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## **FORTY-FIVE YEARS OF FRUSTRATION**

Dr. Mark Clodfelter's article "Forty-Five Years of Frustration: America's Enduring Dilemma of Fighting Insurgents with Airpower" (Spring 2011) is a predictable academic article but misses the point entirely. Airpower is an essential element in counterinsurgency (COIN) strategy but not as a stand-alone solution. COIN strategy is a combination of combat operations, reconstruction, and nation building. The US/North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) alliance flexes and adapts to the enemy's tactics each and every time he changes strategies. This has been the case from the Philippine Insurrection to the present time. Air operations against insurgents were effective in Vietnam (e.g., on the Ho Chi Minh Trail and in Linebacker I/II) as well as Iraq, and they are working quite well in Afghanistan. Many a combat veteran of these conflicts is alive today because air strikes and close air support broke up the enemy's formations before he could attack.

The problem with this article is that the issues Dr. Clodfelter highlights miss the mark. Although the high quality of his research is unmistakable, on page 82 he compares the sporadic bombing campaign against the Vietcong with the use of precision-guided munitions in Kandahar. Yes, there were unfortunate civilian casualties in both campaigns; however, careful application can reduce these numbers, as we have seen in recent US/NATO operations in Afghanistan. Film footage of North Vietnam before the cease-fire and the Peace of Paris showed a lunar landscape in a country teetering on the brink of collapse. Even today Vietnam has not recovered a viable economy in the south. Insurgents in these conflicts tend to cling close to the civilian population, both for support and for the propaganda advantage of "civilian casualties." Historically the insurgents themselves have always been

responsible for the preponderance of civilian casualties, as clearly seen in Iraq and Afghanistan.

During the Vietnam War, the United States needed the political will to stay the course, as Pres. Richard M. Nixon clearly ascertained. We won the Vietnam War tactically but defaulted to the enemy when we left the playing field and pulled out. One must have the political will to stay the course. Many millions of people were left "holding the bag" when they were betrayed by this thoughtless nonsolution to that war's end. Dr. Clodfelter is quite correct in stating that "commanders—and their political leaders—must have a complete appreciation for the potential costs of such bombing" (p. 86).

Don't think for a minute that al-Qaeda and the Taliban are not currently reeling and bleeding from losses due to airpower. Anyone who asks an infantryman about close air support will sense that there is "no frustration here"—just gratitude that our airpower is there when we need it. God bless America, and God save our troops!

**Gary Gault**  
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## **FORTY-FIVE YEARS OF FRUSTRATION: THE AUTHOR REPLIES**

I appreciate Mr. Gault's response to my article as well as the chance to respond to his comments; I had hoped that the piece might stimulate debate. I fully agree with him that airpower is not a "stand-alone" solution to solving the problems of COIN. The attempt by American political and military leaders to make it one in the initial stages of Rolling Thunder was a significant strategic error, given that the Vietnam War was primarily a guerrilla conflict waged by the Vietcong with limited assistance from the North in 1965. Airpower, if it is to be employed successfully, must suit the character of the war (that is, *who* fights and *why* they



do so) as well as the conduct of the war (*how* war is fought). In COIN operations, it must also be applied in concert with other military elements, as well as diplomacy, information, and economics.

Pres. Lyndon Johnson's inability to achieve decisive success with any type of military force ultimately sapped not only the American public's will to fight but also his own desire to do so. The goal of a "stable, secure, independent, noncommunist Vietnam" was too amorphous to attain with airpower alone or in concert with ground forces, especially with a corrupt, out-of-touch government operating in Saigon. Johnson's successor pursued the goal of "peace with honor," but that objective was really a euphemism for getting American troops—and prisoners of war—out of Vietnam without having the South fall in the immediate aftermath of American withdrawal (in President Nixon's own words, the United States sought "a decent interval" for South Vietnam). During the North Vietnamese Army's Easter Offensive in 1972, airpower showed its value against an enemy that fought conventionally, and the two Linebacker campaigns helped to secure a negotiated settlement that secured the South two additional years of independence. Yet the character and conduct of the war fought in 1972 differed significantly from the insurgent struggle that occurred during most of the Johnson presidency.

In recent COIN conflicts like Afghanistan, precisely delivered airpower has certainly damaged the enemy's ability to operate effectively, and it has also provided effective close air support to engaged troops. Yet a relatively small number of aerial mistakes have often undermined bombing successes and served as recruiting mechanisms for an opposition adept at using information techniques, and for whom perceptions count far more than reality. As long as the United States pursues such open-ended objectives as "security" and "stability," airpower's ability to help secure them will remain problematic.

**Dr. Mark Clodfelter**  
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## THE MUTABLE NATURE OF WAR: THE AUTHOR REPLIES

I thank Col David Gurney and Col Jamie Sculerati ("Ricochets and Replies," Spring 2011) for their thoughtful comments on my article ("The Mutable Nature of War," Winter 2010). Naturally, I disagree with their arguments.

Colonel Gurney's first comment is that the initial objective of a planner is to accomplish the mission. Frankly, I thought that went without saying. Why else would a planner sit down to map out a strategy if not to fulfill the mission? OK, *then* the planner should do what I suggested in my article: he or she should attempt to perform that mission with the least cost in blood and treasure. If forces can carry out the mission without killing anyone on either side, then that would be preferable to, say, flooding a theater with hundreds of thousands of troops spoiling for a fight that may cost thousands of lives and billions of dollars. Regrettably, Colonel Gurney then follows with an inaccurate comment: that I am merely repeating "an enduring airpower fallacy"—namely, achieving results without great cost. The colonel must not have noted the examples I gave of Operations Desert Storm, Deliberate Force, Allied Force, Northern/Southern Watch, Enduring Freedom (when Kabul fell before the first conventional US ground troops ever arrived in the country), and, of course, Iraqi Freedom in 2003. Those aren't enduring fallacies; they are facts. Why shouldn't a planner attempt to replicate those wondrous campaigns?

Colonel Sculerati takes a different approach, but his reasoning is similarly incorrect. I argued that those who consider war the province of violence take their lead from Clausewitz. To the Prussian, war was battle and battle was *Schlacht* (slaughter). He is very clear on that point. He never mentions naval warfare; therefore, we cannot extend his argument by equating a naval blockade with slaughter, using the claim that violence *could* occur in the enforcement of a blockade or sanctions. In Haiti

and Iraq, hundreds of thousands of civilians died, quietly and alone. There was no violence—none. But even if one accepts Colonel Sculerati's argument that a ship or two attempted to run the blockade and took fire (the violence he imagines), it would not change the basic condition: Clausewitz and his ilk specifically write of slaughter and violence on the battlefield. That is not at all the same as a blockade, which seeks to kill or starve civilians—and has done so for centuries. If violence occurs at sea due to a blockade runner, it is incidental to the intent of the blockade—to kill the women, the children, the old, and the sick located within a country under siege. Surely Colonel Sculerati must see the difference between the cause and effect of a Clausewitzian battle/ slaughter and that of a quiet 13-year blockade of Iraq. As far as I know, the latter entailed no violence whatsoever yet killed over one million civilian noncombatants.

Colonel Sculerati's second point actually refers to a different part of my argument—the Clausewitzian notion, repeated by numerous contemporary commanders, that war is the province of danger, fear, thirst, pain, physical exertion, and hardship. Consequently, we hear that war for grunts in Afghanistan today differs little from the one for Alexander's hoplites. This is the "enduring nature of war" argument made by people like Lt Gen Paul Van Riper. I use the examples of drones and air warfare in general (as well as cyber war) to show that oftentimes no sense of danger, fear, thirst, pain, physical exertion, or hardship accompanies those types of war—the ones featuring a Reaper flown from a hangar in Nevada. Soldiers or Marines who can still pretend that war's nature is timeless willfully ignore modern air warfare, which, I argue, differs fundamentally from what they claim warfare is "really all about."

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## **GLOBAL POWER: THE AUTHOR REPLIES**

Regarding my article "Global Power Requires a Global, Persistent Air-to-Air Capability" (Winter 2010), Lt Col Paul Matier ("Ricochets and Replies," Spring 2011) points out some problems with arming B-1s with advanced medium-range air-to-air missiles (AMRAAM) that I generally agree with. That said, the point of proposing the B-1 option is that it is the fastest way to get a minimal capability in service and is the cheapest possibility. It is anything but a panacea.

In several earlier (much longer) drafts of my article, I specifically stated that a simple AMRAAM-armed B-1 (even several) would not be capable of going up against a near-peer adversary, as in a Taiwan Strait or Baltic scenario. An air-to-air capability much more robust than a couple of AMRAAM-armed B-1s would clearly be required.

Having been closely involved in the recent Libya issue, though, I believe that it is the perfect scenario for my proposal. In Libya, air-to-air armed B-1s really could have rapidly dominated a foreign air force (arguably much more rapidly than our governmental and command and control processes can react) without any concern about foreign basing rights and ponderous logistics processes.

Additionally, in the Taiwan Strait, there is also no real doubt about the outcome of an engagement between a handful of Chinese aircraft and an Aegis cruiser with lots of missiles. The main difference is that the B-1 might have the option of "running away" while the Aegis cruiser would not; its only option would involve finding itself on the bottom of the ocean. That, however, does not prevent us from buying plenty of Aegis cruisers/destroyers (and aircraft carriers, for that matter).

Fundamentally, this is one problem with the Air Force mind-set. We tend to dismiss possibilities that are not viable against a near-peer adversary as not worth spending money on. Yet, the Marine Corps and our other sister services spend amazing amounts



of money on systems and capabilities that are not viable against near-peer adversaries. The Marine Corps itself is a combined-arms service capable of going one-on-one with most of the militaries of most of the nations of the world, almost by itself. Clearly, it is not able to do that against a near-peer adversary, and many of its capabilities are of questionable value in any conflict with a near-peer adversary.

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### **CIVILIAN LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN AMERICA**

The US military has become the strongest armed force in the world, partially by harnessing perceived internal crises in order to keep evolving. When it comes to the reserve of linguistic talent, Col John Conway's article "Civilian Language Education in America" (*ASPJ*, Fall 2010; *ASPJ in Chinese*, Winter 2010) clearly demonstrates how the US military is capable of identifying its own strategic shortcomings and being open enough to discuss remedies. Many Chinese readers perceive Americans as complacent in terms of language skills—the stereotype is that they generally do not bother to learn a second language. In contrast, Chinese students begin foreign language study at a very young age. By the time a student leaves college, he or she has earned a level-four English certificate. [Editor's note: This level of proficiency would satisfy most American universities' admission requirements for international students.] Thus, it appears that the average Chinese citizen (not just those in uniform) seemingly has far more advanced language skills than his or her US counterpart. This perception is wrong; therefore, I recom-

mend that those who have this impression read Colonel Conway's article.

Yes, almost everyone in China learns English. Although important, English is only one language, and there are a host of other languages that Chinese students could be studying. Unfortunately, China places little emphasis on teaching such languages. Colonel Conway indicates that in 2006, a total of 7,145 (US) students enrolled for Korean language instruction; the numbers are much higher for the other "less commonly taught languages" (table 2, p. 80). By comparison, China has far fewer individuals enrolled in non-English-language courses in both civilian colleges and the military.

Colonel Conway's article also mentions that the US Air Force offers no Air Force specialty codes for linguists and does not require foreign language qualifications for commissioning (p. 79). But it is my understanding that the United States is a nation of immigrants. Many US families (including military members) naturally speak English as well as their "mother tongue." Many of them are bilingual, with or without a language learned in school. It is only because the United States is pursuing global supremacy, which requires global military presence, that the US military has begun to feel the urgency for a talent reserve in less-used languages—hence, the "wake-up" call by Colonel Conway. When I look at the language map, few of China's neighboring countries use English; most of them speak the so-called less commonly taught languages. From a strategic point of view, if the US military has identified language skills as a serious deficiency, then the situation is much worse within the People's Liberation Army.

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