

THE  
PENTAGON LABYRINTH:  
10 SHORT ESSAYS TO HELP YOU  
THROUGH IT



FROM 10 PENTAGON INSIDERS,  
RETIRED MILITARY OFFICERS AND SPECIALISTS  
WITH OVER 400 YEARS OF DEFENSE EXPERIENCE

STRAUS MILITARY REFORM PROJECT  
CENTER FOR DEFENSE INFORMATION

# The Pentagon Labyrinth

10 Short Essays to Help You Through It

From 10 Pentagon Insiders, Retired Military Officers and Specialists  
With Over 400 Years of Defense Experience

Edited by Winslow T. Wheeler

Center for Defense Information  
World Security Institute  
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## Essay 6

# **“Confused Alarms of Struggle and Flight: A Primer for Assessing Defense Strategy in the post-Iraq World”**

by Chet Richards

*War no longer exists. Confrontation, conflict, and combat undoubtedly exist all round the world ... and states still have armed forces which they use as a symbol of power. None the less, war as cognitively known to most non-combatants, war as battle in a field between men and machinery, war as a massive deciding event in a dispute in international affairs: such war no longer exists.<sup>1</sup>*

### ***A National Defense Strategy for the United States***

Suppose someone asks you to assess a national defense strategy.<sup>2</sup> It’s an important assignment because over the last two administrations, we have experienced the effects of poorly conceived strategy. The result has been erosion of our strength as a nation, with stagnant incomes, declining health standards, soaring prices for the most basic ingredient of our well-being – energy – and near destruction of our financial system.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Rupert Smith, *The Utility of Force, The Art of War in the Modern World* (London: Penguin, 2005), 1. The title of this chapter is from the penultimate line of Matthew Arnold’s “Dover Beach” (*New Poems*, 1867).

<sup>2</sup> I am using the term “national defense strategy” to mean the military component of a more comprehensive “national security strategy.” The *National Security Strategy of the United States*, issued by the White House in May 2010, makes this point well: Criteria for the use of military force are considered on page 22 as one component of our larger security strategy. Find this document at [http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/rss\\_viewer/national\\_security\\_strategy.pdf](http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/rss_viewer/national_security_strategy.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> For a stimulating presentation, without elaborate explanation, of how to synthesize a strategy and what conceptually must be included, see Col. John Boyd’s slide presentation, “The Strategic Game of ? and ?,” at <http://dnipogo.org/john-r-boyd/>. Find there also, Boyd’s other original materials. For a readable biography of Boyd’s genius,

Within the Department of Defense, our strategy has eviscerated our military, burdened by a worn-out inventory of anachronistic weapons and a cadre of soldiers, sailors, marines and airmen overstressed by repeated deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan. Despite the expenditure of a trillion dollars and counting, we have failed to bring Osama bin Laden to justice or to eliminate his organization. Our efforts to install democracy in Iraq have resulted in a regime aligned with Iran and with Hezbollah in Lebanon, and our occupation of Afghanistan drags on, with no sign that we can eliminate the Taliban or reconcile Afghans to the presence of foreign infidel invaders on their soil.

Let's look at how you might make a judgment about whether the strategy document that has just appeared on your desk could make any positive change in our ability to use military forces to further the country's interests.

### *The World Today*

A national defense strategy opens with an assessment of challenges to the United States. After you sift through the verbiage, you should be able to condense the strategist's view of the world into a few categories. If I were doing a summary of the world situation, for example, it would look something like this:

- The number of countries that possess nuclear weapons – now assumed to be nine<sup>4</sup> – will not decrease and may increase.
- Several states are improving their conventional (non-nuclear) military capabilities, including Russia, China and India, but these pose no threat to the United States, or to any other nuclear power. Their efforts will bolster their capabilities to deal with nearby third-rate powers and also to suppress the significant threats of internal conflict that they all face, a fact we sometimes overlook in the West:

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see Robert Coram, *Boyd: The Fighter Pilot Who Changed the Art of War* (Little, Brown and Company, 2002).

<sup>4</sup> These are the United States, Russia, United Kingdom, France, China, India, Pakistan, Israel and North Korea. (*2007 Military Almanac*, Center for Defense Information, p. 26) Israel, India and Pakistan have not signed the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT), and North Korea has withdrawn from it.

Country	Potential internal conflicts	Miles of border
Russia <sup>5</sup>	Chechnya and other areas in the North Caucasus; Far Eastern border areas	12,487
China	Tibet, Taiwan, Uyghurs (potential Muslim separatists)	13,743
India	Naxalite and other Maoist guerrillas; separatist movements in Assam, Kashmir and Nagaland; sectarian violence	8,763

By comparison, the United States faces no military threat in the foreseeable future from along its 7,478 miles of border with Canada and Mexico and no internal conflict that would justify the use of military force. As you are going through the strategy, and reading the justifications of the proposed programs and their funding levels, keep asking yourself how other world powers can confront more serious threats than we face but spend significantly less money.

- All major conventional powers also possess nuclear weapons or are allies of the United States or both, and this situation will continue. Since their invention, nuclear weapons seem to have eliminated war between major powers.
- The United States could become involved in a conflict if a friendly state were attacked by another country. This is not, however, guaranteed, as Georgia learned to its detriment in 2008.
- There are any number of states that do not have functioning governments or are subject to regimes not regarded as legitimate by significant numbers of their citizens. Many of these states are also infected by insurgencies, whose goal is to overthrow such governments

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<sup>5</sup> Russia also faces increasing internal security challenges as a result of its declining population. “Transcript of Remarks by Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, Gen. Michael V. Hayden, at the Landon Lecture Series, Kansas State University,” Central Intelligence Agency, April 30, 2008.

and replace them with themselves. Although the potential for armed conflict within and between these countries will remain high, you should ask pointed questions about why any of them poses a threat to the security of the United States.

- There are transnational non-state organizations, often called *fourth generation threats*,<sup>6</sup> as contrasted with sub-national insurgencies, that can do damage. Because these organizations do not possess conventional military forces of their own, they are most appropriately regarded as criminal cartels, the most immediately threatening to the United States being Mexican narco-trafficking groups and the street gangs that distribute much of their product.<sup>7</sup>

The first task for anyone trying to evaluate a national defense strategy is to go through it and make a set of bullet points, similar to this one. Then sit back, gather some colleagues, and look at the list. Do the potential threats and their implied priorities make sense? This is not second guessing: Much of the real activity in creating and implementing strategy takes place out of the spotlight and off the printed page. The flow of people and dollars among the elements of our defense establishment – the corporations, military services, civilian agencies and congressional committees that decide what money is spent and how – dominates national defense planning far more than any consideration of threats.

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<sup>6</sup> For discussions of fourth generation warfare, see Thomas X. Hammes, *The Sling and the Stone* (St. Paul, MN: Zenith, 2004) and the various articles on the subject by one of its originators, William S. Lind. For an archive of Lind's work, see <http://www.lewrockwell.com/lind/lind-arch.html>. Martin van Creveld has stated that his notion of "non-trinitarian war," as described in *The Transformation of War* (New York: Free Press, 1991), is essentially the same as fourth generation war. Theorists like John Robb are examining conflict by groups so distributed, yet networked, that some have proposed a "fifth generation" of war. See Robb's book, *Brave New War* (New York: Wiley, 2007).

<sup>7</sup> There are some 30,000 gangs with upwards of 800,000 members in the United States. (National Youth Gang Center, "National Youth Gang Survey Analysis," 2009, accessed July 29, 2010, <http://www.nationalgangcenter.gov/Survey-Analysis>). Much of the income of these gangs comes from distributing the \$10 to \$30 billion in illegal drugs that narco-trafficking cartels move into the United States every year (Oriana Zill and Lowell Bergman, "Do the Math: Why The Illegal Drug Business is Thriving," <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/drugs/special/math.html>). More than 26,000 people have died in drug-related violence in Mexico since December 2006, and drugs are blamed for a rising share of violence and corruption in the United States, (Randall C. Archibald, "Mexican Drug Cartel Violence Spills Over, Alarming U.S.," <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/23/us/23border.html>). The total number of al-Qaeda members in the United States is unknown, but they have been unable to mount a successful operation in this country since Sept. 11 and are not a significant threat to U.S. security at this time.

A trillion dollar annual expenditure<sup>8</sup> brings along this potent constituency, people whose prosperity, livelihood, or in the case of wounded veterans, for example, even survival depend on this flow of money. Moreover, in the face of gigantic deficits in 2010, the Pentagon planned for its own budget to continue to grow.<sup>9</sup> In addition to these players, there are any number of foreign countries and companies and their lobbying organizations within the United States who have an interest in influencing American national defense strategy.

If you decide that the strategy's picture of the world bears little resemblance to reality, then stop, document and report your findings. Clearly you are reading a political settlement among the various power centers, and you aren't interested in assessing strategies for conflict in Fantasyland. If, on the other hand, you find it reasonable – even if not what you might have written – then the next step is to consider what it is that the strategy wants military forces to accomplish. Here's an illustration of how you might proceed.

### *Shaping the Future*

A national defense strategy does not define what the United States wants to achieve through international affairs; that is a political decision and is given to the national security apparatus by the president through a variety of channels. This is another reason why what is written in strategy papers may not be the actual strategy that the administration or the Department of Defense wishes to conduct. For example, the United States, as do all countries, has an interest in furthering the well-being of its companies abroad. Although you will find nothing in the recent “National Security Strategy” about sending in the Marines to protect U.S. commercial interests, we have done that several times, particularly in Latin America. And in the middle of its high-minded words about intervening to protect “civilians facing a grave humanitarian crisis,” that same national security strategy also admits that “The United States must reserve the right to act unilaterally if necessary to defend our nation and our interests ...” whatever the administration at the time deems those interests to be.

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<sup>8</sup> The total U.S. spending on all elements of national defense, including military forces, intelligence, homeland security, medical care and other services for veterans, border security, and interest on past defense-related debt will total roughly \$1 trillion in 2008. See, for example, Robert Higgs, “The trillion-dollar defense budget is already here,” The Independent Institute, March 15, 2007, <http://www.independent.org/newsroom/article.asp?id=1941/>; Robert Dreyfuss, “Financing the imperial armed forces: A trillion dollars and nowhere to go but up,” *Tom Dispatch*, June 8, 2007, [http://tomdispatch.com/post/174793/robert\\_dreyfuss\\_the\\_pentagon\\_s\\_blank\\_check/](http://tomdispatch.com/post/174793/robert_dreyfuss_the_pentagon_s_blank_check/).

<sup>9</sup> Andrea Shalal-Esa, “Pentagon Official Sees Real Growth In Defense Budget,” Reuters, May 4, 2010.

It is important, therefore, for assessing strategy to keep a grip on reality: If the desired ends are unobtainable – establish universal brotherhood and world peace, for example – it means that what you’re reading is not what we intend to do. My advice, if you come to that conclusion is, again, to stop the exercise. Trying to infer our true strategy is interesting, but like the also interesting writing of alternative histories – *What if the South had held Atlanta until after the 1864 election?* – there is no way to tell if you have it right.

### ***Philosophical Interlude: Military Force in the 21st Century***

So let us assume that you find the description of both the world situation and the stated objectives at least credible. The remaining step in your assessment is to assess the following: Will the military forces that the administration proposes accomplish our objectives in the world as described? It is a question that leaders down through history have gotten wrong, so you should proceed with care and with a degree of humility.

Your judgment must rest on your conception of what military force can accomplish. This is not a purely military problem. You are not trying to predict what would happen should the United States invade “Xyz-istan” but rather to assess the usefulness of armed forces for solving problems in the modern world. You can do this, and permit me to give you some advice on how to proceed.

Although some commentators, particularly on the left, decry the creation of an American empire, the fact is that the United States has a surprisingly limited capability to influence events around the world. We can invade most any country that does not have nuclear weapons, but occupying even militarily weak countries and changing their social and political systems remains a fantasy. In 2010 we were straining, for example, to keep fewer than 200,000 troops in Iraq and Afghanistan,<sup>10</sup> of which perhaps 40 to 50 percent are patrolling or otherwise in combat roles (the rest perform support functions).

The cost of these operations is covered by the purchase of American debt by countries such as China, the OPEC countries and Russia in such quantities that it would be difficult to continue operations in Iraq and Afghanistan without it.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Andrew J. Bacevich, “Surging to Defeat: Petraeus’s strategy only postponed the inevitable,” *The American Conservative*, April 21, 2008; “No US troop increase in Afghanistan without deeper cuts in Iraq: Pentagon,” Agence France-Presse, May 7, 2008.

<sup>11</sup> As of May 2010, China holds more than \$865 billion of U.S. government securities, the “oil exporters” (i.e. the OPEC nations and others) account for another \$235 billion, and Russia \$126.8 billion. “Major Foreign Holders Of Treasury Securities,” July 16, 2010, <http://www.treas.gov/tic/mfh.txt>. Some experts consider these numbers to be understated because nations can buy these securities through third-party brokers—

Yet the United States is not likely to emerge from Iraq and Afghanistan with any improvement in its national wealth. We are, it seems, the first imperial power to be paying for the privilege, with estimates of the total cost of the war running in the \$3 trillion to \$5 trillion range.<sup>12</sup> How contraction of the U.S. economy brought on by the recent recession, with the concomitant need for bailouts and stimulus packages, will affect our ability to continue paying for expensive occupations remains to be seen. Our options will be further limited by our current level of debt, which in 2011 will roughly equal our gross domestic product for the first time since the end of World War II.

Most of the means for reducing the threat from violence do not involve military forces and rely instead on trade, diplomacy, commerce, intelligence, law enforcement, tourism, educational exchange and so on.<sup>13</sup> In a world populated by human beings, however, there will be times when amicable agreement is not possible, when religious fervor or nationalistic feelings or a leader's ego, combined with miscalculation of the odds of success, leads to the use of force.

Granting these considerations, and other that you will think of, your task could be restated as rendering a judgment on whether the strategy defines a framework for procuring and utilizing military forces that would further our national goals as set forth in the Constitution and elaborated by the administration.

Let's look more closely at how military forces can be employed in the 21st century.

### ***The Military Toolbox***

First, there are conventional forces – the tanks, airplanes, soldiers, ships and so on like we faced in the 20th century's world wars. They can wreak enormous damage and kill huge numbers of people – fatalities in World War I numbered around 20 million, and numbers in the 50 million to 70 million range are often

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“Caribbean banking centers,” for example, hold \$165.5 billion and Hong Kong holds \$145.7 billion—and many regard the size and composition of their reserves as state secrets.

<sup>12</sup> Linda J. Bilmes and Joseph E. Stiglitz, “The Iraq War Will Cost Us \$3 Trillion, And Much More,” *The Washington Post*, March 9, 2008. Three trillion dollars roughly equals a \$10,000 burden on every man, woman and child in the United States.

<sup>13</sup> The Department of Defense recognizes the “DIMES” model: diplomacy, information, military, economic and societal-cultural factors. Walter Pincus, “Irregular Warfare, Both Future and Present,” *The Washington Post*, April 7, 2008. The current secretary of defense, Robert M. Gates, described this strategy in his article, “A Balanced Strategy, Reprogramming the Pentagon for a New Age,” *Foreign Affairs*, January-February 2009, and the president reiterated the point in the May 2010 *National Security Strategy*.

cited for World War II – but they take some time to do it.<sup>14</sup> Because they need large numbers of trained troops and vast supplies of expensive weapons, they make up the majority of the world’s defense budgets.

Then there are nuclear forces, which are cheap in comparison to conventional forces.<sup>15</sup> Like conventional weapons, nukes can cause considerable damage, but they do it in seconds. By the mid-1960s, there were enough of these in the arsenals of the major nuclear powers that the survival of the human race itself was doubtful, were they ever to be used.<sup>16</sup> With the total inventory now reduced to “only” many thousands, the results can unavoidably be much the same.

Finally, there is “none of the above,” special forces designed to contest the “unconventional” threats that manifest themselves in “low intensity conflicts” and fourth generation (non-state) warfare. Although special forces are highly trained, there are few of them (hence “special”), and because they need little in the way of complex hardware, they are relatively cheap.

### **When Is the Use of Military Force Appropriate?**

Because we face no direct conventional military threat to our national survival, any use of non-nuclear military forces by the United States will be voluntary,<sup>17</sup> the “continuation of policy” by other means, in the words of the Pentagon’s favorite strategist, the early 19th century Prussian aristocrat Carl von Clausewitz.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> These numbers do not include the 50 to 100 million people who died in the Spanish Flu pandemic of 1918-1920. Although the war did not cause the pandemic, conditions at the front and massive movements of troops around the world are often cited as aiding its spread and perhaps increasing its lethality. For more information, consult the Wikipedia article or <http://virus.stanford.edu/uda/>

<sup>15</sup> Just to cite one example, according to the Center for Defense Information’s *2007 Military Almanac*, pages 98-99, the cost of a Trident II submarine-launched ballistic missile, capable of destroying any city on earth, is about half that of a single F-22 tactical fighter aircraft.

<sup>16</sup> This lesson took a while to sink in. Until about 1960, the United States considered “tactical” nuclear weapons as ordinary tools of war. See: Walter Pincus, “Eisenhower Advisers Discussed Using Nuclear Weapons in China,” *The Washington Post*, April 30, 2008. In recent years the United States has had more than 5,000 nuclear warheads in its inventory.

<sup>17</sup> None of our mutual defense treaties require the United States to go to war if an ally is attacked. The only contractual requirement in those treaties is that we consult with the allies, not go to war. Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, for example, requires a member country to “assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other Parties, such action as it deems necessary,” accessed July 30, 2010, [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official\\_texts\\_17120.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_17120.htm).

<sup>18</sup> Because the German word for “policy” can also be translated as “politics,” Clausewitz’s formula also fits “wag the dog” wars waged for domestic political reasons.

Any national military strategy must indicate when such wars are appropriate for the United States. When, in other words, should U.S. military forces be used for missions other than the immediate defense of the United States, which requires only nuclear deterrence and very few conventional ground, sea and air forces? How the strategy answers this question determines – in theory, neglecting existing forces and spending – the size and composition of U.S. military forces. Almost without exception, anybody you discuss force structure with will have an agenda, so do your own research and think long and hard about what you find.

### **Can We Run on Autopilot?**

Before examining potential uses for military force in the 21st century, it should be acknowledged that some people would dispense with strategy entirely, pick an arbitrary percentage of the U.S. gross domestic product, usually 4 or 5 percent, and spend that amount on something every year. The logic often provided is that we have spent that percentage and more at times in the past.<sup>19</sup> This rationale, however, neglects the world situations at those times, including the existence of major threats in the Soviet Union and the People’s Republic of China. For your reference, at the end of the Cold War, the United States was spending 4.6 percent of GDP on defense, and it now spends 4.9 percent.<sup>20</sup>

Examined in this light, the arguments for holding defense spending at a constant percentage of GDP appear designed more to ensure a money flow to the defense complex than to improve the security and well-being of the rest of our citizens.<sup>21</sup>

### **Potential Uses for Non-Nuclear Military Force**

Although the Soviet Union is gone, legitimate requirements for conventional and special military forces, albeit in much smaller quantities, remain.<sup>22</sup> You will

People who start wars, however, routinely experience unintended consequences, such as plagues, famines, conflicts that drag on well beyond predictions and horrendous cost overruns – not to mention losing. That the dogs of war so frequently devour those who unleash them suggests that war is anything but a rational “continuation of policy by other means.”

<sup>19</sup> For a typical list of justifications for spending 4 percent, see The Heritage Foundation’s white paper, “Providing for the Common Defense: Why 4 Percent?” The Heritage Foundation, April 2, 2008, <http://www.heritage.org/Research/HomelandDefense/wp040208.cfm>.

<sup>20</sup> A variation on this theme is to increase the defense budget each year by some percentage above inflation, again, neglecting both the external threat, or lack thereof, and the diminished utility of conventional force in a world with both nuclear weapons and increasingly sophisticated insurgencies. For a recent example, see Mackenzie Eaglen, “U.S. Defense Spending: The Mismatch between Plans and Resources,” The Heritage Foundation, June 7, 2010.

<sup>21</sup> If you believe that more money means larger, more effective military forces, see Essay 8, “Decoding the Defense Budget,” of this handbook.

find that all national defense strategies include lists of these uses. For example, in rough order of potential severity (as contrasted with likelihood):

1. A major conventional conflict – that is, one that does not go nuclear – between the United States and a “near-peer,” usually hypothesized as either China or Russia.
2. Wars between states where the United States has significant interests (e.g., Saudi Arabia versus, for example, Iran or a resurgent Iraq).
3. Invasion and occupation of a developing country by U.S. military forces. Think Iraq and Afghanistan.
4. Counterinsurgency (COIN), where the military forces of the United States assist a friendly government in suppressing an attempt by indigenous rebels to overthrow it or to replace it within a region of that country, e.g. El Salvador, or – again – Afghanistan.
5. Law enforcement, where U.S. military forces assist in suppressing non-state groups other than insurgents. Anti-piracy is a topical example.
6. Stability operations, nation building and peacekeeping, where military forces are used primarily, but sometimes only initially, for non-combat roles: Somalia and Haiti.

Again, does the list offered in the strategy make sense? Are they left over from earlier strategies? Do they correlate with our current spending patterns? Are you reading another political settlement? Let’s take a brief look at what your examination might include.

### **War Against a “Near-Peer”**

As the opening quote indicates, a few strategists have come to the epiphany that the major nations, are not going to wage war on each other and so military force is of diminished utility in the modern world. The reason is not the outbreak of brotherly love but the advent of nuclear weapons.<sup>23</sup> Although the threat of

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<sup>22</sup> Col. Douglas Macgregor, U.S. Army, ret., provides a good summary of the argument for retaining significant conventional forces in “Remember the Blitzkrieg before it’s too late,” *The Washington Times*, May 10, 2010 at <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2010/may/10/remember-the-blitzkrieg-before-its-too-late/>.

<sup>23</sup> Should some well-meaning effort succeed in eliminating nuclear weapons, conventional war between the major powers would take off where it left off.

occasional sparring cannot be ruled out, such as the Hainan P-3 incident in April 2001, you should take a hard line and ask why this most incredible scenario should dominate the sizing of U.S. conventional forces, which represent, as I've mentioned, the bulk of U.S. defense spending.

### **Proxy Wars and Other Wars Supporting Allies**

The First Gulf War, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War were of this type: The United States itself was not threatened by foreign armies, but believed that it must intervene to help counter a third party that may itself have been supported by other major powers.

An important point about all such wars to date is that the United States did not intervene alone but formed an alliance that helped counter the attack.<sup>24</sup> Involvement of allies, of course, reduces the requirement for U.S. military forces, and a show of international solidarity could alleviate the need for armed intervention. You might also raise the issue of why we're always the ones trundling our military forces around the world searching for a place to replay the Battle of the Bulge. Couldn't we and our allies learn some lessons from the Vietnamese, Afghans and Iraqis that we could use in those conflicts that do pop up?

### **Splendid Little Wars**

In the late 20th and early 21st centuries, the two outcomes that wars of choice have had in common is that they turned out to take much longer and they cost considerably more in lives and money than their proponents promised. The George W. Bush administration's estimates for the cost of the Second Gulf War, for example, were around \$60 billion.<sup>25</sup> In the Clinton administration, the NATO-Serbian War (March 24 –June 10, 1999) was supposed to last three days, but dragged on through 78 and ended only when the alliance cobbled together the credible threat of a ground invasion and dropped demands that Serbia abdicate its sovereignty, and when the Russians withdrew their support for the Milosevic government.

Experiences such as these suggest your assessment should question any tendency to overt interventionism, at least without the support of our closest and most long-standing allies, and consider whether, if a substantial fraction of our NATO allies are not willing to join us, our proposed intervention is appropriate. Such an attitude might have served us well in the run up to the Second Gulf War.

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<sup>24</sup> Even in Vietnam, we were supported by units from Korea, Australia, New Zealand and the Philippines.

<sup>25</sup> Widely cited on the Internet. See for example:  
<http://www.cnn.com/2003/ALLPOLITICS/02/27/sprj.iqr.war.cost/>

## Will COIN Theory Make Occupations Possible?

There is considerable controversy on whether counterinsurgency by outside forces – a mission sometimes known as “foreign internal defense” – is possible. The record of such attempts is not positive, El Salvador being the only recent success, and it was conducted largely through indigenous political reforms with training by U.S. forces and no direct U.S. combat involvement.<sup>26</sup>

The strategy you are assessing may state that counterinsurgency theory has proven itself in Iraq and so can solve the problem of other occupations. It may be early, however, to start claiming success for COIN doctrine in that country, which, two years after the “surge,” continues to evolve into a religiously conservative state dominated by Shiite clerics and politicians friendly to Iran. As for the economic spoils of the war, most of these appear to be going to countries that sign the best deals with the new regime, most prominently China. Russian companies are also actively pursuing contracts in the country.<sup>27</sup>

Perhaps the strongest argument against strategies that posit invasion as a tool of policy, even if insurgencies against the occupation were somehow to be contained, is that nobody knows how to rebuild other peoples’ destroyed societies. The area often cited as a success story, the former Yugoslavia, is an economic and social mess:

However badly run Kosovo may be at the moment, and however much gangsterism and ethno-nationalism have flourished there under the haphazard stewardship of the so-

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<sup>26</sup> U.S. assistance in El Salvador (1981 to 1992) was limited to advice, training and financial assistance. For a detailed examination of U.S. actions in El Salvador, see: Steven Metz, *Counterinsurgency Strategy and the Phoenix of American Capability* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 1995). For an extensive discussion of counterinsurgency since the end of World War II, please refer to Chet Richards, *If We Can Keep It* (Washington: Center for Defense Information, 2008), particularly Chapter 4 at <http://pogoarchives.org/labyrinth/06/01.pdf>.

<sup>27</sup> President Bush’s goals for the war included democracy and freedom for the Iraqi people, defeat of Islamic terrorists in that country, and of course, elimination of Saddam’s weapons of mass destruction. Enriching Russia and China was inadvertently omitted. For a recent update on Chinese investment in Iraq’s oil sector, see Leila Fadel and Ernesto Londono, “Risk-tolerant China investing heavily in Iraq as U.S. companies hold back,” *The Washington Post*, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/07/01/AR2010070103406.html>. Russia’s Lukoil is bidding on Iraqi contracts and state-owned giant Rosneft recently signed a joint venture with U.A.E.-based Crescent Petroleum, which has stated an interest in operations in Iraq. (Aysha Daya and Henry Meyer, “Rosneft, Crescent Agree on U.A.E. Venture, Mull Iraq,” *Business Week*, <http://www.businessweek.com/news/2010-06-05/rosneft-crescent-agree-on-u-a-e-venture-mull-iraq-update3-.html>).

called international community... Bosnia is falling apart again; Macedonia still looks fragile.<sup>28</sup>

The upshot is that most interventions and occupations will turn out badly in the 21st century, unless brutal force to the point of depopulation is used to coerce the inhabitants into submission.<sup>29</sup> Again, ask hard questions about a national security strategy that implies occupying foreign lands for extended periods of time, and keep in mind that nobody you talk to knows more about how to occupy a country than you do.<sup>30</sup>

### ***Law Enforcement***

*Armies will be replaced by police-like security forces on the one hand and bands of ruffians on the other, not that the difference is always clear, even today.*<sup>31</sup>

Much of what is hypothesized as “fourth generation warfare” – state versus non-state groups or “transnational insurgencies” – falls into this category and so does not represent a new form of warfare so much as an evolution of crime. Our opponents in these conflicts are not organized military forces or even insurgent units fighting to overthrow a government, but have more the form of transnational criminal cartels, although sometimes with an ideological or religious veneer. Like most of our probable opponents, these extra-legal organizations have neither the means nor the desire to confront our tanks and combat aircraft in conventional battle. Instead, they will move aside and blend into the population.

Once this happens, our military forces would become a minor facet of the law enforcement efforts because they cannot distinguish members of the criminal

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<sup>28</sup> “The Case for Clarity,” *Economist.com*, February 21, 2008.

<sup>29</sup> For a discussion on the need for coercion in maintaining modern occupations, see Martin van Creveld, *The Changing Face of War* (New York: Ballentine, 2006) and Sir Rupert Smith’s *The Utility of Force*.

<sup>30</sup> You will be in good company. As this is written, DOD is also beginning to have second thoughts about the usefulness of conventional forces for counterinsurgency (all the blather about a new COIN doctrine to the contrary). See Nancy A. Youssef, “Pentagon Rethinking Value Of Major Counterinsurgencies,” McClatchy Newspapers, May 12, 2010, <http://www.mcclatchydc.com/2010/05/12/v-print/94058/pentagon-rethinking-value-of-major.html>.

<sup>31</sup> Martin van Creveld, *The Transformation of War* (New York: Free Press, 1991), 225.

organization from the general population. As van Creveld also noted, the populations of developed countries do not like to see their military forces continuing to kill large numbers of villagers and wedding parties, which is the inevitable result when one cannot tell friend from foe.<sup>32</sup>

### ***Stability Operations and Peacekeeping***

Although the history of such operations does not give cause for optimism, the alternative – do nothing – may not be acceptable to the populations of the developed world, who sometimes demand that their military forces achieve high moral purposes, such as stopping genocide, that have nothing to do with defense of their own nations.<sup>33</sup> As with all incursions into the Third World, however, the stopping part may be simple compared to what follows.

What is required is establishing legitimate governments and functioning economies and their integration into the world's economic and political systems. Unfortunately, as the quote above regarding the Balkans indicates, and our experiences in Iraq, Afghanistan and Haiti reinforce, these are the very things we don't know how to do.<sup>34</sup>

The time-honored principle that misery loves company strongly suggests that American armed forces only participate in nonmilitary missions, including law enforcement, stability and peacekeeping, as members of coalitions.

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<sup>32</sup> “To kill an opponent who is much weaker than yourself is unnecessary and therefore cruel; to let that opponent kill you is unnecessary and therefore foolish,” Martin van Creveld, “Why Iraq Will End Like Vietnam Did,” Project on Government Oversight, [http://dnipogo.org/creveld/why\\_iraq\\_will\\_end\\_as\\_vietnam\\_did.htm](http://dnipogo.org/creveld/why_iraq_will_end_as_vietnam_did.htm). The revelation of the My Lai massacre by Seymour Hersh in November 1969 caused widespread outrage and significantly diminished support for the war. For a chronology of the massacre and subsequent events, see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/My\\_Lai\\_Massacre](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/My_Lai_Massacre).

<sup>33</sup> On May 12, 2010, the U.S. Congress passed S. 1067: Lord's Resistance Army Disarmament and Northern Uganda Recovery Act of 2009 and sent it to the president for signature. As noted above, the May 2010 “National Security Strategy” explicitly endorses (on page 22) the use of military force to resolve “a grave humanitarian crisis.”

<sup>34</sup> To illustrate, one way to jump start an economy is for the developed world to begin buying things from it. Initially, these will often be agricultural commodities. Unfortunately, such a policy runs into opposition from domestic constituencies and leads to a variety of obstacles including agricultural tariffs and subsidies, “Buy American” provisions and the desire of senior politicians to reward American contractors. For a discussion, see Thomas P. M. Barnett, *Blueprint for Action* (New York: Putnam, 2005), 244. Note that dividing a country along ethnic lines – sometimes offered as a solution for problems in developing countries – may exchange a single repressive and incompetent government for a set of them.

## *Conclusions*

If your assessment validates the strategy, even with reservations, you're through.

If, on the other hand, you cannot avoid the conclusion that there are serious mismatches between the world situation, what we're trying to accomplish, the forces we propose to employ and the resources we intend to devote, then you have another decision to make. Do you want to report this to whoever asked you for the assessment and then go on to another assignment, or do you want to try to do something about it?

The rest of this book is intended for those taking the second alternative. It will not be the path to riches, although you may derive great satisfaction from doing good for your country. Budding national security strategists should keep a couple of points in mind before they give into despair when contemplating the enormous size, and hence momentum, of our defense-security establishment:

First, even an aircraft carrier can be turned 180 degrees by manipulating only a tiny fraction of its structure. It has to be the right fraction.

Second is the Stockdale Paradox: You must never confuse faith that you will prevail in the end - which you can never afford to lose - with the discipline to confront the most brutal facts of your current reality, whatever they might be.<sup>35</sup>

Although the national security establishment defeated an earlier generation of reformers,<sup>36</sup> you may have the great good fortune to have come on the scene at the beginning of an era of momentous change, when a trillion dollars of national security spending comes into play.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> An expression coined by management guru Jim Collins in *Good to Great* (New York: Harper Collins, 2001), 83-87.

<sup>36</sup> For a detailed description of what happened to them, nothing beats the memoir in *Military Reform: An Uneven History and an Uncertain Future*, Winslow T. Wheeler and Lawrence J. Korb (Stanford, CA: Stanford Security Studies, 2009).

<sup>37</sup> Some on the political right are already talking about the need to rein in social programs, such as Medicare and Social Security, so they can preserve funding for weapon systems and standing military forces. See, for example, Mackenzie Eaglen, "U.S. Defense Spending: The Mismatch between Plans and Resources," The Heritage Foundation, June 7, 2010. On the other hand, some conservatives, such as Senator Tom Coburn, R-Okla., have proposed extracting a trillion dollars out of the defense budget by freezing it at the 2010 level. See this proposal at [http://coburn.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?a=Files.Serve&File\\_id=3ae23727-6bbe-4ce1-8516-2b82726911cc](http://coburn.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?a=Files.Serve&File_id=3ae23727-6bbe-4ce1-8516-2b82726911cc).

*The Pentagon Labyrinth* aims to help both newcomers and seasoned observers learn how to grapple with the problems of national defense. Intended for readers who are frustrated with the superficial nature of the debate on national security, this handbook takes advantage of the insights of ten unique professionals, each with decades of experience in the armed services, the Pentagon bureaucracy, Congress, the intelligence community, military history, journalism and other disciplines. The short but provocative essays will help you to:

- identify the decay—moral, mental and physical—in America’s defenses,
- understand the various “tribes” that run bureaucratic life in the Pentagon,
- appreciate what too many defense journalists are not doing, but should,
- conduct first rate national security oversight instead of second rate theater,
- separate careerists from ethical professionals in senior military and civilian ranks,
- learn to critique strategies, distinguishing the useful from the agenda-driven,
- recognize the pervasive influence of money in defense decision-making,
- unravel the budget games the Pentagon and Congress love to play,
- understand how to sort good weapons from bad—and avoid high cost failures, and
- reform the failed defense procurement system without changing a single law.

The handbook ends with lists of contacts, readings and Web sites carefully selected to facilitate further understanding of the above, and more.

