

The American Way of War through 2020

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Summary

A distinctive American Way of War emerged in the post-Cold War period as the United States engaged in nine sizable combat or near-combat (Haiti) operations, beginning with Panama in 1989, and continuing through Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003. This American Way of War is characterized by deliberate, sometimes agonizing, decision-making, careful planning, assembly and movement of “overwhelming” forces, the use of a combination of air and ground forces, joint and combined, applied with precision, especially by professional, well-trained military personnel. How this American Way of War resolves the situations is more problematic—resolution does not automatically flow from the capabilities applied.

A conjunction of events made this emergence of a tested American Way of War possible, including both the end of the Cold War and the kinds of situations that presented themselves and to which the U.S. eventually responded (especially with regard to Iraq and the former Yugoslavia).¹ There was considerable transformation of force developing during the Cold War during the post-Cold War period, as one compares Desert Storm in 1991 to “the major combat phase” of Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003.

The characteristics of the American Way of War can be summarized as follows:

1. Aside from Iraq and Afghanistan, the U.S. got involved for reasons particular to the situations, not because it was pursuing some grand strategy. If there was one element in common among most of them it was that the U.S. was in pursuit of an obnoxious leader.
2. The U.S. has been reactive, and deliberately so. That is, most of the situations in which it chose to engage in combat haven't arisen out of the blue, but have simmered for some time before U.S. intervention, nor has the U.S. reacted fast.

1. During the Cold War, the U.S. had engaged in major wars in Korea and Vietnam. The Korean War was, in a way, a continuation of World War II. The new American Way of War described in this paper can be characterized as “Not the Vietnam Way,” though why this is so won't be explored here. Lebanon in 1982-1983 was also a “not to be repeated” case. The “post-Cold War Way” might have started with Grenada in 1983 and the tanker war of 1987-1988 in the Persian Gulf, but we started our analysis with 1989.

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Scratch one myth—about the need for speed of response. Operation Iraqi Freedom was preemptive.

3. In most cases, the U.S. carefully planned the operation before it started. The cases where the planning was not so careful—Somalia and Kosovo—turned out to be the messiest. The regional Combat Commander (i.e., the Unified Commander) gets to do the planning. But this planning has been subject to intense and prolonged iteration with Washington, including at the political level.
4. The U.S. has generally sought international sanction for its operations—except for Panama. It has also sought coalition partners and other international support. This was true even for Operation Iraqi Freedom, though the depth of dedication to this effort has been questioned.
5. The U.S. has been remarkably successful in getting bases. This explodes the myth the access around the world is drying up. Of course, it takes hard diplomatic work, not always successful—we don't get everything or everywhere we ask for.
6. Operations tend to be under tight political control, in part because they have tended to be short. Political control also entails minimizing own casualties (which the U.S. military wants to do anyway, especially in the age of the All Volunteer Force) and avoiding collateral damage. Political sensitivities are reflected in this characteristic.
7. U.S. forces operate joint and combined. The operation is never given to just one service (though it was very heavy Army in Panama). The U.S. has preferred to use overwhelming force and not to enter operations piecemeal.
8. The most salient characteristic of the post-Cold War period is that the U.S. likes to lead with air strikes. It goes hand in glove with minimizing own casualties and, as strike capabilities have evolved, controlling collateral damage.
9. The “major combat phases” have tended to be rather short – even for Kosovo, which was the longest (78 days—though we didn't know that when we were in it). Peacekeeping has been a much longer affair—see #12 below.
10. But air strikes alone have proved insufficient to end or resolve conflicts. The experience of the 1990s has shown that either ground forces or diplomacy are needed to wrap up the conflict.
11. The U.S. has gotten to test and evolve its capabilities across these cases. Especially important has been the growing networking of capabilities, especially for air strikes.
12. The U.S. can't go home easily. It did for Panama, Haiti, and Somalia. But it has ended up with long residual operations for Iraq, Bosnia/Kosovo, and Afghanistan.

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Iraq has been particularly difficult, and one has to say that whatever it is called—from Phase 4 or Stabilization to Nation-Building—hadn't been part of the American Way of War.

Where the applications of this American Way of War may take place in the future is unknown. North Korea, China-Taiwan, India-Pakistan, and Iran, as well as various internal conflicts, are places that threaten war. Would all these cases still be threatening come 2020? The greatest unknown is how the Global War on Terror may proceed and how this American Way of War applies to it. However, with the lessons learned from experience, the sustainment of legacy forces and the continuous improvements in these forces, the capabilities of the American Way of War will remain available. Moreover, maintaining a strong military is rooted in American politics and America is a rich country that can afford it. Much depends, though, on the evolution of the world as a system and the conflicts that may punctuate that system on one hand, and the disposition at the political level in the United States to use the forces on the other hand.

Background

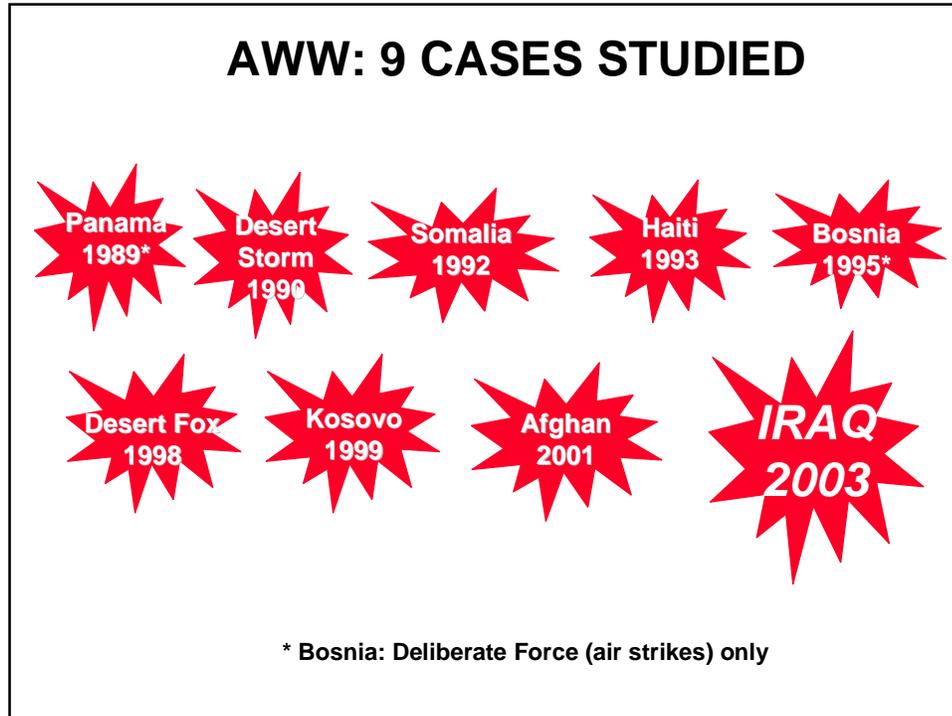
This paper was prepared for presentation at the conference on “the changing nature of warfare” sponsored by the National Intelligence Council. It was presented as part of Panel 2, on “What are the contemporary characteristics of war that are likely to persist into the future?” And further, “What are the characteristics of contemporary conflict that are likely to be consigned to the dustbin of history by 2020?” The panel was to focus on the last 15 years of conflict in order to assess what the “current way of war” was and reach judgments about how long-lived and relevant operational concepts that are current now may be in the future.

A new “American Way of War” emerged after the end of the Cold War, in successive combat experiences. The CNA Corporation examined the nine main cases of combat from 1989 through 2003 in which the U.S. was engaged, including the latest—Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF)—to discern its characteristics. War-fighting is, of course, at the core of what U.S. forces do. Around that core, we speak of some larger strategic functions, such as deterrence, presence, interaction with allies, and preparation for the future (currently referred to as “transformation”). Those factors provide the strategic contexts in which the American Way of War has been developed and exercised by successive U.S. administrations after the Cold War.

We examined the following situations to which the U.S. responded with combat forces: Panama in 1989, Desert Shield/Desert Storm in 1990/91, Somalia beginning in late 1992, Haiti in 1994, Bosnia in 1996 (the Deliberate Force air strikes only), the Desert Fox strikes on Iraq in 1998, Kosovo in 1999, Afghanistan beginning in

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October 2001, and Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003.² Our objectives were (a) to discern the characteristics of the American Way of War and (b) to illustrate transformational operations or capabilities that became manifest during these combat experiences.



We examined these situations empirically: how the U.S. got into the situations, how it sought and obtained international sanction (or did not), how it assembled the forces, how it conducted combat, and how it got out of the situation—or didn't. The front and back ends—how the U.S. got into the situation and how it picked up the pieces afterwards—are extremely important for assessing the strategic effect of operations. Many assessments of the American Way of War have concentrated on the tactical operations without covering the broader political and strategic considerations. Our study did not delve into the long history of America at war, the individual services' dreams and plans, Joint Vision 2020, or other theoretical writings as to what the American Way of War “ought” to be. Our description of the American Way of War is not concerned with contingency plans or abstract scenarios. Rather, it concentrates on actual combat experience in the post-Cold War period.

2. We did not include the retaliatory strikes against Sudan and Afghanistan after the embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania. We also omitted all peace enforcement operations (since they technically don't involve combat as such) and the limited Tomahawk cruise missiles strikes against Iraq in 1993 and 1996.

A Little History

Many of the capabilities we now see as part of the American Way of War, from PGMs to AWACS to GPS to Stealth, were initially developed during the Cold War. They had been developed in part because, in the competition with the Soviet Union, and especially in the European context, the U.S. figured that quality could offset the presumed Soviet superiority in numbers. But the U.S. also feared that the Soviets might surprise the world with new technologies, as it had most dramatically with the launch of the Sputnik satellite in 1957. The U.S. wanted to stay ahead in the technological competition.

At the beginning of the 1980s, the U.S. also began to fear that the Soviets would be more clever in their utilization of new capabilities, as revealed in Soviet discussions in the early 1980s of “the military-technological revolution” (MTR) and its combination with Operational Maneuver Groups (OMG)—notwithstanding that the Soviet economy and empire were beginning to collapse at about the same time and in fact these innovations were indications of the weakness they felt (which the U.S. only realized later). About the same time, some in the U.S. were devising the Air-Land Battle doctrine, which was meant to take advantage of new capabilities to strike Soviet and other Warsaw Pact forces in their rear echelons, not just in defense against assault on the front lines.

The emergence of the All-Volunteer (professional) Force after the experience of Vietnam also contributed to the new American Way of War. It reinforced the American cultural tendency to remain ready by carefully selecting people and training them intensively. The payoff in people came in Desert Storm, where, as Stephen Biddle has shown, the “synergistic interaction of skill and technology” accounted for much more than the performance of superior weapons themselves.³

During the last half of the Cold War, the U.S. didn't have much chance to practice these emerging capabilities in real combat. It didn't consider Vietnam a test case—indeed, the American Way of War that emerged might well be described as “the anti-Vietnam way.” Grenada was too small and messy, though it pointed to the need for improvements in command and control and jointness. U.S. involvement in Lebanon and its dénouement in the bombing of the Marine barracks was an accident, an almost inadvertent involvement—and a main stimulus for jointness, according to the authors of the Goldwater-Nichols revision of the defense legislation. For an understanding of intensive conventional warfare, the U.S. relied heavily on Israel's experience in the 1973 war and in its subsequent air and anti-tank operations against Syria in the Bekaa

3. Stephen Biddle, “Victory Misunderstood: What the Gulf War Tells Us about the Future of Conflict,” *International Security*, Vol. 21, No.2 (Fall 1996), pp. 139-179).

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Valley in 1982 (for example, it learned how some Soviet systems (SA-6, MiG-25, T-72) could be defeated and was able to recalibrate ammunition consumption rates likely to be encountered in intensive armored combat).

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War may have given the U.S. more latitude to intervene in the Gulf area and the Balkans. The Soviet Union under Gorbachev and Shevardnadze was quite cooperative with the U.S. in 1990-1991. Saddam might have thought the Soviets were still behind him, and he probably still did until the U.S. overthrew his regime 12 years later in Operation Iraqi Freedom. It may have been that fear of the Soviets kept Tito's Yugoslavia together, but most observers said that the country was bound to fall apart upon Tito's death, and it did—but it took nine years after that for it to happen. If Yugoslavia had fallen apart while the Soviet Union still existed, it is unclear whether Western intervention would have been possible or might have resulted in some kind of clash with the Soviets if it were attempted.

Post-Cold War Context

The end of the Cold War may well have had a liberating effect on both operational innovation and innovative use of systems that had entered the inventory during the Cold War. The U.S. no longer had to fear that it would reveal classified capabilities to the Soviets. Moreover, there was no fear that the Soviets would intervene or that U.S. and allied operations might escalate to either regional or global war.⁴ U.S. policy-makers did not seem concerned about weakening deterrence elsewhere in the world—even though in Desert Storm and Operation Iraqi Freedom a substantial portion of the total of U.S. forces was brought to bear. Restrictions on the use of “black programs” developed to defeat Soviet systems were lifted and regional commanders were free to employ virtually any conventional capability—including those, like JSTARS, still under development.

Perhaps the most salient change in the strategic environment that prompted U.S. combat interventions was taking place coincidentally at about the same that the Cold War ended: the enervation and collapse of post-colonial leaderships. Noriega in Panama, the Duvaliers in Haiti, and Siad Barré in Somalia were representative. The death of Tito and the rise of Milosevic and the collapse of the monarchy in Afghanistan also signaled the end of old regimes. Earlier, in 1979, the fall of the Shah of Iran was also representative of the end of an era. These failures of governance set new conditions for conflict. Perhaps some of these leaders were sustained for too

4. There was a minor possibility of a clash with the Russians upon their independent intervention in Kosovo—that is, their dash from Bosnia to the Pristina airfield, after the truce with Serbia had been agreed upon.

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long in office by the Cold War, but in any case, they all lost their capabilities to govern. We also saw classic aggression by one of the six rogue nations in the world—Iraq.⁵

The post-Cold War strategic environment, and its reflection in continuing U.S. military involvement around the world, was much broader than the instances of combat we studied. U.S. forces spent only 6 percent of the time in intense combat operations in the nine cases across nearly 14 years.⁶ And most of these combat operations involved only a small portion of the forces. The exceptions were Desert Storm and Operation Iraqi Freedom, and in the air commitment over Kosovo.⁷

The American Way of War as it Emerged had the Following Main Characteristics:

- 1. With the exception of Iraq and the pursuit of al Qaeda in Afghanistan, the U.S. got involved for reasons particular to the situations, not because it was pursuing some grand strategy.** If there was one element in common among most of them it was that the U.S. was in pursuit of an obnoxious leader. These leaders have all proven to be elusive: Noriega disappeared for a few days; it took 8 months to discover Saddam Hussein; Osama bin Laden, Mullah Omar, Dr. Karadzic, and General Mladic still have not been found and arrested; and Aidid was not captured. Only Cedras in Haiti was forced into exile. Milosevic was eventually turned over by his own people for trial in The Hague as a war criminal. Nevertheless, all these leaders lost their power or their base of operations as a result of U.S. interventions.
- 2. Until Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), the U.S. was reactive, and took the time to thoroughly deliberate whether to intervene. OIF was the expression of a preemptive strategy, but was itself deliberated within the Administration for a year and a half.** Most of the situations in which the U.S.

5. The six rogues are Iraq, Iran, North Korea, Libya, Syria, and Cuba. Syria and Cuba have long been neutralized, but now Syria is under pressure from the U.S. as a spillover from the war in Iraq. Qaddafi has put Libya on the sidelines for the moment. Milosevic was a rogue, and is now being tried in The Hague.

6. See W. Eugene Cobble, H. H. Gaffney, and Dmitry Gorenburg, *For the Record: All U.S. Forces' Responses to Situations, 1970-2000*, CNA Information Memorandum (CIM) D0008414.A1/Final, June 2003.

7. Not included in this study of the American Way of War are the peacekeeping operations in Bosnia (IFOR/SFOR) and Kosovo (KFOR), the long Northern Watch and Southern Watch policing of the no-fly zones over Iraq, which involved sporadic exchanges of fire, especially from 1998 to 2003, and the maritime interception operation against Iraqi smuggling in the Gulf.

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chose to engage in combat did not come out of the blue. Rather, they had simmered for some time before U.S. intervention. Nor has the U.S. reacted in undue haste. In most cases, the U.S. carefully planned the operation before it started. The cases where the planning was not so careful—Somalia and Kosovo—turned out to be the messiest. In all cases, the regional Combat Commander (previously called the Unified Commander) got to do the planning. But this planning was subject to intense and prolonged iteration with Washington, especially at the policy level. This is not surprising, considering that most of the situations had a high political sensitivity, especially since many were not viewed as critical to U.S. national security. Only the two wars involving Iraq and the retaliation against Afghanistan for harboring al Qaeda have been thought to be strategically critical.

- 3 **The U.S. generally sought international approval and cooperation for its operations.** This might have been in the UN Security Council, or in the NATO forum. Sometimes it relied on existing UN resolutions, as for the Desert Fox strikes on Iraq in 1998. It also sought and obtained support from other countries for Operation Iraqi Freedom, but could not obtain enough support in the UN Security Council for a second resolution that explicitly authorized the use of force. Operation Just Cause in Panama (1989) was the only situation for which the U.S. did not seek international approval.⁸
- 4 **Given the great distances from the U.S. to the situations in the Gulf area, Afghanistan, and the Horn of Africa, it was remarkably successful in getting access to bases in those areas.** This suggests that the assertion that gaining access around the world is increasingly difficult may be a myth. Of course, it has taken hard diplomatic work to gain access with the countries in the area, and it is not always totally successful—the U.S. didn't get everything or everywhere it asked for, and sometimes the host country placed restrictions on U.S. operations (e.g., it did not get Turkish approval for the transit of U.S. ground forces for Operation Iraqi Freedom, but it did have essential bases on the Gulf side and eventually got air transit rights over Turkey). For Operation Just Cause in Panama, the U.S. still had bases in Panama. Haiti was close enough to the U.S., and NATO bases were available to support coalition air operations over Bosnia and Kosovo.
- 5 **Operations tended to be under tight political control,** in part because the combat situations have tended to be resolved or otherwise ended in a relatively

8. Given the Monroe Doctrine, the U.S. has reserved the right to intervene in the Western Hemisphere without further international sanction. However, for the Grenada invasion, the U.S. lined up the agreement of the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS).

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short time before they could become routine and authorities delegated downward. Reachback capabilities have improved so much that Washington and the Combatant Commander's headquarters had a much clearer picture of the operation. This not only enabled tight control, but also engendered confidence that activities in the field were being conducted according to plan and within the limits established by both political leadership and the Combatant Commander. Political control also entailed minimizing own casualties (which the U.S. military wants to do in any case, especially in the age of the All-Volunteer Force where trained manpower is valuable) and avoiding collateral damage. Most operations involved political debate in Washington, and thus the political leadership had to remain on top of them (perhaps the least contentious was the retaliation in Afghanistan for the 9/11 attacks in the United States).

- 6 Operations were joint and combined.** They were never assigned to just one service (though the operation in Panama was carried out mostly by U.S. Army personnel). The U.S. preferred to use overwhelming force and not to enter operations piecemeal. One exception may have been Somalia, which was a classic case of “mission creep” and changing command relationships, including confusion between U.S. and UN control. Jointness was reinforced by the fact that all these combat experiences involved U.S. forces operating in a relatively confined geographical space—piling into one spot, as it were, raising the risk of fratricide and thus requiring careful deconfliction and coordination, and also opening up the possibility of greater synergistic effects. This was in contrast to the “American Way of War” envisaged against the Soviet Union during the Cold War, where the scenarios envisaged were global and the forces were expected to be dispersed and stretched in the event of war. Of course, most of the capabilities that characterize the American Way of War in the post-Cold War period were developed for the density of a prospective conflict in central Europe.
- 7 Before Operation Iraqi Freedom, the most salient characteristic of the American Way of War in the post-Cold War period was that the U.S. led with air strikes, that is, where the situation lent itself to that option and where the U.S. was reluctant to use its own ground forces.** Establishing air superiority and leading with air strikes has been dominant in U.S. strategic culture since World War II, and was the essence of the Nixon Doctrine of around 1970 (where allies would provide the bulk of ground forces and the U.S. had unique and substantial air capabilities). In the new era, it goes hand-in-hand with minimizing own casualties and, given the precision with which strikes can be applied, controlling collateral damage.
- 8 In both Desert Storm and Operation Iraqi Freedom, the combination of air and ground forces represented the full flowering of the American Way of War.** Simultaneous air and ground campaigns characterized World War II,

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Korea, Vietnam, and would have reached new intensities if NATO and the Warsaw Pact had ever gone to war in Central Europe. However, there has been a constant complaint by the U.S. Army that close air support had not been quite realized, in the sense of that close and timely coordination that would permit air weapons to be dropped very close to the U.S. ground forces.⁹ The combination of air and ground devastated Iraqi forces in Desert Storm—but had been led by 39 days of air strikes. New twists to air support of ground forces had been demonstrated in the Afghanistan. In Operation Iraqi Freedom, the U.S. achieved its closest coordination yet of air and ground operations, but there are still difficulties.

- 9 Air strikes proved insufficient by themselves to end or resolve conflicts.** The experience of the post-Cold War period showed that either ground forces or diplomacy are needed to wrap up the conflict. Diplomacy can be problematic from the military point of view—it's not like a planned, coordinated military campaign leading to predictable results. But diplomacy averted combat in Haiti and led to peace in both Bosnia and Kosovo.
- 10 The U.S. had the opportunity to test and evolve its war-fighting capabilities across these cases.** In effect, the frequent short episodes of combat permitted U.S. forces to test and experiment in battle with new systems and concepts. These included the assembly and delivery of forces to the area of combat and logistic support at the front and back ends. Especially important was the growing networking of capabilities, especially for air strikes, and involving tactical use of satellite relays. But the U.S. did not get involved in these situations simply to get war-fighting experience—it engaged in most of them only with the greatest reluctance.
- 11. U.S. forces couldn't go home easily.** They did leave Panama, Haiti, and Somalia—after several months. But they were saddled with long residual operations for Iraq, Bosnia/Kosovo, and Afghanistan. The follow-on military operations after Desert Storm were particularly prolonged: 12 years of the Maritime Interception Operation (MIO) in the Gulf and the Northern Watch and Southern Watch policing of no-fly zones over Iraq. Now, after “the major combat phase of” Operation Iraqi Freedom, U.S. forces and other U.S. agencies face the longest occupation since those in Germany and Japan after World War II.

9. The U.S. Marine Corps, with its organic air, feels that it has better air-ground coordination for close air support.

As it has Emerged, the American Way of War has been Based on the Mix of, inter alia:

- **A belief in technological superiority.** While this belief was ingrained in American culture as the nation developed its economy, it became an “article of faith” on the military side of U.S. affairs during the competition with the Soviet Union---in part to compensate for perceived numerical military inferiorities.
- **The importance of air dominance.** This was one of the highest realizations for the United States in its pursuit of technological superiority. Both in World War II and the Cold War, it was seen as a way to project power speedily across great distances and as a unique American contribution to allied forces.
- **The importance of having highly capable people in the U.S. armed forces.** This is also ingrained in American culture, including its emphasis on training. It has achieved its military realization in the All-Volunteer Force.
- **Dominance of “the commons,”** i.e. sea, air, space. This is necessary in the first place because the U.S. has had to move across the oceans to wherever it enters combat and would not want to be hindered en route. During actual combat, the U.S. has relied on satellites, air superiority, and immunity for its rear area facilities and operating areas, including the sea. It was challenged in the maritime commons by mines and the threat of air and cruise missile attacks in Desert Storm, but has not been threatened since. In Iraq and the former Yugoslavia, its air superiority was challenged by older Soviet air defense systems. The U.S. put considerable effort into their suppression. In the cases studied, the U.S. has not been challenged in space.
- **The centrality of accurate firepower.** This has been an ages-old military goal, that is, to be more effective in destroying enemy forces. In the cases studied, the U.S. has demonstrated great efficiency in firepower through technological advances. These advances have also permitted greater economy of force. An additional benefit of the accuracy of firepower is less collateral damage—though this has also brought higher expectations that collateral damage would be minimized.
- **The ability to synthesize all the forces and capabilities,** i.e., through jointness and networking, given the concentration of forces and the need to maintain direction and control.

Many Elements of Transformation were Progressively Demonstrated in the Nine Combat Situations

Elements of transformation, as we currently understand the term, were exercised in each of the nine case studies. These elements include direction and control of the operation, innovations in the use of existing systems, and the use of new systems. In each case, we examined the contributions of these transformations to the efficiency of the operation, the overall success of the operation itself, and to the resolution of the situation.

The U.S. has believed in applying overwhelming force to solve a situation—a concept that might be regarded as “something more than might otherwise be considered appropriate.” The current administration is now referring to the concept as “overmatching force.” In the cases we examined, U.S. operations tended to be well-planned and economical in the forces assembled, committed to the operation, and supported.

- Desert Storm was perhaps the least efficient, in that the plans were to build up to a force matching the size of the Iraqi army and to support the ground forces with 30 days worth of ammunition prior to launching the counterattack into Kuwait. In the event, and unknown to the U.S. there were large numbers of desertions on the Iraqi side prior to the combat phase. The U.S. ground forces used only 1.5 days of ammunition against opposition that was in retreat.
- The less-well-planned operations—Somalia and Kosovo—involved a series of changes in both the forces committed and the objectives of the operations. But while Somalia turned into a mess once mission creep set in, the Kosovo operation saw progressive advancement in the efficient use of airpower, both in selecting and attacking targets and in controlling collateral damage.
- In any case, the most visible growth in efficiency through transformation was in airpower. This was a product of the networking of air capabilities (greater inclusion of naval air, for instance) and the availability of PGMs (Precision-Guided Munitions, to include Tomahawk). The U.S. and its coalition partners were also able to restrict own casualties in ways unprecedented in history.

Most of the nine operations were successfully conducted in terms of bringing major combat to a conclusion in a relatively short time. The main enemies defeated were Iraq and the Taliban. Both had pre-war mystiques (based on Iraq’s equipment on one hand and the Afghans successful guerrilla war against Soviet forces) that were demolished quickly by U.S. technology, efficiency, and utter domination of the information sphere—to the surprise of those enemies. In both cases, however, insurgencies continue. In the cases of Bosnia and Kosovo, the Serbs were tougher to crack, in part because the U.S. and its allies were reluctant to send in combat ground

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troops against them. The instruments that ultimately caused the Serbs to recede from the battlefields were political and diplomatic.¹⁰

Finally, total resolution of situations—in the sense of completely restoring order, getting economies functioning, and achieving stability of political leadership—proved difficult, despite the transformations in U.S. war-fighting capabilities. As noted earlier, obnoxious leaders proved difficult to track down, however good the transformation in U.S. eavesdropping and Special Forces capabilities have become. Residual operations after the two wars with Iraq were and are prolonged. U.S. and other NATO forces and civilian authorities must still maintain the peace in Bosnia and Kosovo. However, the awesome efficiency of U.S. forces removed the proximate threats in each of the cases we examined, opening up the opportunities for peaceful evolution in each of the countries involved.

The operations against Iraq were the only two comprehensive operations undertaken by U.S. forces and their allies, as they involved air, ground, naval (though mostly naval aviation), and Special Forces elements, supported by extensive and improved command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (C4ISR).

This American Way of War is now part of the legacy. It will persist and be improved upon—transformed as it were. Though I must say, the old abstract Cold War myth of “lighter, faster” keeps intruding. I’m not quite sure why—but it flows out of the old expectation of Soviet surprise attack. “Lighter, faster” does not flow out of the experience of the American Way of War as I laid it out.

Is the Past a Prologue?

U.S. combat operations from 1989 to 2003 have been a proving ground that has established an American Way of War of a certain character, as outlined earlier. The cases we examined—in which the circumstances necessitated combat—enabled the American Way of War to be developed more rapidly and realistically than exercises might have permitted before (although the earlier development of doctrines, practice of tactics, and training on equipment, including at the National Training Center in the California desert, contributed greatly to the successes of the forces). In virtually every case, new or improved concepts, capabilities, and command arrangements were employed with some degree of success. Over the period commanders were willing to

10. There is a myth among some that a threat of attack by ground forces caused Milosevic to give up on Kosovo. There is no evidence from Milosevic to this effect. Rather, he said that he gave up because of NATO solidarity and Russian betrayal. NATO bombed Chernomyrdin to the table.

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test new systems still in development—UAVs and JSTARS, for example. The progress of the evolving American Way of War came about largely because U.S. forces were used so frequently in combat in this period.

We can expect that the American Way of War will continue to evolve—to transform—over the next 16 years through 2020. The ongoing global war on terrorism will provide some particular challenges for the adaptation of the forces, since the enemy is so dispersed and irregular. Less certain may be the need to conduct large-scale and comprehensive combat operations on the order of Desert Storm or Operation Iraqi Freedom; one always worries about North Korea, but they haven't attacked since 1950. Second, the long-term commitments facing U.S. ground forces in Iraq and Afghanistan suggest that additional operations involving substantial ground forces cannot be undertaken in any case until U.S. ground forces have fully left Iraq and have recovered and possibly unless the U.S. Army and U.S. Marine Corps personnel are increased. It is worth noting here that Afghanistan has still not been pacified.

On the other hand, U.S. air and naval forces will continue to be available to conduct the sorts of operations that the U.S. and its allies conducted over Bosnia, Kosovo, in Desert Fox against Iraq, and, with the aid of a few forward air controllers on the ground, in Afghanistan. Indeed, at one point, the pattern of air strikes (albeit often coupled with local ground forces, which do not represent “transformation” as such) appeared to be the dominant characteristic of the American Way of War. The deterrent value of this demonstrated air power is not to be underestimated. How this would be relevant in the global war on terrorism, though, is not clear.

Operation Iraqi Freedom knocked out the major rogue enemy the U.S. had confronted and may have created a dramatically new strategic situation in the cockpit of the world—the Persian Gulf area—and thus perhaps for the whole world, assuming Iraq emerges as a stable and secular state, which is difficult to predict at this time (May 2004). In the meantime, Libya has decided to give up its WMD program-related activities and not to buy military equipment from the other rogues.

The most serious state enemies that remain are Iran and North Korea, especially as they develop and build nuclear weapons and missiles with which to deliver them. The two countries are otherwise contained. Iran and North Korea also do not lend themselves easily to the preemptive application of the American Way of War—Iran's population is large, its territory vast, and its capital far inland, while North Korea would devastate Seoul before being subdued. Syria also continues to be a rogue state. Syria apparently has chemical warfare capabilities and may be weaponizing Scud and No Dong-type ballistic missiles with chemical warheads. But Syria has been contained by Israel and has followed more benign foreign policies than the “Axis of

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Evil” states, although it still supports the terrorist Hezbollah in Lebanon and appears to be an avenue for terrorists to enter Iraq.

Some people also wonder whether the U.S. would ever again face as militarily incompetent an enemy as Iraq—yet the few armies, air forces, and air defenses the U.S. might face come essentially from the same Soviet mold that the Iraqi military came from. They have the same equipment, now vastly outdated, the same bad training regimens, and the same hierarchical, initiative-stifling, politicized command structures. And they have troubled economies. The collapse of the Soviet Union has eliminated the free distribution of military equipment from that source, though much still lies around the landscape, as demonstrated in Iraq.¹¹ Moreover, the collapse of the Soviet Union demonstrates that big military programs may well ruin economies.

The possibility of conflict with China over unification with Taiwan also remains an unresolved issue that is likely to persist well into the future. So long as the U.S. remains committed to defending Taiwan from an unprovoked Chinese attack and so long as China is unwilling to forego the use of force, the bleak cloud of conflict will be present. Unlike the forces in North Korea and Iran, the Chinese military is improving, thanks to a rapidly growing Chinese economy. How “the American Way of War” as described in this paper would be applied in a battle over Taiwan is an interesting question.

Beyond those problems with other states lies the whole global war on terror. Al Qaeda and the offshoots it has inspired are a much more diffuse, shadowy enemy, which may take a whole different kind of American Way of War, except if the U.S. were to retaliate in those states in which the terrorists attempted to establish a base as they did in Afghanistan. Instead, any combat against the global terrorists is more likely to involve U.S. Special Forces or other covert operations and the exercise of non-military capabilities and operations of a law enforcement nature, plus the continued attempts to dry up their financial resources. A larger task, which goes beyond the capabilities for the American Way of War described here, is that of getting at the root causes of terrorism through reform in the countries from which they have originated. Achieving peace between the Israelis and Palestinians is also necessary.

There is also the festering problem of insurgency combined with narcotics traffic in Colombia.

11. While the Soviet Union ostensibly transferred military equipment under loan agreements to countries ostensibly with cash (e.g., Algeria, Libya, Iraq), the loans have never been paid back, and Russia has despaired of every collecting on the loans. Cheap Chinese equipment is still on the market.

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The exercise of the American Way of War in the period 1989-2003 has resulted in fundamental strategic improvements: the removal of Saddam Hussein's threat to peace and stability in the Middle East, the removal of the Al Qaeda terror base in Afghanistan, and the end of the most serious remaining conflicts in Europe (i.e., those in the former Yugoslavia). Each of these situations still requires the internal restoration of governance and economies, but they no longer pose strategic threats.

The nine combat experiences in which the U.S. engaged since 1989 provided real-world validation of the transformation of U.S. forces' capabilities. The successful application of military force in these situations may presage future successes, depending on the maintenance of trained and ready forces, the circumstances, deliberation at the political level, reasonably careful planning at the command level, and a willingness to exploit the new capabilities that have been delivered to the forces. Thus, the template of the American Way of War that has emerged in the post-Cold War era suggests that the past is prologue—at least as far as the way the U.S. may contemplate the use of its forces in actual conflicts. Whether situations comparable to the nine we have examined may arise and whether a U.S. administration may find it necessary to use the forces remains to be seen.

Even if opportunities for the kind of combat demonstrated in the American Way of War do not arise, the development of that way of war and the transformation of U.S. capabilities that made it possible are likely to have an impact around the world. Beyond Iran, North Korea, Syria, the global terrorists, and Colombia lies the whole issue of whether the U.S. can dissuade possible future military competitors from entering arms races with the United States. The American Way of War as we have described it in this paper has proven capabilities difficult for any other country to duplicate, especially given the large U.S. defense budget and the large amount (\$64 billion proposed for fiscal year 2005) that it tends to spend on research and development (R&D).

While some say that other countries—unspecified, but some suggest China—may try to emulate U.S. capabilities, the development and sustainment of U.S. capabilities may also have a dissuasive effect. That is, emulation of the American combination of political direction, organization, technology, practice, and trained and motivated career personnel would be difficult. This is a cultural question, it takes time, and it may take a country some failures in actual combat experience to find out what works and what doesn't—and whether it has a taste for war. The next 16 years might not be sufficient for such emulation to be achieved, even if attempted, but the indications of any progress may be evident by 2020.

Looking Out to 2020

What of the U.S. military Legacy may well Persist

The U.S. has come out of its post-Cold War historical experience, that is, its grounding in combat, with:

- **A big professional force.** The experience of the Cold War made the U.S. fear demobilizing (or at least very much). Moreover, U.S. volunteer personnel have established careers in the military that U.S. leadership wishes to sustain. At the same time, the personnel burden is not large: only one half of one percent of the population is in uniform, representing less than one percent of the work force.
- **An expeditionary and logistics character,** originally developed for World War II, but now even more efficient in its airlift and specialized sealift. This would be affected only by a massive shift of military resources to homeland defense following a new devastating assault by the terrorists.
- **Leading technology.** It's in the U.S. nature, reinforced by the Cold War and the fear of surprise Soviet advances in technology. This fear persists. "To stay ahead of a putative peer competitor" is still the main driver of U.S. military transformation, though many in the U.S. also speak enviously of what they see as more aggressive innovation and risk-taking in private industry.
- **High readiness.** This goes with being expeditionary, that is, having to deploy long distances to fight and the time that entails. It also derives from the old fear of Soviet surprise attack. Moreover, U.S. forces find that it's essential to keep its volunteer personnel busy and training at their skills, lest they leave for more active employment.
- **A strong tendency to jointness.** Experience in operations is practically the only way to bring all the services together. Otherwise, the individual services tend to go their own way, inventing their own worlds and enemies to fight.
- **Military strength rooted in U.S. politics.** Neither party can look soft on defense. Moreover, the U.S. military establishment is the most respected institution in America (Abu Ghraib notwithstanding).

Some might see this ready, expeditionary war capability as a temptation for aggression and empire-seeking. Iraq might be cited as an example, but, given the failure there to find WMD and connections to al Qaeda and the quagmire resulting from U.S. attempts to stabilize the country, it looks as if Iraq was a one-off exercise of this preemptive doctrine. If the U.S. really had good intelligence on North Korea's

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or Iran's nuclear capabilities, it might still preemptively attack them. But conquest of a whole country is another matter.

The U.S. public doesn't like going to war, nor does Congress, though Congress's ability to restrain the executive may be waning. War is also costly, and operations both use up equipment and squeeze the funds available for new equipment—which may represent a dilution of the transformation that could otherwise be pursued in quieter times. There is also a feeling in the U.S. that involvement deep in a place like Iraq leaves the country unready for some rogue to take advantage of U.S. distraction—notwithstanding that North Korea has passed up innumerable such opportunities for the last 50 years. Finally, the prolonged occupation of Iraq and its drain on the family-oriented volunteer military personnel may cause difficulties for recruitment, both for active and reserve components, in the near future.

What this says is that this American Way of War I have described is neither the totality of defense efforts or of foreign policy. Rather, it is only the “battle” portion of it, as Lt. Col. Echevarria of the Army War College described it in a recent pamphlet. The American Way of War is thus not “grand strategy.” And the people immersed in it do not do economics. The unfolding of the world through 2020 is going to be mostly about economics.

There are more ways to nudge the world in a positive way toward 2020 than with the American Way of War. Some of us speak now more of horizontal scenarios than the punctuated vertical scenarios. The global war on terror will be a horizontal scenario, punctuated not by war or even battles, but by incidents. But the U.S. is not going to manage this world evolution just with the American Way of War.

In Projecting the Persistence of U.S. Forces and the American Way of War to 2020, Much Depends on the Evolution of the World

The big trends in security affairs in the world may well continue:

- **The decline of state-on-state warfare.** And it is not clear what country would want to take on “the American Way of War.”
- **The decline and obsolescence of classic military establishments,** as in Russia. Part of this is due to the absence of threats. More important is economics (as Putin says). In the globalization era, the state's role in economics is (a) not to kill the golden goose that is expanding the economy by taxing too much (again, see Putin), and (b) to provide housing, health care, education, and pensions, especially as populations age. Those who dream about a new era of warfare are never economists. The dissuasive effects of America's persistent sustainment of the capabilities of the American Way of War play here.

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- **The decline in the number of internal conflicts**, however intense some may be and however much some are never solved (e.g., Colombia). Old conflicts die out, and new ones arise, but overall the numbers are declining. This trend would have to be reversed. The U.S. has been reluctant to intervene in such situations—it only intervened in four of the 37 internal conflicts counted across the 1990s (Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia, Kosovo), and Somalia was not a very effective demonstration of the American Way of War. In any case, the full capabilities of the American Way of War would not come to bear during an intervention in an internal conflict. Whether the prolonged “stabilization” phase of Operation Iraqi Freedom leads to lessons learned, better pre-planning, and other kinds of capabilities in the American Way of War remains to be seen, but it was not part of the nine cases we studied. The U.S. is only now learning those lessons.
- **As an opposite trend so far, the growth and dispersion of Islamic global terrorists** now seems to be the major threat to global security. This may be arising from the major structural deficiency in world globalization—the inability of the Islamic states to accommodate their surging populations yet being in such close proximity to the advanced world that the populations feel those pressures.

The specific situations we know about that could either be resolved or drag on through 2020 include:

- **North Korean and Iranian proliferation.** We keep hoping that North Korea will simply collapse and that the populace will grow tired of the mullahs in Iran and toss them out of office in a new revolution. The outside world seems to have little effect on either evolution.
- **We worry about a war between India and Pakistan**, one which escalates to the use of nuclear weapons. So do they. India may be undergoing healthy economic growth, but, as their election just showed, the growth is not getting down to enough of the poor people—the 800 million villagers. Pakistan is close to being a failed state. A favorite U.S. military planning scenario is going into South Asia to restore order after a nuclear exchange. But if the U.S. doesn’t have enough resources to police Iraq, it doesn’t have enough to handle 50 times the population.

China may be the real wild card in all this, though, as Arthur Waldron says, the country itself is the Chinese leadership’s real wild card.¹² At the moment, the Chinese economy may be overheating, and yet they have still not created enough jobs to absorb layoffs from reforming state-owned enterprises (SOEs) or to absorb the 200 million people that are currently floating between village and city. In the meantime,

12. Remarks at the Kluge Center, Library of Congress, December 4, 2003.

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the PLA obsesses about Taiwan and is benefiting from the growth in the economy to improve its forces.

Aside from the general evolution of conflicts and the particularly worrisome situations, we might worry about the availability of energy resources through 2020 on one hand and such afflictions as AIDS on the other. It is not clear how these would result in warfare nor the relevance of the American Way of War.

Much also Depends on the Evolution of U.S. Politics and Policies

The maintenance and use in warfare of “the American Way of War” is not an objective inevitability. It is not detached from U.S. political leadership and their political choices. All these uses and development of the American Way of War are subject to political decisions. The administration in power rules.

The U.S. polity is now debating:

- How to prosecute the global war on terror. If there is a next catastrophic terrorist attack in the U.S., we could see a huge shift of defense resources to homeland defense.
- At the other end of the spectrum is the challenge of nation-building, for which I suspect the U.S. nation doesn't have quite the guts or resources to undertake. Defense is basically a domestic program, related mostly rhetorically to foreign policy (it makes us feel strong).

There is a good deal of discussion in the United States these days about the roots and evolution of U.S. foreign policy and U.S. propensity to use force. This discussion even includes observations that the U.S. has historically had a propensity to take preemptive action, though perhaps neglecting to note that such action, until Iraq, was confined to the Caribbean and Central America (the Monroe Doctrine).¹³ It is also said that the U.S. has tendency to unilateralism, again neglecting to mention that it has much to do with the Monroe Doctrine. Rather, as a democracy, the U.S. has tended to be reactive, and to react only after long and painful deliberations. From World War II on, it has sought to form alliances and coalitions for any actions. The question lies in the balance between internal U.S. debate on one hand and early consultation with allies in order to solicit inputs to that debate and to garner support (“sharing the burden”) on the other hand.

In the first place, Iraq may be exhausting the U.S., or at least, as many say, come close to “breaking U.S. ground forces” (Army and Marines). In any case, it is

13. John Lewis Gaddis, *Surprise, Security, and the American Experience* (Harvard University Press, 2004).

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uncertain right now (May 2004) as to when the U.S. can substantially reduce its forces in Iraq and when thereafter the forces can be reconstituted (i.e., their equipment restored and their training resumed).

Unless there were another Iraq-type situation requiring that the U.S. invade a country harboring terrorists, it would not appear that the global war on terror would place a huge demand on U.S. Defense Department resources—unless a catastrophic terrorist incident in the U.S. were to lead to a huge switch of those resources to homeland defense. Whatever the case, that would send “the American Way of War” off in quite another direction.

At the other end of the spectrum, some in the U.S. have suggested that the U.S. might have to engage in much more “nation-building” to “drain the swamp” in which terrorists breed. This would either entail reducing fighting forces and increasing constabulary forces, or some large shift of funds to other U.S. government agencies. Aside from whether nation-building is even practical, such a switch is likely to encounter fierce political resistance in the U.S., either to do it or to shift the resources to other agencies. In any case, nation-building is not what we have considered to be “the American Way of War,” which still implies quick resolution of a conflict and thus quick return of U.S. forces back to their home bases.

The U.S. military is strongly supported in U.S. politics, so its budget is not likely to decline for a few years at least. But as 2020 approaches, the U.S. may well be facing a continuing budget deficit and greatly increased outlays for Social Security and Medicare as the population ages. This could put a squeeze on the defense budget, though not substantial cuts (given U.S. politics), unless there were some kind of national or global financial disaster. The effects of a squeeze, and depending also on the costs of continuing operations and the inevitably rising costs of new equipment, could be some reduction in force structure numbers. The U.S. still fears the emergence of some new “peer competitor” replacing the Soviet Union and exhibiting some new technological innovations, so that, faced with a trade-off between new systems and maintaining force structure, it would probably prefer the new systems.

Some Broad Alternatives for U.S. Forces Through 2020

So what are the big bracketing alternative paths—not for the world, but for the American Way of War within the world?

1. **A simple evolutionary momentum, rooted in the continuing support emerging from U.S. politics.** The U.S. sustains this kind of force, which nonetheless shrinks in numbers as the budget levels off because of the deficit and the bills to support an aging population and yet new systems cost much more as the U.S. continues the quest for more quality (just as in the Cold War).

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- 2 **A huge shift of defense resources to homeland defense**, following an atrocious and catastrophic terrorist incident—which also causes the U.S. to retreat from the world. This would also entail shifting resources to domestic security agencies out of DOD.
- 3 Contrariwise, **a huge shift of national security resources to nation-building**: economic, on governance, and peacekeeping. This also would involve shifting funds from DOD to AID and other international agencies.
- 4 **“The System Administrator” force**: lots of professional military cooperation around the world, including coordinated interventions in failing states.

One trouble is that the current DOD planning system appears to be totally inappropriate for any of this. It is focused on inventing a new peer competitor and fighting him in classic wars.

In previous studies at The CNA Corporation, we had devised three grand alternatives for post-Cold War U.S. forces, though those studies predated the global war on terror. First devised back in 1992, we had not found a different set of alternatives in successive studies since that time. We characterized the alternatives for U.S. defense efforts as follows:

- I. The stabilizing force, also known as the presence force.
- II. The response force, also known as the surge force.
- III. The transformation force, also known as the future force.¹⁴

We looked at each of these forces in terms of what future it implied the U.S. was seeking, in what direction legacy forces would be nudged in the alternative, and how the forces might be operated. We also fed the alternative forces back into globalization, i.e., to see how they might nudge the evolution of the world system, as it were.

The American Way of War as it has emerged after the Cold War fits Alternative II, the response or surge force. For the alternative:

- **The future is contingencies**, that is the unexpected or unanticipated situations that might disrupt globalization if not responded to. Put another way, U.S. forces would be “the SWAT team.” In the near term, the contingencies we envisaged in previous studies included an attack on or by Iraq (which could well disrupt the whole Middle East and with it the oil market) or by North Korea (which would

14. See H. H. Gaffney, *Globalization and the U.S. Navy: an Annotated Briefing* (The CNA Corporation: CAB D0006753.A1/Final, July 2002), pages 31-35.

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certainly disrupt the South Korean economy, one of the prime engines of both the Asian and world economy). In the longer term, we said it might be a Chinese attack on Taiwan. Responsive U.S. forces are also a deterrent to such aggression. Some people worry about “response” being too late, but the nature of this force is not the speed of response, but the inevitability of U.S. response and its overwhelming nature, that is, it’s capacity to punish.

- **“What to build” is a joint force.** We anticipated a concentrated effort, not efforts scattered around the globe, as the nature of the response. This would require integrated air, ground, sea, and space efforts. In addition to the basic forces that each of the services builds, the option would entail all the connecting and supporting capabilities for a joint force—as demonstrated in Afghanistan. Tailored attacks on the specific defenses of the rogues would be anticipated, that is, “anti-anti-access.” Strike capabilities would take priority, but as time goes on, tactical ballistic missile defenses would be part of the force and might take priority for scarce resources over national missile defense. In the general globalization context, this military capabilities of this joint response force would be unmatched by any other country—though it could also make it progressively harder for allied forces to integrate with U.S. forces.
- **Operating the Response Force** would be a mix between exercising joint forces in preparation for contingencies and concentrating overseas deployment in the areas of potential contingencies as a deterrent, especially to rogues who might attack their neighbors. We suggested less spreading of U.S. forces in engagement with other countries around the world.

The United States takes pride in this kind of alternative. But it has implied less engagement with friends and allies around the world. We see some of this in the repositioning of the forces that is now planned—though the proposals to date have not been quite clear. But it means withdrawing most of the U.S. forces from Germany and relocating them to the United States, while redeploying some of them on temporary bases to places “closer to the likely action,” which usually means closer to the Middle East. The U.S. Navy, too, has a Fleet Response Plan (FRP) described as a surge force (a hitherto forbidden word in the Navy, for the service during the 1990s had staked all on “presence,” i.e., as part of the stabilizing alternative). At the same time, the global war on terror could involve, not contingencies, but little actions by small U.S. forces dispersed through “the arc of crisis,” i.e., from the Strait of Gibraltar around to southeast Asia.

More difficult is the transformation of such forces because high readiness and the planning for contingencies may limit the imagination about future types of warfare. Yet if transformation involves not just more exotic systems, but also the training and acculturation of U.S. military personnel, better networked forces, and adaptability,

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this is not precluded by the response/surge alternative and is consistent with the American Way of War as we have described it.

Conclusion

The U.S. military, like other militaries, except those that emerge from revolutions (e.g., Trotsky's Red Army), evolves off its legacies. These legacies are based on the acquisition of equipment that may last for a long time, especially as quality and reliability have been improved, and there are no rapid modernizations elsewhere, such as the Soviet Union posed. The legacy is also based on the lore passed on from the more senior military personnel and reflected in the training and education of new personnel. If this lore arises from actual combat experience—as the U.S. practiced and improved upon from 1989 through 2003—it may be especially deeply rooted. This is what is reflected in the American Way of War as described.

The question arises what could perturb this legacy over the next 16 years, through 2020. We have said that the global war on terror may not lend itself to this model of the American Way of War unless a new harboring state is found for us to strike. Otherwise, the global war on terror is likely to involve very small actions by smaller forces, not requiring very sophisticated technology, except as it is linked into the worldwide intelligence and surveillance system that looks for clues as to where the terrorists may be. But this waging of the global war on terror may be possible as a “lesser included case” within the maintenance of the overall legacy. The exceptional perturbation we have mentioned could be a massive shift to nation-building on one hand or a massive shift to homeland defense on the other, with the associated shift of fairly constrained defense resources.

Will the confrontation between China and Taiwan still be with us 16 years hence, and how might both those countries evolve in the interim, either to make war more likely or less? (We have in mind, i.e., the evolution of a much more decentralized China, even if not a “democracy,” whatever that is.) Back in 1990, we worried about North Korea taking advantage of U.S. distraction in its confrontation with Iraq, but heard for the first time that, “the North Koreans are starving.” 14 years later, the situation for the North Korea people has hardly improved, but North Korea has become the proud possessor of a few nuclear weapons. Its government did not collapse. So both the Taiwan situation and North Korea could be with us for another 16 years.

Will India and Pakistan finally go to war over Kashmir, and will they use nuclear weapons? It is not inevitable. We have worried about such a war since 1974 when India first tested a nuclear device. The two countries are certainly more advanced in their thinking and communication about nuclear war than the U.S. and Soviet Union

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were in the early 1960s,¹⁵ but both Pakistan and India are vulnerable to internal instabilities. Pakistan is also on the front line in the global war on terrorism.

Right now, the U.S. is preoccupied with Iraq, and beyond that, the global war on terror. It still has a problem in Afghanistan as well. We have no real idea how that war on terror will evolve, though the demographic and resource situations in the Arab and other predominantly Muslim countries do not look good, so that the production of terrorists is likely to continue.

Yet the U.S. is not helpless in nudging outcomes toward 2020. It has the resources. It has a powerful military, likely to be relatively even more powerful as the years pass (in 1994, a rough calculation of what proportion of the world's defense spending the U.S. spent was 38 percent. The figure quoted these days is 51 percent). It has a powerful economy that is still the engine of the world economy, though on some days it looks like China might eventually take over as the engine, given its huge population—but the U.S. has practically been adding the equivalent of the Chinese GDP each year in its own economic growth. A lot depends on whether U.S. political leadership is ready to engage in the world—but relying just on “the American Way of War” for that engagement has proven to be not too promising, given U.S. experience in Iraq.

We should remember, however, that the elements of the triptych—of world evolution, U.S. force policy, and the evolution of U.S. forces—are only loosely related. Therein lies the genius of this triptych, for if they were closely coupled, we would be vulnerable to surprise evolutions and have less adaptability—in all three aspects.

15. Rear Admiral Raja Menon (retired), “Reflections on India’s Nuclear Doctrine and Command & Control” (informal paper, April 2003).