

Executive Summary

Four years after the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, the United States has not won the “global war on terror” nor even brought its chief antagonist to justice. And we remain bogged down in a war in Iraq against guerrillas who command the loyalty of at most 20 percent of that country’s inhabitants. In prosecuting these campaigns, we have stretched our resources so far that when a natural disaster struck at home, nearly a week passed before we could provide relief to the citizens of New Orleans.

Our failure to provide for the common defense does not stem from lack of money. We spend roughly half a trillion dollars per year to maintain and operate the Defense Department, an amount that matches the rest of the world’s defense spending combined. Before our incursion into Iraq finally ends, we will have spent at least as much as we did on Korea or Vietnam, removing the effects of inflation so as to make an apples-to-apples comparison.

Clearly something is not right, and spending even more money on a failed defense strategy is not going to make it right. This monograph does not recommend a specific alternative – aside from the obvious one: it is time to re-create the DoD or even abolish it completely and make way for a new structure for, and approach to, national defense.

Instead, it examines what has changed over the last dozen or so years to render the U.S. war machine ineffective against the types of opponents we now face, and, given their success, the type we are likely to face in the future. It reviews several approaches to a radical restructuring of the Armed Services

to eliminate not only our large, heavy formations but the mindsets that accompany them. In their place, we should consider forces that blur the boundary between “civilian” and “military” as well as between government and private industry. We can be sure that our opponents have not ruled out any form of organization, and if we are to win, we must be at least as creative.

The present work is a continuation of ideas first raised in Richards’ 2001 book, *A Swift, Elusive Sword*. The premise of that volume was that since something called “maneuver warfare” had proven itself to be the best way to fight wars, we should identify the units in our defense establishment best suited for that form of warfare, form a new Department of Defense around them, and eliminate the rest. As that book explained, the roots of maneuver warfare go back to Sun Tzu and extend in an unbroken thread to the present day, embodied in U.S. Marine Corps doctrine. History shows that forces that fight according to this doctrine virtually always defeat those that don’t, regardless of how much the other side spends or how many troops it has.

If maneuver warfare is so effective, why would any changes be needed to previous recommendations? The main reason is that maneuver warfare is designed to enable one country’s military establishment to defeat another’s in battle. While it works very well for that purpose, what we face today are non-state actors, such as al-Qaida and the Iraqi insurgents. These adversaries aren’t coming out to meet us on battlefields, rather they are attacking us with improvised explosive devices or hit-and-run ambushes or commercial airliners anywhere in the world 24/7.

What we are seeing, in short, is an evolution in armed conflict – one isn’t sure whether to even call it “war” – in which guerrilla warfare is morphing into something much more dangerous. This analysis is based on a comparison of recommendations from five distinguished strategists:

- William S. Lind, author of “Strategic Defense Initiative”
- Martin van Creveld, *The Transformation of War*
- Thomas X. Hammes, *The Sling and the Stone*
- Micheal Scheuer, *Imperial Hubris*
- Thomas P. M. Barnett, *The Pentagon’s New Map* and *Blueprint for Action*

As these authors note, to varying degrees, guerrilla warriors traditionally operated largely within a state (although they may have base areas just outside it) and their goal was either to replace the government of that state or to drive out an occupying power from it. This pattern has held from the early 1800s, when the word “guerrilla” was coined, to the U.S. war in Vietnam and the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. With the fall of the Soviet Union, however, and the withdrawal of support by both Cold War powers, many U.S. and Soviet client states around the world began to fail. These states are now providing safe havens for a new breed of violent ideological organization that has ambitions for changing governments not just in single states but in entire regions. They use modern technologies such as the Internet and cell phones to recruit and train members, and to plan operations. And they recognize that in order to achieve their goals, they must often persuade an outside power – generally the United States – to back off.

This new type of conflict is often known as “fourth generation war (4GW).” Although ideas for prosecuting 4GW run the gamut from isolationism to an active program of military intervention and regime change, all of these strategies can be lumped into two schools, “containment” and “rollback.” Each offers costs, risks, and potential benefits for the United States and its allies.

Containment would be the least costly, at least in the short term. Our military forces would be downsized to a retaliatory element to punish and eliminate any regime harboring 4GW organizations that attack us. Depending on the strategist, our retaliatory forces could be conventional military units such as we used in Iraq, or massive non-nuclear carpet bombing strikes, or even nuclear weapons. Some ideas for containment would permit intervention with intelligence and international police operations, while saving the military option for retaliation. Under any containment strategy, however, the force recommended in *A Swift, Elusive Sword* would do fine as the retaliatory element, although it could also be reduced in size and cost. The idea is that over time, people living in areas that spawn 4GW will get their acts in order, throw out their bad rulers, and join the world system. Until that happens, we will protect ourselves.

The problem with containment is that we may not be able to live with whatever arises in the under-developed world in the meantime. It is possible that such a strategy, especially if carried to the extent of isolation, would hasten the day that groups like al-Qaida acquire nuclear devices and smuggle them into the cities of the developed world.

The idea of *rollback*, on the other hand, is to help the process along by various levels of intervention, and then to stay and rebuild the failed state so that it no longer can harbor our 4GW opponents. Proponents of rollback generally see the military as an ordinary tool of policy and would use it to break open countries that harbor 4GW groups or that we, for any other reason, feel potentially threaten the security of the developed world.

The promise of rollback is great. It would eliminate “terrorist” groups, world poverty, ignorance, hunger and disease. The problem with rollback is equally great: nobody knows how to do it. Our Iraqi adventure has discredited the idea of military intervention as the primary mechanism, and other tools of regime change such as political pressure or economic sanctions can take decades to work, when they work at all, and they always bring great hardship to ordinary people living in the affected countries.

Military forces for rollback, should we swallow the risks and proceed anyway, fall into two categories. The first, like the containment force, specializes in maneuver warfare to rapidly eliminate a hostile regime. Unlike containment, however, the idea is not to retaliate but to do the least amount of damage to the country so that rebuilding can proceed sans insurgency. In order to ensure the maximum level of creativity and initiative for this mission, should we decide to undertake it, this book recommends privatizing the forces for it. Such a course of action would require expanding the current capabilities of private military companies, and putting in place a legal structure to promote competition among them and enforce compliance with laws and rules to govern their activities. Although difficult, it is much easier than trying to transform the current hierarchy and bureaucracy of DoD, which has settled into an extremely stable pattern of spending more and more while as an institution, it produces less and less.

The other category required in any rollback force is the rebuilding element. Its larger component would be an expanded Corps of Engineers focused on reconstruction not only of infrastructure but of everything else needed to help the invaded state function as a member of the world economy. The smaller piece of the rebuilding element would be a counterinsurgency force modeled after the U.S. Marine Corps’ Combined Action Program, which proved successful in the early days of Vietnam. This force would live down in the neighborhoods and villages – not in bases or Green Zones – to head off potential insurgencies, particularly those instigated by members of the ousted regime and would work hand-in-hand with the expanded Corps of Engineers.

After looking at what would be required in each case, and balancing the promise of rollback against its dismal track record, the book recommends containment, but not isolation, as our near term strategy. It would continue to use intelligence and law enforcement on an on-going basis, while experimenting with diplomatic and financial means of encouraging states and other entities in the developing world to eliminate 4GW organizations and the conditions that spawn them. Since this is unknown territory, Richards would keep a significant military force in being, and would put a high priority on accounting for every nuclear device and kilo of fissile material anywhere in the world.

Introduction

The late Chinese premier, Zhou Enlai, when asked his opinion on the impact of the French Revolution, thought for a moment and then answered that it was too soon to tell. So much more is it with the events of the 21st century, particularly the attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon, the removal of the Taliban from Afghanistan, and the invasion of Iraq. In the four years since I wrote *A Swift, Elusive Sword*, our national mood has swung from horror to resolve to elation and now to frustration. It would be presumptuous in the extreme to draw conclusions from these events, much less to predict the course of even the next four years. Still, we do have to deal with the future, and one can perceive the first dim, dark glimpses of patterns that may help us navigate our way through.

The purpose of this volume is to re-examine the conclusions of *A Swift, Elusive Sword* in light of what has happened since Sept. 11, 2001. As was the intent of that book, I will only examine the military dimension of our national strategy. Some may object that such an approach would be of little value, or even dangerously misleading, since military forces should form a small and diminishing component of our strategy. While it is certainly true that trade, diplomacy, finance and intelligence should comprise the majority of the tools in our kit, recent history suggests that presidents from both parties will continue to regard military force as an attractive device for influenc-

ing events. Twenty-five centuries of history, however, demonstrate that if committed unwisely, military force causes more problems than it solves. It is important, therefore, as Sun Tzu urges in at the beginning of *The Art of War*, to examine the utility of force in the various categories of conflict that will confront us in the future.

Conventional conflict – replaying World War II?

The premise of *Sword* was that although it strained the imagination, we could not absolutely rule out the possibility of large-scale conventional conflict. Fortunately, we know how to fight this type of war, and although many of our weapons look back to the Cold War or even the Second World War – tanks, missiles, aircraft carriers, and the like – our doctrine has improved and our enemies have deteriorated so that we can ensure our security with far fewer weapons, people and expense. The fall of the Soviet Union and the removal of its thousands of tanks, aircraft and missiles from the list of potential threats made this a simple conclusion. Thus, I constructed the *Sword* force around those elements of the existing U.S. military establishment who best understood the doctrines of modern warfare, put the rest into reserve, and waited confidently for peace and prosperity.

That was May 2001. Are the prescriptions in *A Swift, Elusive Sword* still reasonable? Would we be doing better in Iraq if we had the *Sword* force? And how are we positioned for what might happen next?

The post-Sept. 11 world

The future, of course, is not just sitting out there waiting to unfold. People will observe what we do over the next several years and gauge their own actions accordingly. So it makes no sense to talk of “likely” scenarios: future opponents will not be tossing dice and resigning themselves to whatever they get. They will do what they feel advances their cause best, weighing costs, difficulties and risks as part of their calculus.

One way to deal with this situation is to try to foresee moves into the future and create counters for each, much like how a supercomputer analyzes positions on a chessboard. This is, conceptually, what we tried to do during the Cold War: virtually all of our major hardware programs, including many still in production today, were sold as “counters” to some Soviet weapon or to our guess at what they might be developing.

Unfortunately, a game like this only works against a single enemy much like ourselves, with a limited number of predictable moves. It is barely feasible for chess, a game with only 64 locations and only six types of pieces available to each side. It would become more interesting if we gave the pieces creativity and initiative, allowed them to change sides, and inflicted them with varying degrees of cowardice, heroism, fear and fatigue. If we now multiply the numbers by millions, throw in strange cultures and religions, organize them into tribes, clans, cartels and villages as well as by modern states — well, you see how ridiculous it is to try to predict what future opponents would do under such conditions. So as a country we were caught unawares by the attacks of Sept. 11 and by the intensity of the guerrilla-type war that has broken out in Iraq since our occupation. More such surprises are to be expected.

Where is Strangelove when we need him?

Although we cannot predict the future, we still have to live in it. Perhaps our best approach is to start with what we know and then set aside resources to cope with the unpredictable. For example, we feel confident that we can deter nuclear attacks by states. Our strategy is to make sure the world understands that if we detect a nuclear attack coming from the territory of another country, or if we can trace an attack back to the government of another country, that government and perhaps that country will quickly cease to exist. This strategy deterred the Soviet Union, which was likewise capable of destroying the United States, and it will work against countries capable of hurling at most a handful of missiles. A similar logic says that there won't be a large-scale conventional war between countries with significant nuclear capabilities since Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) could break down if one side began to feel its existence (or the personal honor of its supreme leader) threatened.

I could be wrong, though, so it makes sense to keep some conventional capability around, and it probably makes sense to keep a research and development (R&D) program going to look into a missile defense system, with the caveat that any country capable of developing or otherwise obtaining a warhead has many options for delivering it other than trying to re-invent the ICBM.

Countries lacking nuclear weapons are either U.S. allies or if they are not, they are so weak that any military action against them would hardly merit the label, "war" — at least as far as the getting-in stage is concerned.

Where does this leave the force I proposed in *A Swift, Elusive Sword*? The answer is that it is still okay as a hedge against conventional conflicts and to pre-empt entities that we don't like from developing nuclear weapons. Events in Iraq, however, suggest that we should have a real international coalition behind us before attempting such incursions, which are otherwise violations of international law no matter how egregious the regime appears in our view. Given that ground rule, we could reduce the burden on American taxpayers by incorporating elements into the *Sword* force from our NATO allies and from other longstanding partners, such as Australia.

Unconventional war

If the West persists in using military intervention as a tool of geopolitical engineering, we will get a lot of practice in guerrilla warfare. For one thing, the mere presence of occupying forces from another culture or religion will catalyze insurgency, which will most likely start as a guerrilla war, a form of warfare where the record of Western armies is at best mixed.

Foreswearing intervention, however, and staying within our own borders is no guarantee of peace. Even if we do not intervene somewhere, we can still expect a bumper crop of irregular, non-state opponents to arise and spar with us. Failed states, for example, and countries rent by rebellions will provide a fertile culture medium for transnational ideological groups such as al-Qaida as well as for a host of ordinary criminal cartels.

If you have a pessimistic streak, you might see the number of failed states growing over the next few years. Many of these were artificial creations of European colonialists and would have died natural deaths years ago if one side or the other had not propped them up during the Cold War. That war is 14 years over, and the ravages of neglect, the world economy, disease and tribal animosities are tearing at whatever foundations these nations once had.

The noted Israeli historian, Martin van Creveld, looked out on this landscape and prophesied a dim future for organized military forces. Much of the task of defending society against future warfare, he foretold, will fall to private security companies, with a corresponding decrease in the utility, size and technological complexity of military forces. Armies will shrink in size to be replaced by police-like security forces on the one hand and armed gangs on the other (“... not that the difference is always clear even today”).

It is coming to pass. Private military companies and other non-government security services represent a major source of job growth in the U.S. economy. And gangs like MS 13 and the Aryan Brotherhood are growing in wealth, power, and most disturbing of all, in their ability to harness new technologies such as the Internet to recruit members and plan, then conduct, operations. It seems reasonable that in this new world, the national security apparatus we built starting 200 years ago to protect us from other states — and that we tweaked a half century ago to wage the Cold War — might not be what we need.

Can it change? I don't think so. We can extrapolate from the experience of large commercial organizations since the end of WW II. Most of them will go out of business before they make the changes necessary to survive. Where are Pan Am, Eastern Airlines, Montgomery Ward and Digital Equipment? Even Chrysler and Sears are merely divisions of other companies. We do not want the United States or any other developed country or ally to go out of business, so to speak, or become a division of another entity.

This book is an attempt to illustrate how much change would be necessary for the armed forces of the United States, Europe, Japan, China or Russia to be able to operate in a world of jihadists, narcotraffickers, road warriors, or among the even nastier organizations that are watching them and watching us and learning. I would never claim that the recommendations I make are the only ones that might work, nor would I suggest that others cannot create even more effective solutions. What I hope to convince the reader of, or at least make plausible, is that measures less drastic than mine are excuses for maintaining current organization charts, money flows, career paths and political alignments. As such, they stand no chance at all of securing our country and our allies.