interpreted as counterrevolutionary behavior is just naked opportunism. It is unclear whether Russia had its eyes on Crimea before the opportunity to take it back presented itself in 2014.

My only other gripe is Ramani should have synthesized his main evidence and arguments in his final chapter instead of providing a detailed rundown of the war's second year. His second-to-last page details the minutia of prisoner exchanges rather than identifying wider gaps in our knowledge of war onsets or termination to suggest future avenues of scholarship. The final chapter ("Conclusion") has the unfortunate subtitle "Russia in 2023: A Year of Implosion?" Yevgeny Prigozhin (who died in August 2023) features prominently in the book's final pages. Ramani prophesizes too much about Russia's imminent collapse with statements like "[Russia] is veering on the precipice of an economic and political crisis heading into 2023" (400). He simply runs out of runway.

More comprehensive books about the Russia-Ukraine War will come once government documents are declassified and defectors write memoirs. Based on the limited open sources we have, books like this one are invaluable for interpreting Putin's thinking beyond his rambling statements, opinion essays, or interviews with Tucker Carlson.

It is Kremlinology 2.0. We need more books like this one to make sense of this senseless war.

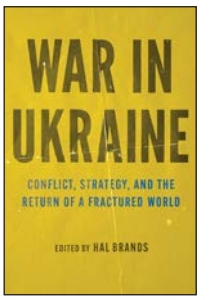
London: Hurst, 2023 • 584 pages • $29.95

Keywords: Vladimir Putin, Russia-Ukraine War, counterrevolution, information operations, NATO

War in Ukraine: Conflict, Strategy, and the Return of a Fractured World

edited by Hal Brands

Reviewed by John C. Erickson, senior engineer, Axiom Technologies, and Dr. John A. Nagl, professor of war-fighting studies, US Army War College



The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 initiated the biggest war in Europe since World War II. Increasingly, scholars of conflict are comparing Russia's unjust and unprovoked invasion of its neighbor to the joint Russian and German invasions of Poland in September 1939 that, in most historians' eyes, marked the beginning of World War II. In April 2024, George F. Will wrote in the *Washington Post*, "We can see now that the great unraveling that was World War II perhaps began with Japan's 1931 invasion of Manchuria. Without the benefit of retrospection, we cannot be certain that World War III has not begun" (George F. Will, "So, 112 Ignoble, Infantile Republicans Voted to Endanger Civilization," *Washington Post*, April 24, 2024, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2024/04/24/ignoble-house-republicans-against-ukraine-aid/). The next month, House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Michael McCaul (R) of Texas stated what keeps him up at night is "World War Three. It would be an unholy alliance between Russia, China, Iran, [and] North Korea, threatening both Europe and the Pacific" (Rhonda Colvin, "What's Next for Congress on the World Front," *Washington Post* (online), May 3, 2024, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2024/05/03/michael-mccaul-ukraine-israel-congress-republicans/). McCaul does not think there has been an environment this ready to combust since World War II.

In this time of global crisis, Johns Hopkins scholar Hal Brands's *War in Ukraine* provides a scholarly appraisal of the Russian invasion of Ukraine that may mark the first blows of World War III. Unusually, the book is available as a free download from Project MUSE; readers should take the time to download and review it. Brands emphasizes the importance of this conflict, arguing that "[i]ts outcome—whatever that outcome is—will profoundly influence the international balance of power, the struggles between democracies and autocracies, the alignment of countries on multiple continents, and the rules that govern global affairs" (1). The book's purpose is to help "policymakers and analysts make sense of—and react intelligently to—world-shifting events as they occur" (2).

Part 1, "Origins and Overviews," tackles causal factors for the war by interacting with neorealist interpretations, specifically those put forth by University of Chicago Professor John J. Mearsheimer, an apologist for Russia. Contributors Michael McFaul and Robert Person critique Mearsheimer's analysis that NATO expansion was the principal cause of the war, arguing instead that "antagonism between Russia and the West—including over NATO—was a *variable*, not a growing constant, one whose variation bears little temporal relation to Russia's hostile actions toward Ukraine" (48). Anne Applebaum's chapter, "How the War Will End," similarly critiques Mearsheimer by grouping him with MIT Professor Emeritus Noam Chomsky in the "'America is at fault' clique" (88). In contrast, Applebaum finds that Russia has wanted to incorporate Ukraine into its orbit through any means necessary: "The Russians want to show they can bring back, with impunity, cruel forms of repression and occupation familiar to historians of the 20th century" (89).

Part 2: "The Conflict," emphasizes aspects of America's strategy in Ukraine and the ongoing battlefield dynamics. Michael Kofman's chapter discusses pertinent battlefield dynamics; he analyzes the war by phase, geographical considerations, Russian strengths and weaknesses, and technological factors. Thomas Mahnken and Joshua Baker highlight prewar fallacies in strategic thought:

> In the months leading up to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, there was plenty of wishful thinking that such a war would be irrational. . . . Contrary to such wishful thinking, Putin saw the use of force against Ukraine as a rational option. He made it clear in public statements long before launching the war that he saw Ukraine's statehood as illegitimate and claimed that Ukraine was an integral part of Russia (188).

Part 3: "Global Dimensions and Implications," analyzes the post–Cold War international order, Russia's future, Chinese assessments of the war, and America's global role. Ashley Tellis states:

> The ideational gulf between Russian realpolitik and Western liberalism regarding international order is thus quite stark. . . . This view is not Putin's alone. Many countries outside of the liberal West believe that the Ukraine crisis cannot be properly judged, politically and morally, without admitting to the inadvertent consequences of the West's desire to expand the pacific federation in Europe (210).

Chapter 14 may be of utmost importance to the Intelligence Community and senior defense officials. Bonny Lin and Brian Hart deep dive into Beijing's assessment of the Russian invasion and Western response: "There is now consensus among Chinese scholars that the Ukraine conflict has uprooted the global order, resulting in uncertainty and a new contest for power that is reshaping the international landscape" (240).

The last chapter concludes with Peter Feaver and William Inboden's assessment of America's role in the world after the Russian invasion. They conclude that an "emerging coalition of tyrannies" forces America to realize that, "[a]s costly and challenging as internationalism can be, it also remains the least-bad option, grounded in the lessons of history. If the defenders of the rules-based global system prevail in Ukraine, the prospects for the American-led internationalism will improve—and that is far better for US interests and security than the alternative" (301).

War in Ukraine asks big questions about the emerging world order that has surfaced since Vladimir Putin's war in Ukraine. It is a penetrating analysis of what changed in world leaders' minds to enable the possibility of war and what the future of the international order might be and ought to be. War college students, policymakers, and national defense leaders should conduct a deliberate read of this indispensable resource for navigating the complexities of a turning point in the post–Cold War order—and perhaps of the opening days of World War III.

Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2024 • 328 pages • Free download available from Project MUSE at https://muse.jhu.edu/book/122782

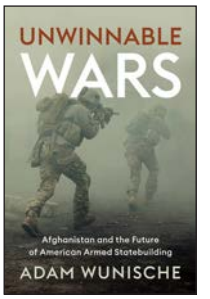
Keywords: Russia-Ukraine War, international relations, political theory, post–Cold War, NATO

Strategy

Unwinnable Wars: Afghanistan and the Future of American Armed Statebuilding

by Adam Wunische

Reviewed by Dr. Erik Goepner, US government analyst, colonel (US Air Force, retired)



Adam Wunische's new monograph, *Unwinnable Wars: Afghanistan and the Future of American Armed Statebuilding* provides military leaders and the elected officials to whom they report a timeless reminder—American power has limits. Wunische offers a critical analysis of the challenges and limitations the United States faced in armed state-building efforts, using the case of Afghanistan as a focal point. The book argues that preexisting conditions beyond the control of the intervening power often foreordain the failure of such missions.

Wunische identifies four major preexisting conditions that severely limit the success of armed state-building efforts:

- Rough terrain, like mountain ranges, provides safe places for insurgents.
- Ethnic divisions inhibit democracy building and increase the likelihood of conflict.
- Resentment from the local population erodes legitimacy
- Economic deprivation makes the building of critical social and industrial conditions much harder.

Beyond these preexisting conditions, Wunische highlights several other factors that further constrain positive outcomes. First, temporal incentives that pressure the intervening state to leave quickly can encourage local leaders to prolong the intervention. Next, an intervening military faces the dilemma of taking on an atypical mission for which it does not normally train while maintaining readiness for near-peer conflicts. Finally, the armed forces must consider the unintended consequences of aid and development programs, which include creating dependencies that undermine the goal of creating sustainable governance.

TOC

Readers will find themselves nodding in agreement as they survey Wunische's arguments, particularly when examining recent American efforts in Afghanistan. He admirably explores the policy implications of his arguments by developing a framework that policymakers can use to evaluate potential intervention strategies and probabilities of success and then applies that framework to potential interventions involving America's near-peer competitors, such as China-Taiwan and Russia-Ukraine scenarios.

Unwinnable Wars could have benefited from a more nuanced treatment of the preexisting conditions foundational to Wunische's thesis. Much of the evidence for the preexisting conditions comes from the civil war and insurgency literature, despite the definition of armed state building referring more broadly to war and hostilities. For example, though the book identifies ethnic fragmentation as one of the most consequential preexisting conditions affecting armed state building, as Nicholas Sambanis found in his review of quantitative studies on civil war, "ethnic diversity is not linked to a higher risk of civil violence, but may in fact reduce that risk" ("A Review of Recent Advances and Future Directions in the Quantitative Literature on Civil War," *Defence and Peace Economics* 13, no. 3 [2002]: 230).

Additionally, *Unwinnable Wars* largely ignores the role of weak democracies in state failure, as compared to the dramatically reduced risk of state failure found in closed autocracies and strong democracies. Considering the impact of government type could be particularly important, as American armed state-building efforts often introduce democratic forms of government in nations that have little familiarity with such systems. *Unwinnable Wars* offers a persuasive argument about the perils of armed state building. It provides a solid foundation for future research on the topic and raises important points about the limits of American power and the challenges to successful armed state building.

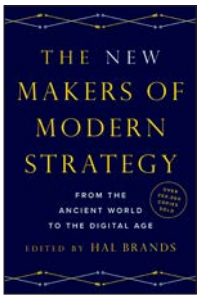
Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2024 • 224 pages • $69.95

Keywords: military intervention, armed state building, policy making, international relations, Afghanistan

The New Makers of Modern Strategy: From the Ancient World to the Digital Age

edited by Hal Brands

Reviewed by John C. Erickson, senior engineer, Axiom Technologies, and John A. Nagl, professor of war-fighting studies, US Army War College



When the first edition of *Makers of Modern Strategy* was published in 1943, an America just finding its footing as the world's most powerful nation faced the twin threats of Nazi Germany and the Empire of Japan. The authors of that notable collection of essays, whom the estimable Edward Mead Earle gathered together, drew upon the long history of strategic thought to find a path to victory in the global struggle in which the United States was engaged.

The second edition was published in 1986, near the height of the Cold War with the Soviet Union. This time, under its editor, Peter Paret, the book explicitly described its goal in its subtitle: examining strategy From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age (the latter of which the first edition clearly could not have covered).

Keeping with the tradition of publishing a new volume about every four decades, Hal Brands has brought forth a third edition that goes back further and reaches forward to a present in which the United States does not have a clearly defined enemy as it did during earlier iterations.

This is only one factor making this third edition the most interesting yet. While the authors in the first two volumes were overwhelmingly British and American males, the third volume reaches far more widely in the topics it covers and in the authors' lived experiences. The combination of academic rigor, historical analysis, and concluding questions each essay poses makes this edition especially valuable.

These exceptional essays touch upon different time periods and aspects of military and national or grand strategy. Particularly good essays include US Army War College Professor Emerita Tami Biddle's on Allied grand strategy in World War II and the Editor in Chief of *Parameters* Antulio J. Echevarria II's on Henri Jomini. Seth Jones's fascinating analysis of irregular warfare as practiced by state actors focuses on what may be the most likely challenge for America and her allies. Jones notes, "For Russia, Iran, and even China, choosing to fight a conventional or nuclear war with the United Sates would be a risky and

dangerous proposition indeed," and that "the United States and other Western countries are vulnerable to irregular methods" (1,021).

In another important essay, Joshua Rovner describes how new war-fighting domains bring about new strategies and outlines the three-fold historical pattern that invariably follows. Initially, hopes are high as new war-fighting domains emerge. Then comes fear as questions are raised about what adversaries can do in those new domains and as they adapt their strategies to counter ours. Last is the acceptance of limitations as technological and adversarial setbacks occur during conflict. Rovner raises questions about the emergence of potential manmade domains beyond cyber, space, and artificial intelligence. He notes: "Forty years ago few predicted the growth of the internet. Twenty years ago, few could have predicted the nature of social media today. A similarly unexpected change will force observers to reconsider their understanding of cyberspace, and the strategic implications that follow" (1,091).

John Lewis Gaddis's fitting and comprehensive capstone essay to this volume discusses national and grand strategy. Gaddis blends insights into Clausewitzian ideas with domestic and ecological factors to assess what makes grand strategy succeed or fail. A successful grand strategy, he argues, must balance the theory of strategy ("Grammar") and its application in real time to uncertainty ("Logic").

If strategy, as Brands argues in his introductory essay, is "the indispensable art of getting what we want, with what we have, in a world that seems set on denying us," then the essays continued in this new edition are of immeasurable importance for students, practitioners, and scholars alike (1). This new volume calls for a comprehensive renewal of our understanding of strategy because "[s]trategy is most valuable when the stakes are high and the consequences of failure are severe," as they so clearly are today (2).

It is hard to overstate the importance of this book. The essays provide excellent starting points for research on almost any topic relevant to practitioners, and many of them will endure as the best summaries of thinking on their respective subjects until the next edition is published around 2065 or so. Until then, war college students would be well served to pick up this hefty tome for a mental workout. Reading the book cover to cover would be terrific preparation for a year at any American professional military education institution—or for service in Congress or the executive branch at a time when American strategy appears to be faltering.

Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2023 • 1,200 pages • $45.00

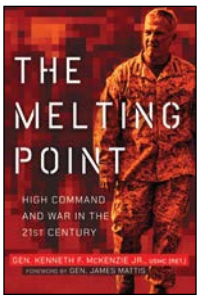
Keywords: World War II, Henri Jomini, irregular warfare, cyberspace, Carl von Clausewitz

Strategic Leadership

The Melting Point: High Command and War in the 21st Century

by Kenneth F. McKenzie Jr.

Reviewed by Dr. Thomas W. Spahr, De Serio Chair of Strategic Intelligence and associate professor, US Army War College



After three grueling years as the commander of United States Central Command (CENTCOM) and 42 years of service, General Kenneth F. McKenzie Jr. refused to rest in his retirement. Instead, he wrote a valuable book for military professionals, Middle East scholars, and civil-military relations experts. McKenzie presents an honest, often critical, assessment of military and policy leaders, including himself. Unlike many post-career biographies that span entire careers—such as Stanley A. McChrystal's *My Share of the Task: A Memoir* (Portfolio, 2013) or James Mattis and Bing West's *Call Sign Chaos: Learning to Lead* (Penguin Random House, 2019)—or offer broad analysis on warfare—such as David Petraeus and Andrew Robert's *Conflict: The Evolution of Warfare from 1945 to Ukraine* (Harper, 2023)—McKenzie focuses on his three years as CENTCOM commander. This tight focus creates space for details rarely available so close in time to the events he describes.

McKenzie makes three central arguments:

1. Recent accusations of a civil-military relations "crisis"—specifically, an overpowered military dictating to civilian authorities—are overblown, a point he supports with ample evidence.

2. Combatant commanders executing policy and directing military forces in conflict have a unique role. McKenzie compares the combatant commander to other four-star generals, including the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the service Chiefs of Staff, who are not in the operational chain of command and do not bear moral responsibility for US servicemembers in combat.

3. Leadership matters, and combatant commanders' decisions have profound effects on battlefields.

McKenzie describes in detail his interface with the chairman, the secretary of defense, and the president as he presented military options, orchestrated operations, and balanced risk surrounding events, including the raid that killed ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and the strike that killed Iranian Quds Force leader Qassem Soleimani. He argues that Iran is the most important threat in the Middle East and defends the much-criticized Soleimani strike as justified and impactful on Iran's ability to orchestrate military operations. McKenzie highlights moments of civil-military disagreement and the frustrations of managing CENTCOM as successive presidential administrations shifted focus to the Indo-Pacific. He criticizes what he calls a strategic "system of expedients" versus "a cohesive, coherent whole, applied within an overarching concept" when allocating forces to the Middle East (102).

While McKenzie argues that Iran is the central problem in the Middle East, he dedicates nearly half the book (151 of 306 pages) to Afghanistan. I am glad he did, as his description is the best I have read of the strategic events that led to that dramatic end. McKenzie casts blame all around for the ultimate failure in Afghanistan: on the military, Department of State, and the executive branch. For the dramatic collapse, he blames the most recent and current presidential administrations for failing to enforce the terms of the Doha Agreement and places blame squarely on President Joe Biden's administration for the chaotic exit in August 2021. Specifically, the administration decided to reduce the military below his recommended cap of 2,500, permitting no more than 650 American troops, while maintaining an embassy with a significant presence of Americans and Afghan allies. This decision was naive to the type of enemy facing the United States—one determined to win a military victory, replace the government, and remove all Western influence. His convincing argument demonstrates military responsiveness to civilian orders, but it left me questioning if the military could have better prepared for the worst-case scenario that became a reality.

In his nuanced conclusion, McKenzie defends his central argument against what many academics have called "an ascendent Joint Staff that has tended . . . to mute or quiet civilian voices" (290). Each side has its place, and he is critical of officers who fail to understand that the military must ultimately yield to the political and the civilian. He is equally critical of politicians who, instead of executing their responsibility to manage the more difficult task of making policy, tend to "substitute tactical micromanagement for policy creation" (291). He claims that if the military seems overpowering, it is likely attributable to the experienced military planners building courses of action, versus often-inexperienced civilian politicians. This scenario was especially true at the end of the Trump administration, after Secretary of Defense Mark T. Esper's firing, a period McKenzie refers to as "amateur hour" on the civilian side of the relationship (166).

McKenzie's valuable advice to future strategic military leaders should be required reading at senior levels of professional military education. Military advice matters because it is rooted in experience, judgment, and the practice of war. Politicians should not elevate it above other advice but should always listen and insist that military advice be unfiltered. Few would argue this point, yet trust has eroded between senior politicians and their military leaders. One hopes that books like McKenzie's will help future civilian and military leaders understand their role better.

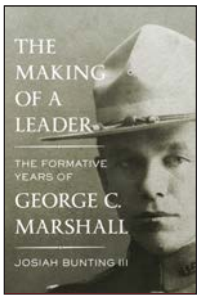
Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press • 327 pages • $34.95

Keywords: Afghanistan withdrawal, civil-military relations, military leadership, combatant commands, Middle East

The Making of a Leader: The Formative Years of George C. Marshall

Josiah Bunting III

Reviewed by Reverend Dr. Wylie W. Johnson, chaplain (US Army, retired), US Army War College class of 2010



General George C. Marshall's amazing military career is perhaps one of the most documented livelihoods ever. Amazon currently lists well over 20 books about it in print. There is hardly a World War II book that does not mention Marshall. Add to this list countless articles about Marshall and the war that have been published over the past 70 years, not to mention those out of print, and the volume of writing on Marshall becomes staggering.

So why another book, especially one that only briefly covers the many assignments, achievements, and accolades of such a well-trodden subject? The obvious answer is to introduce new generations to the remarkable person, work, and leadership of this gifted soldier. The author, Josiah Bunting III—a Rhodes Scholar, a former enlisted marine and later an Army officer, and a graduate and former superintendent of the Virginia Military Institute (VMI)—retells the story of VMI's stellar alumnus.

This short biography describes an exceptional military leader who, despite his recognized ability and many efforts, never led troops in combat but always served as a staff officer. The hard truth is that most military leaders do not get to lead in combat or leave an indelible mark on their respective service. Marshall had a different military career than that which is usually lauded today. He set the example as a gifted planner, strategist, judge of leadership ability, and consummate military politician ultimately able to navigate at the highest levels of government. Remember, even at the very apex of his storied career, he served as President Franklin D. Roosevelt's primary staff officer.

At the turn of the twentieth century, America possessed a minuscule military penuriously funded, chronically short of equipment, suspicious of education, and plagued by a stultifying seniority system. At times, Congress even reduced the pay scale for all serving military personnel while making steep cuts in the overall service budgets. Army assignments often meant remote locations, rude accommodations, and small contingents of soldiers.

Promotions came excruciatingly slowly. Marshall graduated from VMI in 1901 but did not receive one of the few commissions reserved for schools other than the United States Military Academy until the following year. It would be five long years until his promotion to first lieutenant and 10 more before pinning on the captain insignia. During World War I, Marshall quickly rose through breveted ranks to colonel and was recommended for brigadier general. Immediately following the war, he returned to his permanent rank of captain. He would not see promotion to colonel again until 1933.

Marshall served at a time when junior officers found themselves as the senior authorities in remote outposts because ranking officers departed for months at a time. As a newly minted lieutenant in the Philippines, Marshall quickly learned leadership skills from seasoned noncommissioned officers and by necessity. Traveling to his first remote posting, Marshall and another lieutenant had to take command of a coastal ship during a storm when the terrified captain took refuge below decks! Officers dealt with more than discipline and military matters in such places. They confronted epidemics, enforced local laws, oversaw soldiers working as stevedores, led communities, and served as patresfamilias.

Bunting repeatedly observes that officers remained in the Army for recognitions other than promotions or pay. They shared a deep devotion to the military profession and honored each other for their abilities and

competence because rank reflected neither. Opportunities came infrequently, so soldiers had to be prepared. Marshall was ready, always striving to be the best. His ability, effort, and work caught the attention of a series of military mentors and patrons over the years, which resulted in significant assignments in places where he could lead. There are many lessons to be learned from Marshall's example. Today's military requires the same enduring mindset of professionalism and dedication to the calling.

Some benefits of military life for Marshall included ample time for martial arts and personal recreation. In many assignments, his wife could accompany him. Officers had privileges then that allowed extended leaves of absence to travel. When in remote overseas locations, even enlisted servicemembers could afford to hire servants and live well. The military life was not then, and is not now, all service and sacrifice. Today's high-tempo, high-stress Army could relearn some lessons about time for study and recreation.

Bunting's short biography is an easy read divided into 12 concise chapters moving through Marshall's many assignments. The book concludes by describing Marshall's years as the ranking General of the Army and the Chief of Staff of the Army during World War II. Wrapped in the life and times of George C. Marshall, this book is a well-written introduction to the art of leadership that senior leaders can recommend to rising junior officers. It may stimulate further reading and study on the pathfinders of our profession.

New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2024 • 272 pages • $30.00.

Keywords: leadership, military biography, mentor, World War II, recreation

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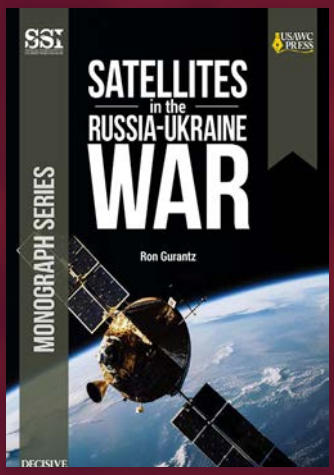

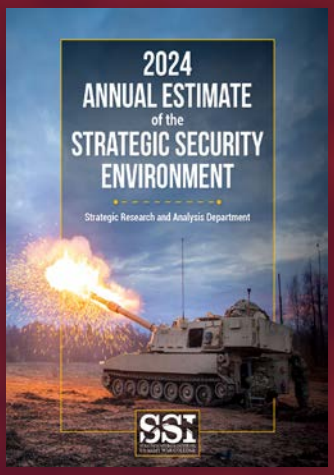

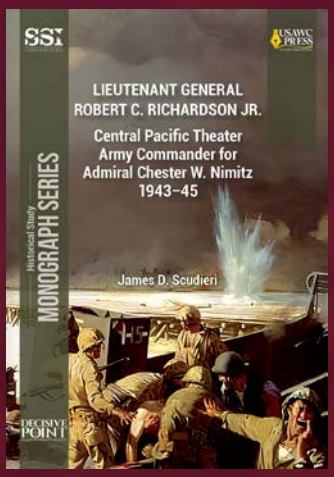

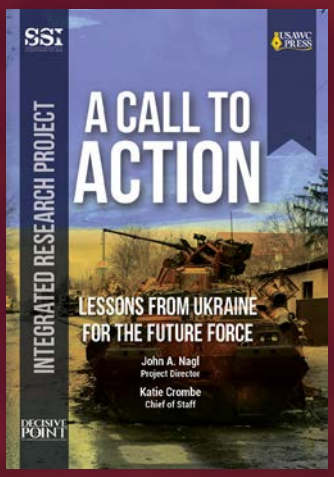

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