

Small Wars

The Past as Prologue, an Alternative Vision of Future Conflict

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Introduction

Today, many national security and defense planning discussions and articles begin with the caveat that the foreseeable future just ended. I disagree. Today, more than ever, we need to reflect upon the future. A bitter irony is that the mass murders of September 11 were foreseeable and to some degree, even foreseen.¹ Unfortunately, those who predicted such an apotheosis of terror were simply ignored. To 'do what has to be done', to take those measures necessary to look to the future and to safeguard the world from predictable and predicted threats was politically unacceptable. Today, actions that should have and could have been taken years ago are being conducted without significant political opposition.² And, just as the future face of terrorism can be examined and studied, so too can future conflict.

The purpose of this article is to present a view of future conflict that is at odds with current academic and

Op 11 december 2001 hield Andrew Nicholas (Nick Pratt), op uitnodiging van de Koninklijke Vereniging ter Beoefening van de Krijgswetenschap, een lezing over *Small Wars: the past as prologue, an alternative vision of future conflict*.

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defense thinking. Herein, future conflict is described as simply 'small wars', borrowing this name from the late Colonel C.E. Caldwell, British Army, who wrote a book by the same title nearly a century ago.³ My grand-

father, the late Lieutenant Colonel Harold B. Pratt, USMC, also used this term in describing future conflict in a manual printed by the Marine Corps based upon its collective experience in Central America and the Philippine Islands in the early 20th century. The *Small Wars Manual, United States Marine Corps, 1940*, is a classic and is more relevant today than anything currently in use by any military service.

Prior to September 11, 2001, only a small elite was examining the future of modern conflict. The Cold War was over and we thought we were living in an era of relative tranquility. However, there is and there will always be a standing requirement for national security officials and members of any armed forces to study conflict. There was in the 5th century B.C., when the warrior-philosopher Sun Tzu wrote:

*War is a matter of vital importance to the state; a matter of life or death; the road to either survival or ruin. Hence, it is imperative that it be studied thoroughly.*⁴

Today, thorough study is still vital. Coping with modern conflict is not a multiple-choice test with one right answer.

About the same time that Sun Tzu was writing, Thucydides, an Athenian Greek, arguably the greatest Western military and strategic historian wrote his account of the 26-year Pelopon-

¹ Robin Wright, 'Prophetic 'Terror 2000', Mapped Evolving Threat' *Los Angeles Times*, August 9, 1998, p. 17.

² For all the focus on Afghanistan, the war on terrorism is a global effort. Often with us assistance, this cooperative campaign has made significant inroads in discovering terrorist cells and disrupting their operations. Between 800 and 1,000 terrorist suspects have been arrested or detained in more than 50 countries, not including the more than 640 held in the United States. Many of the foreign arrests have not been made public. More than

140 countries have also frozen funds in 270 accounts with assets of \$65 million. Most of the arrests and frozen assets are linked to Al Qa'ida, but other extremist groups have also been affected.

³ C.E. Caldwell, *Small Wars, Their Principles and Practice*, Third Edition, General Staff – War Office, London: His Majesty's Stationary Office, 1906.

⁴ Tao Hanzhang, *Sun Tzu's Art of War, The Modern Chinese Interpretation*, translated by Yuan Shibing, New York: Sterling Publishing Co., Inc., 1990, p. 13.

nesian War. Thucydides' classic work makes three significant observations. First, human behavior is consistent and you can gain insight by studying history. Second, some individuals depart from this constancy and their departures can make an enormous difference. Usama Bin Laden and his confederates are a sound example – their diversion from the normal pattern of human behavior has profoundly changed current history. Lastly, some things are simply inconceivable in terms of patterns of behavior or predictions. These events happen by chance – *tyche* in Greek, things that are not possible to predict and are contrary to reasonable expectations.⁵ For these events, leaders need intellectual capital and luck. Sun Tzu has provided us the *vision d'etat* for which we must attempt to understand future conflict, and Thucydides has provided us a lens, or means with

⁵ My thanks to Colonel Nestoras Voudouris, Royal Hellenic Air Force Forces, for his assistance in understanding this concept.

which to peer into the future and to attempt to predict its character or be prepared for the unpredictable.

The post-Cold War world environment has convoluted rather than simplified the missions, strategies, and organizations of traditional armed forces. Rapid downsizing after the fall of the Soviet Union, cashing the 'peace dividend', and the remarkable 4-day Allied victory in the Persian Gulf War left many militaries lacking strategic direction, a thoughtful force structure, and a logical threat upon which to base an appropriate future force structure. And, regrettably, during the last decade, elected officials and lawmakers around the world sought the luxury of a 'strategic pause'. However, allowing the new world order to arrange itself naturally has presented us with significant risks and threats with which we are ill prepared to contend. The attacks of September 11 were just a preview and serve as a reminder that our world is still a dangerous place and deserves vigilance. But, while these threats are

significant, like piracy in the 17th and 18th centuries, they are not unprecedented security challenges.

Risks and threats

Militaries must address several challenges. First, threats need to be identified. Logically, after identifying these threats governments must seek to finance a military capable of meeting these potential challenges or adjust their national security strategies accordingly. Budgeting will also drive a need to reform within the services to handle rapid developments in technology. And, finally, a national level interagency reform in coordination with a military reform must be accomplished so that the full weight of a nation's power can be effectively brought against risks that have a malevolent intent and have become adversarial. However, while these requirements are significant, of the most import is to understand the character of future conflict. For as Clausewitz noted:



A modern commandpost
(Source: Timo Beylemans)

*The first, the supreme, the most far reaching act of judgment that a statesman and commander have to make is to establish... the kind of war on which they are embarking.*⁶

For this analysis the two most common and popular views of future conflict will be examined briefly followed by an alternative vision of conflict. The contending visions of modern conflict the two extremes that are to be discussed, are labeled: 'The Pristine Battlefield of High Technology' and 'The World of Conan the Barbarian or the Return to Thunder Dome'.

Following this artificial dialectical comparison, 'small wars' will be described. At the end of the 19th century, British strategists defined small wars as conflicts waged against the forces of lesser powers, to include indigenous insurgent movements. Today, this definition should include wars against state-sponsored or supported sub-state and non-nation actors such as Usama bin Laden's Al-Qa'ida movement or the proxy forces of other nation states such as the Hizballah movement that exists as a result of Lebanon's lack of sovereignty, a lucrative drug business, and significant Syrian and Iranian external support.

The term 'small wars' simplifies the plethora of terms that are currently being used to describe contingencies that can be met with a range of military operations and capabilities.⁷

There are also many other reasons to stick with this simple, but elegant term 'small wars'. The Vietnam era term 'limited war' can include conventional state-on-state conflict as well as a limited and controlled exchange of nuclear weapons. The term 'low-intensity conflict' has been problematic since its first use in the early 1980s. 'Low intensity conflict' is too inaccurate, especially from the vantage of participants.⁸

The Pristine Battlefield of High Technology

Although the face of conflict may change and be the focus of academic research and discussion, the intrinsic nature of conflict will never change. Since the end of the Cold War, the coalition victory over Iraq, and now the defeat of the Afghan Taliban, defense writers have been quick to claim that the very nature of conflict has been 'transformed'. This alleged transformation is usually attributed to one or two sources: on one hand, changes in the international system, especially the claim of the increasing irrelevance of the Westphalian concept of the nation state; and, on the other hand, the rapid and revolutionary changes in related technology.⁹ The fundamental shortcoming of scholars who support these concepts of transformation is that they mistake the face or character of conflict for the nature of conflict. The latter has neither transformed over the past decade, nor will it in the future.

The Tofflers

Let us begin with the first vision, 'The Pristine Battlefield of High Technology'. Pioneers in the analysis of the changing face of conflict were Alvin and Heidi Toffler, in their book *War and Anti-War*. They describe three waves of conflict associated with the Agrarian, Industrial, and Information Ages and identify technological advances that they argue changed the way wars are fought. Major General (retired) Vladimir I. Slipchenko, formerly of the Soviet Army, conducted similar research and published his findings in October 1993.¹⁰

The Tofflers describe Union General Ulysses S. Grant's late American Civil War campaigns as being the first battles with threads from the Agrarian Age into the Industrial Age. They argue that the trench warfare of World War I, while still reflecting much of the Agrarian style of warfare, represented the transition into the Industrial Age that became complete with World War II. Operations 'Just Cause' and 'Desert Storm', the United States' intervention in Panama and the coalition defeat of Saddam Hussein, began the transition into Information Age warfare, which the Tofflers argue redefined the waging war.¹¹ Persuasive as these examples appear, the reality of the future conflict is that any combatant must expect to face elements of all three ages in modern conflict. In Somalia – like Afghanistan today – warlords or tribal leaders communicated with

⁶ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, edited and translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976, pp. 88-89.

⁷ 'Small Wars' have nearly as many names as there are scholars writing about this cottage industry: 'Limited Wars'; 'Tea Pot wars'; 'Camouflaged Wars'; 'Unrestricted Wars'; 'Operations Other Than War'; 'Low Intensity Conflict'; 'Lesser Regional Contingency'; 'Small Scale Conflicts'; 'Wars of the Bed Bugs'; 'Wars of National Liberation'; 'Wars of Internationalist Duty'; and 'Asymmetric Guerrilla War'.

⁸ Eliot Cohen, 'Constraints on America's Conduct of Small Wars', *International*

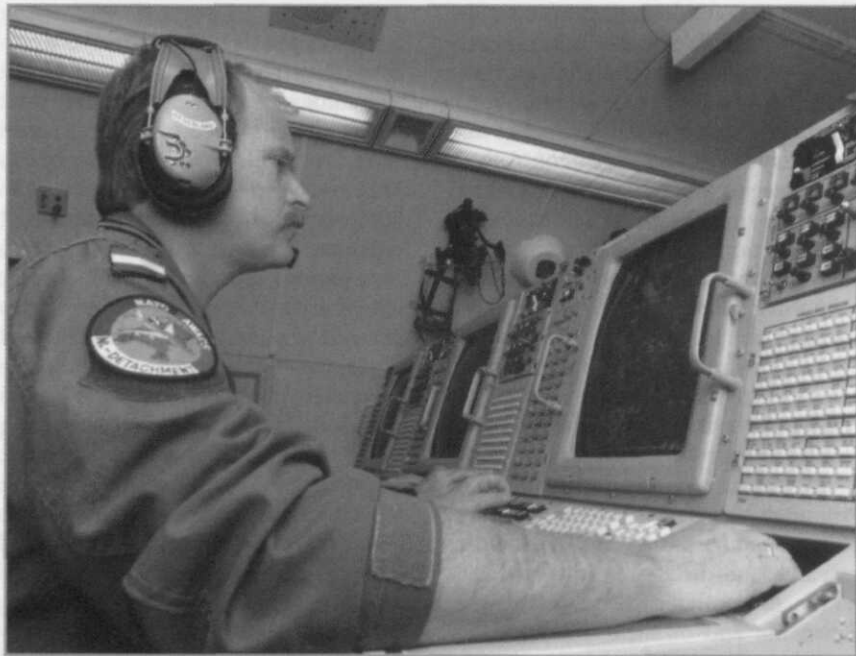
Security, Fall, 1984, Vol. 9, No. 2, pp. 151-181.

⁹ Mackubin Thomas Owens, 'The Changing Nature of War – Not So Fast', *Faculty Paper*, Newport, RI: US Naval War College, 1999.

¹⁰ Vladimir I. Slipchenko, 'A Russian Analysis of Warfare Leading to the Sixth Generation', *Field Artillery*, October 1993, pp. 38-41.

¹¹ Alvin and Heidi Toffler, *War and Anti-War*, Boston, New York, Toronto, London: Little, Brown & Company, 1993, pp. 1-302. The Tofflers argue that technology plays a vital role in the winning of wars, just as it does in economic markets. Advanced technology, cameras, computers, and microchips do provide valuable input in the making of military strate-

gy. However, technology is valueless absent the leadership with the political willingness to undertake the risks associated with conflict. Doctrine, planning, and human will are far more important factors in the business of waging war and defeating an enemy. History supports the conclusion that for every technological breakthrough, there will always be flaws and weaknesses associated with such technology and the inevitable counter-poise. As asymmetric warfare suggests, a skillful adversary will always try to exploit those weaknesses for his own advantage. From this point of view, the Tofflers are too deterministic by putting their trust in technology as a determinant for victory or defeat.



AWACS (Photo: Hennie Keeris)

state-of-the art, secure cellular phones; Somali gunmen used World War II anti-tank rocket propelled grenades (RPGs) to destroy Task Force Ranger's modern helicopters; and cow bells provided early warning to these gunmen during the street battles of Mogadishu.

Metz

Dr. Steve Metz logically followed the Toffler concept by identifying three forms of potential future conflict. In 'Standoff Warfare', Metz foresees state-on-state combat with discernible political objectives and well-developed rules. Enemies rationally give up when faced with a poor cost/benefit ratio. Deterrence and preemption are better than traditional warfighting. Technology minimizes friendly risk and maximizes the impact on the

enemy. Speed, knowledge, and precision provide the keys to operational success. In 'Hands-on War', he describes the 'nasty' form of conflict; fought by nations unable or late in moving into the information age. Here antagonists may be nation states or non-state/sub-state actors. Primal identities and enmities may be as important as political objectives. Combat will be 'hands on', or close, and take place in 'complex terrain', another word for urban terrain or combat in cities. Refugees and non-combatants are constant elements of this form of conflict.¹²

Metz concludes by describing 'Net War' at once as an infrastructure conflict and a quasi-war. Opponents bypass conventional military forces and directly target national or commercial infrastructure. This is a quasi-war because Metz envisions conflict with non-state enemies, often-criminal cartels, or more importantly, networks of adversaries. Conflict may even be between corporations where the use of psychology can be as or more important than technology.¹³ But Metz envisioned modern conflict much like a Swedish *schmorgesborg*

or a Middle Eastern *mezza*: a little of this, a little of that; there appears to be something for everyone.

Following on Metz's model, one real expert with both practical and research experience predicts that adversaries will be 'embedded', or will live or operate in local infrastructures and use friendly or neutral infrastructures against its opponents.¹⁴ The World Wide Web and financial systems could 'hide' these adversaries. Essentially, anything that we have built will be used against us. Airplanes will be used as a primitive form of a cruise missile. Attacks may be hidden, subtle, and camouflaged. This form of conflict plays on gray areas, ambiguities, and the inadequate organization of many of our newest areas of innovation. We have no coherent strategy against this form of conflict. 'Net War' is the extreme of this vision of modern conflict.

Owens

At the heart of the dream of moving toward a pristine battlefield is the idea of operations that will capitalize on the advances and advantages of information technology or the ability to conduct a network centric conflict. The father of conflict on the pristine battlefield is probably Admiral William Owens, USN (retired), a true visionary, who predicts a large, theoretical, three-dimensional box kept under surveillance by 'advances in information and overhead technologies sufficient to remove 'the fog of war'.' This is supposed to be the death knell for this famous Clausewitzian notion.

For Clausewitz, war is a violent clash of opposing wills, each seeking to prevail over the other. This cyclical interaction between opposing wills occurs in a realm of chance and chaos. To Clausewitz, there are three timeless elements of conflict: its *non-linear nature, chance and uncertainty, and friction*. Disciples of Admiral Owens believe that Clausewitzian 'fog and friction' has been overcome by technology and that the pristine battlefield is not theory, but today's

¹² Stephen Metz, *Future War*, presentation to George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies faculty, Garmisch, Germany, on May 29, 2001.

¹³ Stephen Metz, *Future War*, May 29, 2001.

¹⁴ From a discussion with Keith T. Holcomb, USMC (Ret.), who currently is working with Defence Advanced Research Projects Agency, DARPA, October 5, 2001.

reality. The combat power that technology allegedly purports to offer provides unique dominant battlefield awareness. Admiral Owens' notion envisions connecting largely existing 'sensors' and 'shooters' together via appropriate information and command and control systems. Within a cubic air, land, and sea, 200-nautical mile battle space, all militarily relevant objects would be detected, tracked, and classified.¹⁵ The operational concept derived from this vision is its cooperative engagement capability (CEC) that has enabled some nations to attempt a shift to network centric operations (NCW).¹⁶ These operations give a nation the ability to achieve decisive effects without having friendly forces incur the devastation of attrition warfare. Advances in communications, computers, and weapons coupled with changes in organization and doctrine, could produce strong, lithe, wise, and adaptable forces.¹⁷ The pristine battlefield is so envisioned in the following statements:

- Precision Fires from multiple platforms and from all dimensions of air, land, sea, and space
- Dispersion of combat elements at distances never before imagined
- Invisibility of friendly forces & delectability of all enemy forces
- Force structures specifically designed for this new environment
- Command & control from higher to lower and horizontally, and of course,
- Space dominance¹⁸

First reservations

But, who is your enemy or what is your threat? If you do not have one that fits into your neat three-dimensional box, then you must build one. In some circles today, this threat has been coined 'the emerging anti-access threat'. If examined carefully, this unique threat has everything for the commander of the pristine battlefield to engage. What are his or her critical initial joint tasks to use current jar-



F117 Stealth-fighter

gon? First, the commander must be capable of launching long-range, joint attack operations. This requires a rapid aerospace dominance, the suppression of enemy air defenses, and dominant battle space awareness (C4ISR). This enables the next phase, which is the rapid halt of the enemy aggression that initiated this campaign. To achieve this the commander must counter enemy surface movement operations both on land and sea and conduct his own strategic attack. The commander's attack will require

the safe deployment of follow-on joint forces made in a secure environment through counter-weapons of mass destruction (WMD) operations, counter-cruise/ballistic missile operations and counter-maritime, anti-access operations.¹⁹ The commander of this pristine battlefield will be a very busy fellow.

Naturally, there will be a standing requirement for long-range manned bombers for this operation. And the commander needs a fighter escort capability to get these bombers under

¹⁵ William A. Owens, 'Systems of Systems: Emerging Dominant Battlefield Awareness Promises to Dissipate the 'Fog of War'', *Armed Forces Journal International*, January 1996, p. 47.

¹⁶ Arthur K. Cebrowski and John J. Garstka, 'Network-Centric Warfare', *US Naval Institute Proceedings*, January 1998, Vol. 124, No. 1/1, 139, pp. 28-35.

¹⁷ William S. Murray, 'A Will to Measure',

Parameters US Army War College Quarterly, Autumn 2001, Vol. XXXI, No. 3, p. 143.

¹⁸ Christopher Bassford, *The RMA and the Nature of War*, speech to the George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies, Garmisch, Germany, October 23, 2000.

¹⁹ USAF, *Prospectives on Access Denial*, 26 September 2000.



A cruise missile (Tomahawk)

the 'anti-access bar'. Is this cynicism and an attack solely on the United States Air Force (USAF)? Perhaps a little, but to be fair, all of the United States' services, to some degree, and many North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) nations are copying this pattern. Describe the 'box', envision a 'cooperative' threat, and develop concepts necessary to control the activities inside the 'box'. These concepts become capabilities that drive requirements. This technique allows for a military transformation or possibly a revolution in military affairs.²⁰ Operational concepts drive technology, which in turn drives organizational change. But, absent a clear vision of future conflict, is this a precise course of action or an expedient? In fact, the American military has barely begun to change fundamentally. Almost all weapons now being bought and used were conceived in the 1980s and designed to counter a massive Soviet onslaught rolling through Western Europe. Consider this: instead of buying new aircraft, the USAF, the *finest* air force in the world, could replenish its needs mostly with existing fighters – still unequaled worldwide – and release money for the development of ultra long-range, stealthy, unmanned attack aircraft. But, that is culturally anathema to an organization built around the world's best pilots.

The World of Conan the Barbarian

To conclude this discussion on 'The Pristine Battlefield of High Technology' recognize what this battlefield will *not* be if it ever becomes reality. This battlefield as described would be anything but pristine. The capabilities envisioned for this less-than-pristine hellhole would make this the most lethal conflict ever fought. A historical trend in conflict is that casualty rates decrease as the density of the battlefield decreases.²¹ This trend would change dramatically. However, this is not the future of conflict. Rather, all this talk of 'The Pristine Battlefield of High Technology' – the coming age of the 'electronic *blitzkrieg*'; the establishment of a 'zero-sum environment'; psycho-technology; disingenuous phrases like weapons of mass protection; roles for globo-cops and a plethora of obnoxious multimedia, power point presentations are nothing more than a lot of 'mumbo jumbo'.²² It is one very *seductive* vision of modern conflict that is the panacea for force planners and a military-industrial complex.

Van Creveld

Having described one extreme of future conflict, I will now introduce a serious critic of 'Pristine Battlefield of High Technology'. Martin Van

Creveld, a former chair holder at the United States Marine Corps Command & Staff College and author of *The Transformation of War*,²³ is one of the earliest thinkers about alternative visions of future conflict. His writings have always goaded and stretched the minds of his students and audiences. In his examination of modern conflict, Van Creveld argues that the relative dominance of the state was declining from its zenith of the 19th and the early 20th centuries and the state is losing its centrality as a political organization because it cannot meet the threats of non-state actors and sub-states.²⁴ He argues that the state's effectiveness, as a political unit, is ending. In a later work, he modifies that position by arguing that the state is in retreat.²⁵ Regardless if ending or retreating, Van Creveld argues that non-state actors undermine the state's authority in two ways. First, their attacks demonstrate the state's inability to protect its citizens and thereby fulfill its social contract. Second, they attempt to supplant the state's coercive power.²⁶ As Van Creveld argues, the state is facing a crisis of authority created by these threats.

*National sovereignties are already being undermined by organizations that refuse to recognize the state's monopoly over armed violence.*²⁷

Van Creveld notes that international law and custom tended to forbid and prevent the participation in war of people, who were not uniformed armed forces and that it was not until recently that civilians did take up arms against armies. He suggests the entire Clausewitzian phenomenon of the separation of the people, armies, and the government is not only historically limited, but it never really had any practical currency outside the confines of Europe. Van Creveld considers the famous Clausewitzian trinity, this distinction between the government, the people, and the army to be blurred. However, his greatest contribution to the study of conflict is his

²⁰ A military revolution is what occurs when the application of *new technologies* into a significant number of military systems combines with innovative operational concepts and organizational adaptations in a way that fundamentally alters the character and conduct of conflict. It does so by producing a dramatic increase – often an order of magnitude or greater – in the combat potential and military effectiveness of armed forces. Andrew F. Krepinevich, 'Cavalry to Computer', *The National Interest*, No. 37, Fall 1994, p. 431.

²¹ T.N. Dupuy, *The Evolution of Weapons and Warfare*, New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1980, pp. 312 & 314.

²² Robert Baxter, *British Army in 2010*.

²³ Martin Van Creveld, *The Transformation of War*, POP: Free Press, 1991. Since Clausewitz wrote, war has been considered a rational extension of politics by nations seeking to advance their interests. In *Transformation of*

War, Van Creveld advances a different understanding of what war is today, why it is fought and why the old Central front battles between the USSR and the US during the Cold War never happened and never will. The passage of time makes his book appear even more relevant.

²⁴ The difference between non-state military actors and sub-state military actors is imprecise. I will use the terms interchangeably because of their challenge to the state's authority. The focus will be on sub-state actors.

²⁵ Martin Van Creveld, *The Rise and Decline of the State*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

²⁶ 'State Sovereignty in International Relations: Bridging the Gap Between Theory and Empirical Research', *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 39, No. 2, 1995, p. 230.

²⁷ Creveld, *Transformation of War*, p. 225.

four predictions adopted by many contemporary scholars.

First, Van Creveld argues that conflicts would be between political communities that do not have a political base in a territorial sense. The *raison d'être* of any political community is the protection and advancement of its constituency. With a sharply decreasing capacity of a territorial state to provide either of these requirements, primary loyalties will switch, or revert in some cases, to tribes, gangs, companies, city-states and other forms of social organization that have not been dominant for at least several hundred years. German scholar Hans Magnus Enzensberger suggests a similar pattern in which amorphous, but organized, gangs will cause future conflicts by inciting 'molecular civil wars' in the world's metropolises. The current conflict in Afghanistan provides a relevant case study.

As a result of this chaotic condition, Van Creveld predicts that conflicts would assume a form of terrorism or guerrilla modality. 'War will no longer take place in an open field'. Modern conventional armies will not be properly equipped for this 'asymmetric warfare'. This has become a popular shibboleth and, in fact, warrants examination. The US Defense Science Board (DSB) contends improvements in policy and hardware must be made to correct America's armed forces inability to contend with asymmetric threats from weapons of mass destruction, cruise missiles, diesel submarines, and other means of destruction either already or soon to be at the disposal of rogue nations or non-state terrorist groups.

Van Creveld suggests conflict not be

fought solely for the interests of governments, and that soldiers will no longer be simply agents of the state. Soldiers will become modern 'Robin Hoods', or mercenaries, like the Free Companies or the Wild Geese. Van Creveld sees us living again in a world of pirates. Although these fighters could be motivated by political and religious causes, they could also be enticed by "... individual glory, profit, and booty..." As Andre Malraux notes in *Man's Fate*, "... Oh what a relief it is to fight..." In the Lebanese Civil War, Beirut's 'Kalashnikov Cuties', in French-cut t-shirts and snug designer jeans, engaged in vicious firefights because combat became a social event of sorts. It was fun, impressed their boy friends, and did not require them to consider their future. Moreover, Van Creveld notes that the distinction between soldiers, terrorists, and criminals would be hard to discern.

Finally, because Van Creveld considers the Westphalian state system as outmoded, future conflict will be between these political organizations for reasons no longer considered civilized. This will be the result of the blurring of distinctions between: *conflict*, usually described as violence between states or organized political groups; *organized crime*, violence undertaken by privately organized groups for the purpose of financial gain; and, *violations of human rights*, violence undertaken by states or political organizations against individuals. A predatory conflict between rival drug warlords is a case in point.

Huntington

The most provocative prediction and closest resemblance of modern conflict or its causes in the post-Cold War period, fought as described by Van Creveld, is made by Samuel Huntington in *The Clash of Civilizations*. Arguably the most influential and dominant thinker of political ideas of the last decade, Huntington posits that the fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future. Huntington's position emphasizes

religious and cultural differences over similarities. He also equates political, economic, and cultural differences with confrontation. Traditional areas of cooperation and the fact that most countries are primarily, although not solely, driven by national and regional interests, are overlooked in his analysis.²⁸ Although his original thesis appears to have recently been modified in his article, 'The Age of Muslim Wars', a good counter-point to Huntington's original thesis is the 'coalition of the willing' fighting today against terrorism.

However, the closest coincidence to the 'World of Conan the Barbarian' can be represented by the thousands of prisoners of war of the Northern Alliance/United Front, which defeated the Taliban. Many are Pakistanis who were motivated to fight against adversarial warlords for a host of reasons: for the individual religious glory associated with Jihad; for a monetary pittance offered by their village elders; or, simply to relieve the mind-numbing boredom of their pitiful daily existence.²⁹ Nevertheless, these prisoners were Pakistani pawns, sent or permitted into an Afghan civil war, for purely Pakistani national interests. Concomitantly, the same militant fundamentalist forces involved in the Kargil battle in Kashmir with Indian forces in 1999, were used in a similar fashion by General Pervez Musharraf to precipitate a law and order crisis in Pakistan to undermine its democratically controlled Pakistani government. In the days leading up to Musharraf's coup in October 1999, Sunni sectarian gangs including these fighters from Kashmir assassinated some 45 Shia religious and communal leaders across Pakistan.³⁰

An alternative vision

'The World of Conan the Barbarian' is no better a description of future conflict than 'The Pristine Battlefield'. Both are in fact extremes. So, now that we have examined the extremes, what will modern conflict

²⁸ John Esposito, 'Political Islam', *Joint Forces Quarterly*, 2000, p. 51.

²⁹ 'Jihad' is a term that is frequently misunderstood. Mass media's misuse has made this a purely secular term. English speakers use it everyday when referring to a military campaign in favor of a cause. Here 'Jihad' is intended in its correct Islamic context.

³⁰ Esposito, 'Political Islam', p. 55.

look like in the 21st century? It is true that the farther you look out, the harder it is to forecast something, but let us use Thucydides' lens and examine the future.

Dr. Burto Jongman describes future high intensity conflict as at a steady state; low intensity conflict as increasing; and internal political and ethnic violence as increasing dramatically.³¹ Many of these low-level conflicts, or small wars, get only scant attention in the international media. Due to daily monitoring of local media, Interdisciplinary Research Programme on Root Causes of Human Rights Violations (PIOOM) has been able to produce a more complete and thorough conflict summary than other major research institutes. Most of these so-called violent political conflicts, or small wars – those with fewer than 100 deaths – are beyond

the horizon of government or academic research teams.³² This is the future of conflict.

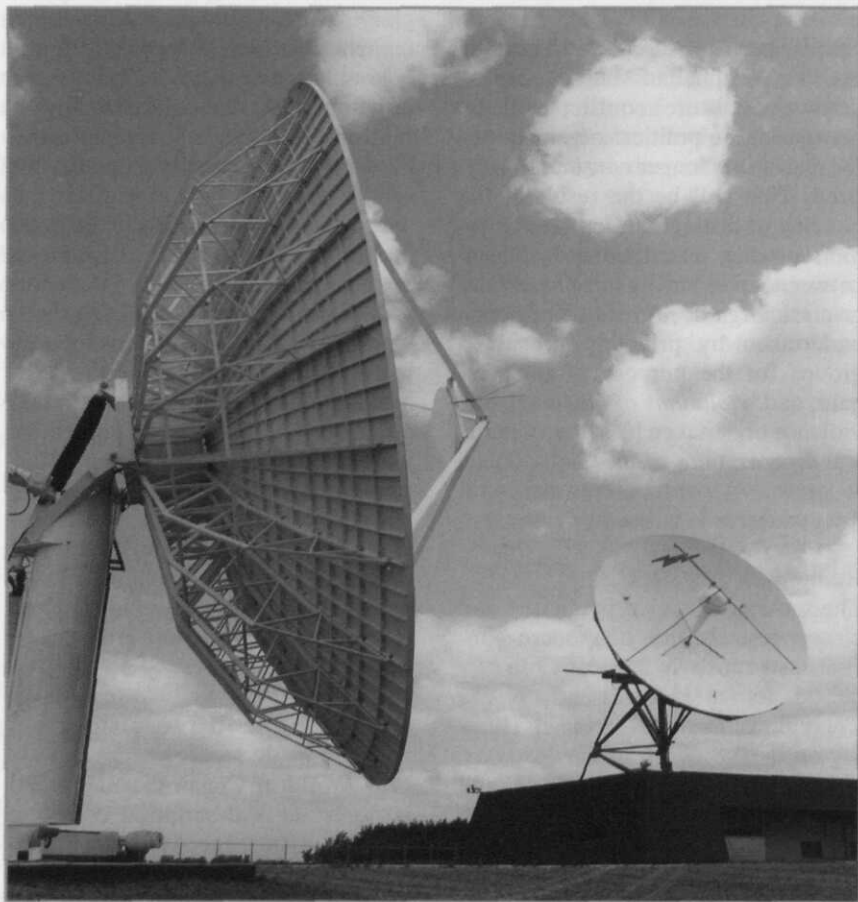
Small wars present us with a different symmetry; are composed of different dimensions; are conducted by different actors and influenced by a variety of unfamiliar stimuli; and, take place in different venues with profound implications for national security officials. I will begin examining 'small wars' using a conflict spectrum initially developed by the US Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC).

This spectrum embraces the technology available (ranging from low to high), the size of the forces (ranging from small to large), and the level of professionalism, including training (ranging from low to high).

In the past, we routinely engaged in 'balanced' inter-state conflicts. During

the Cold War, the 5th US Corps faced the 3rd Soviet Shock Army prepared for a battle in the Fulda Gap. In terms of size, the Soviet force was larger. In terms of professionalism and training, the US 5th Corps was superior. In terms of technology, both were composed primarily of armored forces supported by mechanized infantry. This array of forces, even with its dissimilarities, was *reasonably* symmetrical.

Today, in 'small wars' we can observe an asymmetry of means, size, and technology as well as an asymmetry of objectives, interests, and constraints. There are also tactical, operational, strategic and political examples. Asymmetry is nothing new. In the fall of 1972, north of Danang a solitary North Vietnamese Army (NVA) soldier engaged a South Vietnamese AC-121 'Shadow' gunship during an entire night. At the end of the engagement, as the powerful aircraft flew 'off-station' to return home, the NVA gunner rolled his pre-World War II heavy machine gun out of his cave and fired one last burst. The Somalis using cowbells and cooking pots and pans systems to 'coordinate' attacks against the US-led UN coalition is a more current example. This notion of asymmetry can also be found in what is called 'information



Communications

³¹ Dr. Burto Jongman is the director of the Interdisciplinary Research Program on Root Causes of Human Rights Violations (PIOOM). The PIOOM Foundation is an independent, non-partisan research organization, which is based at Leiden University in the Netherlands. While PIOOM does not itself campaign for human rights observance, it aims to support non-governmental organizations such as Amnesty International and international organizations like the United Nations by undertaking research, which enables them to combat human rights violations more effectively. In its monitoring of low-intensity conflicts, PIOOM pays more attention than other monitors to sub-national conflicts in large states with large heterogeneous populations countries like Nigeria, Sudan, South Africa, Uganda, India Indonesia, and Myanmar/Burma.

³² A.J. Jongman, 'Downward Trend in Armed Conflicts Reversed', *PIOOM Newsletter*, Vol. 9, No. 1, Winter 1999/2000.

warfare'. The use of the World Wide Web is a case in point. Operations can be conducted on the web by individuals against our global financial systems. Essentially, any use by others of what we have built to harm our interests or ourselves describes an aspect of asymmetry. In *Studies in Asymmetry*, dr. Max Manwaring provides a good partial definition of this condition: the organized application of violence or non-military coercion or threatened coercion intended to resist, oppose, change, or overthrow an existing government, and to bring about political change.³³ The important question that should be asked is what has happened to the world that has caused the sharp escalation in 'small wars'?

Today, in many parts of the world, chaos is the normal state of nature and the roots of 'small wars' will be found in this chaotic realm. The former director of the Central Intelligence Agency, James Woolsey, observed:

*...We have slain a large dragon, but we live now in a jungle filled with a bewildering number of poisonous snakes.*³⁴

What are some of these snakes that will influence future conflict?

Nationalism

Nationalism will always be used throughout the world to justify the use of force to settle regional disputes. 'Nations' can be based upon many sources of identity – from religious, to ethnic, to historical, to territorial, and back again – and are often contradictory. But, nationalist aspirations

will continue to fuel and to justify modern conflict and particularly 'small wars'. Where democracy has not put down deep roots, nationalist appeal will be used to justify strengthening centrist regimes or increased statism. These same aspirations will lead to the break up of multiethnic states and generate rebellions, insurrections, irredentist movements, and terrorist actions; all are potentially 'small wars'.

Ideology

Ideology, the body of ideas reflecting the social needs and aspirations of an individual, group, class, or culture, will increasingly come to dominate the relationships of states and peoples. One only needs to pick up a current periodical and one article will be about the role of Islam and its relationship to the rest of the world, but especially the West.³⁵ Many governments no longer define their nation's ideology. In many cases, multinational organizations have assumed this role. Concomitantly, the race toward the 'free market' causes real pain with which many communities refuse to live. And, many religions are failing their membership while becoming increasingly militant. In the mid-90s, Islam played in the root causes of half the world's ethnic conflicts. Eleven or twelve of the sixteen major terrorist attacks between 1983-2000 involved Muslims perpetrators. Five Islamic countries appear on the Department of State's list of seven terrorist states. And, two-thirds of the current 'small wars' are between Islamic states or Islamic states against non-Islamic states. Notwithstanding, Islam only makes up one-fifth of the world's population.

Competition

The negative aspect of *competition* will sharpen disputes and create more 'instability pairs' such as India and Pakistan. There is no balance of power today. Nearly every nation and many non-state actors have access to high technology. Meanwhile, nearly everyone has global access to the information media.

Population growth

A disproportionate *population growth* in the lesser-developed world also will contribute to increasing conflicts over basic resources. The 'youth bulge', a rapidly expanding population that is proportionately younger than a stable population, can be found in many unstable parts of the world such as Iran and Iraq. This stresses at once governments and societies in two ways: youths are traditionally unproductive members in modern societies, and youths in most societies are more easily persuaded to adopt radical solutions to prevalent problems. A disproportionate population growing in lesser-developed countries will exacerbate the looming mismatch between populations and local resources. Increasing populations are also exposed to natural and man-made disasters. During the recent conflict in Afghanistan, an unusual outbreak of Crimean-Congo hemorrhagic fever erupted in the refugee areas near Herat. The refugees from the Soviet invasion and subsequent combat operations in Afghanistan in the 1980s that I encountered all along the Northwest Frontier became the Taliban of the late 1990s. Like the Palestinians of 1948, these refugees became radicalized given their pathetic state.

Declining ability of a state to govern

The declining *ability of a state to govern* and the increasing inability or willingness of a population to be governed will foment future small wars. Governments are losing control in many parts of the world and this has led to a frequent devolution of authority to local levels. Non-government organizations (NGOs) and organizations such as the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) can further exacerbate this situation during conflict prevention activities, by recognizing these local leaders and, inadvertently legitimizing them. Many are actors 'out side of the law'; local warlords or drug barons with demonstrable power to influence in their region. The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Columbia

³³ Max Manwaring, *Studies in Asymmetry*.

³⁴ Testimony by the DCI before the Senate, February 1993.

³⁵ For further treatment of this subject review Dr. David Ziedan, 'The Great Debate in Islam', *Middle East Review of International Affairs (MEIA) Journal*, Vol. 5, No. 4, December 2001; Jay Tolson, 'Struggle for Islam', *US News & World Report*, October 15, 2001, pp. 23-26; Dr. Fareed Zakaria, 'Why they hate us', *Newsweek*, October 15, 2001, pp. 27-40.

(FARC) is a classic example. This lawlessness led to the nearly exponential growth of 'Peacetime Engagement' operations such as those that ended temporarily in the dirt streets that formed the Bakara market of Mogadishu, Somalia. This firefight between one of the most sophisticated strike forces ever assembled and the Aided clan, caused the United States to forsake its efforts to assist this basket-case nation.

Technological acceleration

And, what role will *technological acceleration* play? Segments of the industrialized world have and will continue to seize the opportunity to make quantum leaps in technology leaving lesser-developed countries in their wake. As conscription fades and the idea of military service becomes even more unpalatable, military technology will become increasingly 'fire and forget' or brilliant weapons of dummies. When a nation like Germany has nearly 200,000 conscripts who refuse service, systems must be simple, yet effective. Whether some sort of rapid reaction force (RRF) for NATO, or the European Union (EU), or even the local 'praetorian guard' for a drug warlord, small units will become more lethal.

In Afghanistan, a small US Special Forces 'A' team uses B-52 bombers

for close air support. This same aircraft was once part of America's Strategic Air Command (SAC). During the Vietnam War, their missions were coordinated from the White House. Today, they are coordinated from horseback. Advanced technology is getting into the hands of everyone and anyone at a blinding rate. During operation Desert Storm, global positioning satellites (GPS) were guarded 24 hours a day. Today, day hikers feel ill prepared without one. Technology has compressed time and states must keep pace with a global media. The 'CNN effect' or the 'CNN-drone' is not a casual remark off the lecture circuit, but reality for spokesmen like Jamie Shea and even the current US Secretary of Defense. Criminals and terrorists abuse this technological acceleration as well. September 11, 2001 was a relatively unsophisticated operation.

Economics

And what role does *economics* play? As noted above, lesser-developed nations face a rapid population growth. These states have scarce capital for industrialization. What limited industrialization there is reduces the need for 'unskilled' labor, thereby increasing unemployment. What export materials are available are consumed domestically. So, how does a nation state break out of this dilemma or death spiral? To paraphrase Carl von Clausewitz, conflict permits the continuation of economics by another means.³⁶ Today, increasingly, guns, drugs, and diamonds are conflict objectives, not another country's capital or some obscure hilltop or road junction. High primary commodity exports, low income, and slow growth are a 'witches brew' which makes 'predatory' small wars the most predictable form of modern conflict today. Conflict is financially viable. Fighters can do well out of conflict. In many lethal small wars, distinguishing between a narco-trafficante and an insurgent is difficult. The FARC in Colombia employs around 12,000 people and earns up to \$700 million per year from drugs and kidnapping.³⁷

But there is more than those snakes that will influence future conflict. There are also contrasting dimensions.

Contrasting dimensions

I will discuss organized versus informal, soldiers versus warriors, commanders versus warlords, segregation versus integration, global versus local, state-of-the-art versus back-of-the-flatbed technology and other contrasts.

Organized - Informal Organization

Small wars contain distinct and contrasting dimensions that must be understood by participants.³⁸ Historians look at the development of organized warfare beginning some 6,000 years ago. By the 3rd millennium B.C., forces were organized, trained, and equipped as recognizable combined arms armies, a concept that exists today. Military analysts assume that organization equated to greater effectiveness. But, while theoretically the Druze militia in Lebanon in the 1970s and the clan-based forces of Somalia in the 1990s could not have stood up to a Western army, the Druze did defeat the Lebanese Christian militia and regular units of the Lebanese Army (LAF) and the Somalis gave the United States and United Nations forces *all* they wanted in Mogadishu.³⁹ The Battle at the Bakara Market was a 'gunfight' between 'Delta Force', Special Forces Operational Detachment Delta (SFOD-Delta), and Rangers against elements of Aided's clan.

The Kurdistan conflict is a continuous struggle based upon Kurdish tribal and family allegiances. This is also an organizational factor in a fashion. The Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) is organized within the Talabani clan while the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) is organized from the Barzani clan. At the same time, ethnicity is a critical factor. The Kurds are engaged in an ethnically-based struggle against Iraq, Iran, and Turkey. At the same

³⁶ Refers to the German philosopher Carl von Clausewitz, well known for the maxim 'war is the continuation of policy by other means'.

³⁷ Joseph Kahn, *Guns and Dope Fuel Civil Wars Around World, A Study Finds in Economic Causes of Civil Conflict and Their Implications for Policy*, edited by Paul Collier, Development Research Group, Washington, DC: World Bank, June 15, 2000. Online:

<http://www.worldbank.org/research/conflict/papers/civilconflict.pdf>.

³⁸ Jeffrey B. White, 'A Different Kind of Threat: Some Thoughts on Irregular Warfare', *Studies in Intelligence*, Vol. 39, November 5, 1996. I have used Dr. White's contrasting dimensions framework extensively in the paper, while applying my own experiences and observations.

³⁹ Jeffrey B. White, *A Different Kind of Threat*, p. 5.



Kurdish refugees, Irak 1991 (Source: 11 Geniehelpbataljon)

time, both the Barzani and the Talabani are Kurdish clans, both hate each other, and both will fight or ally themselves with Saddam Hussein or Tehran's Paderan when needed. As Talabani aptly said of his rival (Barzani) once,

*He's a weak man, – prey to a narrow tribal view of the world – someone who doesn't give a damn about the opposition or Chalabi's (leader of the inc) uprising or even overthrowing Saddam. He cares only about the Barzani clan and would make a pact with the devil to protect it.*⁴⁰

The devil has a filing cabinet full of pacts from this part of the world and the Afghan and Somali files are particularly thick. Religion, another powerful factor, can reinforce ethnicity. However, in this context one needs to be careful of

generalizations, e.g., Muslim *versus* Christian. In Lebanon, the politics of the Christian Phalange party were largely the politics of the old Gemayel family. The Phalange was a political expression for one 'tribe' of several within the Christian heartland of Lebanon. In another 'tribe', terms like socialism, democracy, or nationalism may have no real meaning. Walid Jumblatt's 'socialist party' was not about socialism, rather about his tribe, the Druze. Jumblatt's real interests were and still are in furthering the interests of his 'tribe'. The armed elements of these 'tribes' were at first glance very informal, but their real organization was based upon a clan arrangement.⁴¹

The late Jonas Savimbi's forces of the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) represent a classic case study for students of 'small wars'. Conflict in Angola

began over forty years ago and its current civil war erupted in 1975 when the Portuguese colonialists departed and the Marxist government of Angola (MPLA) was left in place backed by the Soviet Union and Fidel Castro. Although multi-tribal in ideology, UNITA was always dominated by two great clans of Angola's biggest tribe, the Ovimbundu. The clans were the Savimbis and the Chingunjis. Jonas Savimbi and his branch of UNITA, trained by the Chinese, fought in the Angolan bush until Savimbi's death. The Chingunji clan organized the clandestine underground and penetrated the MPLA from within.⁴² While

⁴⁰ Robert Baer, *See no Evil: Story of a Ground Soldier in the CIA's War on Terrorism*, New York: Crown Publishers, 2002, p. 196.

⁴¹ Jeffrey B. White, *A Different Kind of Threat*, pp. 4-5.

⁴² Fred Bridgeland, 'Angola's Secret Bloodbath', *Washington Post*, March 29, 1992, page C1.

this insurgent force of clans was not organized along Western conventions, it was viable, organized, and effective absent covert support from South Africa and the United States. These informal arrangements, while not recognized by Western analysts as 'organized' in the traditional sense, are nevertheless effective. We make a serious mistake equating organized conventional forces with greater effectiveness in small wars. Furthermore, we imperil our forces by not recognizing the effectiveness of this informal or non-traditional style of organization.

Soldiers - Warriors

'Small wars' are usually fought by soldiers against warriors. Modern armies develop discipline and cohesion through deliberate indoctrination. Irregular forces found in small wars produce the same results, but use a more natural process. One of the first 'modern' armies, the famous Greek phalanx of the city-states was formidable because the men knew each other well. Phalanx warfare depended upon a sense of community between the leaders and the middle class. Hoplites, Greek infantry, had to face the enemy together, each protecting with his shield the sword arm of the man to his left.⁴³ The glue of this military ethos is what the Greeks called *philia* - friendship, comradeship, or brotherly love. *Philia*, the bond among disparate individuals

who are facing death and misery together, is the source of the unit cohesion that research has shown to be critical to battlefield success. The United States Marine Corps (USMC) recruits in this fashion and demonstrates a similar bond. The motto of the Corps, *Semper Fidelis*, is a way of life. Irregular forces are drawn from a similar kind of base: from friendship, comradeship, or brotherly love.

But, soldiers and warriors are *not* the same.⁴⁴ The modern professional soldier is a product from a system that removes him from society and intentionally strips him of his identity.⁴⁵ He is made a professional in the use of lethal force. He follows strict rules of engagement and a clear chain of command. He responds to legal orders from his superiors and is held accountable for his actions. Soldiers and their commanders think in terms of what makes sense in modern parochial contexts. However, warriors draw upon historic and cultural backgrounds that are routinely all but invisible to the soldier.⁴⁶

A warrior never leaves his society. Rather, he is a reflection of his surroundings. His martial skills represent what is traditional within his culture. His knowledge of warfare is in part inherited and in part reinforced on a daily basis. He operates within a looser organization and a more relaxed disciplinary system. However, the

consequences of his failure can be draconian by Western standards. Warrior leaders are also different from leaders of modern armies. While they may, or may not, have formal military education, they have extensive combat experience, and know their men; their psychology, their real capabilities, and their social needs.⁴⁷ Understanding this nuance will prevent the kind of comment made by the former Russian Minister of Defense Pavel Grachev, that Grozny, the capital of Chechnya, could be taken by 'one airborne regiment in two hours'.⁴⁸

Commanders - Warlords

'Warlords', or warrior leaders, sometimes campaign differently. In some cases, they cannot afford to accept 'risk' in the classic military sense because the loss of just one major weapon system and even certain elites, or 'stiffener' forces to a lesser degree, can have an inversely proportional result, and not just to their political existence. As one of the Marshall Center's distinguished faculty noted in a discussion about coalition warfare among warlords, 'Get the guy on your left flank to lose his (tank) and you've just increased your own position and strength'. Understanding this is all part of comprehending another's strategic culture or improving our 'Silk Road street smarts',^{48a} which is an education of both antiquity and post-mod-

⁴³ David Boucher, *Political Theories of International Relations*, New York: Oxford University, Inc., 1998, p. 48. Alvin Bernstein, *Sparta: Strategic and Operational Approach to War*, Lecture at the US Naval War College, August 30, 1990.

⁴⁴ Jeffrey B. White, *A Different Kind of Threat*, p. 8.

⁴⁵ This is not the case within a conscripted army whose intent is to maintain the civilian identity of its combatants.

⁴⁶ Dunlop, Charles P., 'Special Operations Forces in Kosovo', *Joint Forces Quarterly*, No. 28, Spring and Summer 2001, p. 10.

⁴⁷ There are exceptions that have formal military training and these need to be appreciated by analysts. Somali General Mohamed Farrah Aidid attended a military university in Odessa, FSU and in Rome. He fought against Ethiopia, in the Somalia *coup d'etat* and in

the Somalia Civil War. Aidid was in charge of the Habr Gedir Clan. In Somalia there were five clans at the time, all struggling for power of the country. Gen. Aidid's clan was the strongest and he proclaimed himself president of Somalia. Akhmad Shah Massoud was the son of a colonel, initially trained in the Afghan army and then by the Pakistani ISI and other intelligence services. Shamil Basayev spent two years in the Soviet Army and fought with fellow Chechens as a 'colonel' in the Abkhaz resistance forces. While fighting in Abkhazia, Basayev had regular contact with Russian military officials who were covertly assisting the Abkhaz in operational planning and intelligence. Before returning home to Chechnya in 1994, Basayev and his unit, the 'Abkhaz Battalion', fought with the Azeris against the Armenians

in the Azerbaijani enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh. According to Raymond Finch, *A Face of Future Battle, Chechen Fighter Shamil Basayev*, he may have well received training in Afghanistan.

⁴⁸ Timothy Lee Thomas, *Military-Political Aspects of the [Chechen] Conflict*, Fort Leavenworth: Foreign Military Studies Office, 1994, p. 6. Minister Grachev's comment was widely reported in the Russian and international media.

^{48a} 'Silk Road street smarts' is another way to express that an actor or observer in this area must possess a highly developed situational awareness of his or her surroundings. 'Street smarts' is an American police term (apologies) and the 'Silk Road' is the old trading route from the West to China from Marco Polo's era.

ernism.⁴⁹ One old T-54 tank, held together with bailing wire, is as good as an Abrams main battle tank in the world of Toyota flatbeds.

Equipment replacement is challenging. Warrior replacement is harder. A warlord's recruiting and logistics base is limited to certain select geographic or cultural areas. A Taliban leader cannot replace combat losses or defections easily while occupying the Hazara region and the Sheik Ali ethnic areas, someone else's backyard, and he has no recruiting depot upon which to turn.

Warlords operate on 'momentum' vice the results of a classic deliberate planning process.⁵⁰ 'Initiative', a lauded western military attribute associated with time, is hard to discern. Today, Afghan commanders appear not to be in a hurry. Commentators on the ground war in Afghanistan repeatedly discussed the imminent termination of combat operations because of cold weather. In fact, the Afghan fighting season has little to do with the onset of winter. Rather, over the centuries, Afghan warlords have become socially accustomed to a 'half time' in the winter when it suits their need to renegotiate with their opposition and perhaps switch alliances: it is their battle rhythm.⁵¹ Small wars are orchestrated

by these rhythms. Time has a different connotation and favors the warrior for whom there is neither rotation, nor surcease. If he is not losing, he is winning. The recent small wars of Lebanon, Somalia, and Chechnya have demonstrated how hard it is for an external or conventional force to have more than a passing effect on a conflict that is deeply rooted in a society. Misunderstanding a warrior's notion of time has led to great frustration and sometimes Western 'defeat'. Frustration will become evident in Afghanistan.

Segregation - Integration

Another dimension at variance with modern and irregular forces in small wars deals with their place in society: an issue of segregation versus integration.⁵² Modern forces are drawn from a society, basically segregated or taken out of the society, and trained for deployment into a theater or a region, and employed in some tactical area of responsibility. In small wars, the warriors seem inseparable from the society. Any CNN camera scene from Afghanistan today supports this point. Fighters, refugees, and common ordinary citizens move about freely and in many cases are indistinguishable. These conflicts, or small wars, can continue from generation to generation and become a routine part of civil society. Try identifying the roots of the current Afghan conflict or the 'Irish troubles'.

Global - Local Control

In state-on-state war and where states are engaged in small wars, the coordination and direction of conventional forces and resources requires robust organization, technology, and manpower. Advanced information systems provide the necessary command, control, computer support, communications, intelligence, and information (C4I2).⁵³ The commander-in-chief, normally the senior elected official or head of state, declares the state of conflict, its end-state, and his intent. This sort of conflict is directed from the highest levels of government and military command. Today, the Com-

mander-in-Chief Central Command (CENTCOM) controls combat operations in Afghanistan from Tampa, Florida in strict accordance with his civilian leadership's intent. This is not unusual and reflects a healthy civil-military relationship. Small wars are tightly intertwined with international diplomacy, domestic politics, the media campaign, and require an inter-agency approach. In the American context, only the White House can manage them.

However, small wars are directed by a local warrior-leader for regional or perhaps very personal reasons. Divining such reasons is challenging because his values, goals, and strategies are often based upon obscure, idiosyncratic, and remote historic and chronological factors. Let me use the profile of the Chechen commander Shamil Basayev, as an example of local leadership and personal ambition. Basayev is first and foremost a product of his regional traditions. Travelers in the Caucasus are liable to find that Chechen mountain peoples' legendary hospitality, *Rhilk*, has one peculiar flaw: that is the need for self-preservation. Vendettas have torn this wild and lawless part of the world apart for centuries. *Adat*, an ancient system of retribution, is *older* than Islam itself and is still more widely followed than the Russian penal code, which has never commanded much respect from Chechens. While it may appear that the Chechen conflict is based upon Russia's desire to control its sovereign territory, the conflict also may be attributed to on-going blood feuds that began decades or centuries ago. Like *Adat*, an analogous code of self-preservation can be found in most of the mountainous trouble spots of the world. It is especially lethal when mixed with a militant fundamentalist brand of Islam.⁵⁴

For their personal command and control needs, warlords, or local leaders utilize a variety of very simple communication devices. 'Handys', or mobile telephones, the ubiquitous 'bricks' with simple encryption devices,

⁴⁹ From e-mail discussions with LTC Tom Wilhelm, USA, Defense Attaché to Mongolia, November 19, 2001, 2:23 AM, Subject: Wilhelm After Action Report: 'Song of the South'. LTC Wilhelm was TAD in support of operation Enduring Freedom.

⁵⁰ Warlord 'momentum' was an attribute discussed at length by Rudman, SADF, and this author, in conversations regarding combat operations in Africa and specifically Angola. Rudman was responsible for psychological operations developed by the South African Brigade Headquarters fighting Cuban and the FAPLA forces in Angola during operation Modular in the last months of 1987. That was during the final phase of the South African involvement in Angola.

⁵¹ Wilhelm e-mail, November 19, 2001.

⁵² Jeffrey B. White, *A Different Kind of Threat*, p. 9.

⁵³ Jeffrey B. White, *A Different Kind of Threat*, p. 7.

and runners can provide a perfectly effective command and control net for local operations. Before the battle in the Bakara Market, Aideed's fighters were marshaled in that area using pots and pans. Local command and control is further enhanced in small wars especially when subordinate leaders really understand their leader's intent: not just what he wants accomplished but why he wants it accomplished.⁵⁴ In October 1987, before the battle for control of the

Keran Valley in Northern Afghanistan, Ahmed Shah Massoud personally discussed his intent for two hours with over 100 subordinate commanders.⁵⁶ He covered his priorities, critical missions, the logistical preparation of this battle, and intelligence. His subordinates, men with whom he had fought for years, had a complete appreciation for Massoud's desires. The results were predictable with Massoud soundly defeating the Soviet-supported government forces,

capturing over 300 POWs and killing only 29. His losses were negligible. As is always the case, the operation as originally planned changed as soon as it began. However, given their thorough understanding of Massoud's intent, his subordinate commanders were able to improvise and accomplish their mission without having to stop and communicate with their superiors. Massoud was able to reduce the time required to receive supplies from Pakistan from two

⁵⁴ In the Pathan area of Afghanistan, *Pakhtunwali* is the nearly sacred code, which decrees that friendship is sacred, and an enemy shown no quarter. In Albania, the *Kanun* (pronounced ka-NOON) is a similar written code of rules and oaths. By the dictates of the *Kanun*, one's primary allegiance is to clan and community, not to the state. In accordance with this allegiance, taking revenge in order to defend the honor of one's family is not only permissible, but also a sacred duty. Of course, unlike medieval times, that duty can now be carried out with modern weaponry. There is an astonishing resemblance between the customary law of the Northern Albanians and that of the peoples of the North Caucasus. Writing in 1925,

in the *Zeitschrift fuer vergleichende Rechtswissenschaft*, Adolf Dirr noted, 'that the two systems of customary law appeared practically interchangeable'. Like 'Adat', 'Kanun' is by no means a relic of the past and this idea of a 'highland' code is not unique to the East. For a superb treatment of 'Kanun' read, Scott Anderson, 'The Curse of Blood and Vengeance', *The New York Times Magazine*, December 26, 1999.

⁵⁵ For a complete understanding of the concept of a 'Commander's Intent' see Marine Corps FMFM-1, *Warfighting*. 'We achieve this harmonious initiative in large part through the use of the commander's intent. There are two parts to a mission: the *task* to be accomplished and the reason, or *intent*. The task

describes the action to be taken while the intent describes the desired results of the action. Of the two, the intent is predominant.

⁵⁶ Suicide bombers killed Ahmed Shah Massoud, the former defense minister and head of Afghanistan's deposed government, two days before the September 11 terrorist attacks in the United States. The 48-year-old Massoud was an indomitable resistance leader in the 1980s, repelling one Soviet foray after the next. After the Soviets withdrew from the country, the coalition government that he was a part of was unable to hold onto power. By the mid 90s, Massoud became the chief adversary of the Taliban. It should come as no surprise that Al-Qa'ida and the Taliban leadership planned for his assassination years before it occurred.



Grozny in ruins



Kosovo, 1999 (Source: MNB(s))

weeks to three days. The Russians again experienced the same phenomenon in Grozny, where very simple or even 'primitive' command and control systems were more than sufficient for operations in an urban environment.

State-of-the-Art - Back-of-the-Flatbed Technology

To conclude with the contrasting dimensions of small wars, conventional forces focus on the development of advanced technology while warriors in small wars adapt the technology that is on hand. Somali 'technical' vehicles, with their antique

106mm. recoilless rifles, were World War II vintage, but controlled the streets of Mogadishu. Conventional forces are logistics-dependent, tethered to 'the ball and chain' of their logistics system, while warriors are logistics independent to a point. Battlefields of small wars are pre-staged and engagements avoided until supplies are adequate.

Other contrasts

Conventional forces pride themselves on the production of reams of coherent doctrine: joint doctrine, service doctrine, and theater doctrine. Careers are made on this industry. Warlords use what has worked and what might work. Massoud could recite Maoist doctrine from memory and was a prodigious reader. However, he could

improvise and did what had to be done to win. The modern armies of the East and West have been fixated on the Clausewitzian notion of the decisive battle, '*ein Schlacht ohne Morgen*', while the warriors in small wars can exist with skirmishes forever. Conventional forces fight with allies, partners, and within real or illusionary coalitions. Warlords seek accomplices, families, and other clans for support.⁵⁷

My observations

Why are small wars *now* much more likely to occur as described and where might they occur? Several important factors form a classic trilogy of means, motive, and opportunity regarding the answer to the first question.⁵⁸ First is the 'trickle-down' of

⁵⁷ Jeffrey B. White, *A Different Kind of Threat*, p. 6.

⁵⁸ Fred Fuller, *New Order Threat Analysis: A Literature Survey*, USAJFKSWCS 28307-5000, Ft. Bragg, NC: November 2, 1996, pp. 2-3.

weapons of mass destruction or increased destruction: the advent of chemical, biological, nuclear, enhanced, or sophisticated weapons appears at hand. There are numerous cases that support this suggestion: the Japanese subway attack with nerve gas, the Tamil Tiger chemical attack on the Sri Lankan army, the Moscow 'park surprise' of ionizing material which the Chechens threatened to spread with conventional explosives, and the Al-Qa'ida kamikaze assault on the Pentagon and World Trade Center. Most of the small wars in Africa are fueled with near state-of-the-art weapons systems such as Mi-24/26 Hind gunships, and experienced pilots abound. Increasingly, 'talent' looking for any paying job or willing to serve because of personal ideology provides greater access to knowledge and hard skills for small wars. This includes pilots, trained intelligence and security operatives, as well as nuclear engineers, biologists, and chemists. Sophisticated, tactical light and heavy weapons are available to anyone with the money to purchase them. Minsk and the Trans Dnestr region are some of the primary suppliers of the world's illegal weapons.⁵⁹ Belarussian army stockpiles and small arms industries in Trans Dnestr are prospering from this global demand. The reason is at once purely criminal and economic, largely owing to the state weakness in both Belarus and Moldova and to the incapacity of the authorities to enforce

any arms exports controls. Likewise, the continued willingness of certain 'rogue states', such as Syria and Iran, to supply arms and high explosives to terrorist groups continues. Combatants also have greater access to the amount of funds needed to mount significant attacks. Even though some traditional state sponsorship has begun to dry up, extortion, kidnapping, robberies, or drug related activities easily fund small wars. As noted above, combatants can make money from 'small wars'. Also, ideologically motivated groups can and will do more on a shoestring. The first attack on the World Trade Center cost terrorist bomber Ramsi Yousef less than \$4,000 dollars. Finally, with the end of the Cold War, sub-state groups like Al-Qa'ida are more willing to carry out significant attacks for ideological reasons, or for profit, in the absence of controls formerly exercised by the major Cold War actors.

Thomas Homer-Dixon describes the growth of small wars and their lethality in epidemiological terms. The virulence of violence, the fatality rate, is a result of a vicious cycle: Weak and illegitimate governments in poor countries stimulate conflict. This attracts an influx of weapons and makes conflicts more bitter and protracted, further weakening and destabilizing the impoverished country.⁶⁰

Operational environments

And small wars will exist in highly specific operational environments like the Afghan microclimate, where populations, tribes, and tribal units live and act both inside and outside state- or other boundaries. This needs to be understood by all participants: policy makers, commanders, combatants, intelligence officers, and even lawyers. The Afghan conflict has been and continues to be 'invaders' against Afghans at one level; the Pushtun majority against the minorities like the Hazaras or the Uzbeks at a lower level; or, the Pushtun Durrani tribes against the Ghilzai tribes. When these elements are not fighting, it's village against village or brother

against brother. These operational environments will present several challenges.

Understanding context

First, these operational environments consist of a number of elements, including geography, ecology, history, ethnicity, religion, and politics. These are not topics to which the military, intelligence, or law professionals have devoted much attention. Next, these topics just mentioned – and there are many more – must be seen in a detailed and nuanced context. It is specific local geography, history, politics, and the like that are critical. Examine Kosovo for example. Balkan history is one thing; the history and the legend of the Serb-Ottoman conflict is another. The role of custom and culture, specific families, tribes, clans is yet another. For an even more complex mosaic than Afghanistan or Kosovo, consider Lebanon. Arab history is one thing; the history of the Christian-Druze conflict is another; and, the roles of the specific families – the Gemayels, the Chamouns, the Franjiyahs, and Jumblatts – is yet another. A Westerner trained in Western logic will have difficulty here because these conflicts seem irrational and are dismissed erroneously as the result of the 'wog' factor.⁶¹

Cultural geography will need to be understood in a micro sense as well. Despite all of the US forces' technological advantages, the ethnic Albanian guerrillas operating in Macedonia have two huge assets: the utter loyalty and commitment of the ethnic Albanian villagers who live on both sides of the Kosovo-Macedonia border; and, an innate knowledge of this rough mountain terrain. The Albanian villagers in Kosovo fully support the National Liberation Army (NLA) fight in Macedonia. Amid this bucolic setting, the white plaster farmhouses with terra-cotta roofs and herds of sheep wandering the hillsides, the villagers have supplied NLA rebels with safe houses, food, and transportation. A recent search by US troops of a

⁵⁹ 'Arms for Chechens and Taliban', *Jane's Intelligence Digest*, January 11, 2002, p. 2. This report was corroborated separately in December 2001 during a discussion the author had with a US intelligence officer who is currently working in this region.

⁶⁰ Homer Dixon Jones, 'The Virulence of Violence?' *The Washington Post*, February 4, 2001.

⁶¹ *Wog* stands for 'worthy oriental gentleman'. In the 19th century it was a genteel euphemism for Indians with English manners and a quasi-British social status, but it quickly became derogatory. By the era of T.E. Lawrence, it was the British way of cursing anything and everything east of the Channel.

farmhouse on a dirt road high in the mountains revealed 30 futons that military sources believe furnished sleeping quarters for NLA soldiers. Is this true or is this simply a traditional haven for shepherds?

In Afghanistan today, how does a young Marine distinguish between a member of the United Front, a Taliban fighter, an 'Arab' mercenary of Al-Qa'ida, or an Afghan farmer? They all carry weapons and look the same. Only a local can identify who belongs to whom. As General Hamid Gul, the former chief of Pakistan's main intelligence agency, Inter Services Intelligence, noted:

*(Afghanistan) is a traditional tribal society where even a dog from another tribe is noticed by everyone.*⁶²

Gul's comment about Afghan society is accurate.

Understanding environment

And where will small wars occur? The increasing urbanization of populations on a global scale concentrates greater numbers of people in smaller geographic areas, vastly increasing their vulnerability to attacks on infrastructure (power, water, transportation, and communications). Today, 45 percent of the world's population lives in an urban environment. This percentage will grow to 60 percent by 2025. The vast majority of these urban areas are on the littorals. Crowded cities and urban sprawl are also most vulnerable to attacks by weapons of mass destruction even if these attacks are carried out in relatively unsophisticated fashion. Given the increasing weight of urban areas

as an opponent's center of gravity or source of power, modern forces will fight in urban areas like it or not.⁶³

Russia's current experience in Chechnya and specifically the city of Grozny is noteworthy. In spite of better planning, improved training, reasonably effective command and control, and a successful media campaign, Russian forces took heavy casualties in Grozny, and through their tactics, virtually destroyed the city driving the Chechens out. Even then, it is unclear whether the Chechen rebels' retreat was a result of genuine Russian victory or of previously laid plans. The Russian Army could not efficiently and effectively capture an urban area from a weaker force. One reason, perhaps the most important, is the Russians were fundamentally unprepared for urban combat. Real Chechen resistance was not planned. Training came too late. And, their encirclement was too porous. The Russian military fervently hoped to avoid urban combat. By

⁶² Anwar Iqbal, *United Press International*, March 13, 2002, 613PM.

⁶³ *Marine Corps Midrange Threat Estimate - 1997-2007: Finding Order in Chaos (U)*, Defense Intelligence Reference Document, MCIA-1586-001-97, Washington, DC: August 1997, p. 3.



Russian troops in Tadjikistan, 1993

believing that they could avoid an urban battle and by not preparing for one, the Russian military guaranteed that any fight – successful or otherwise – would have a very high butcher bill.⁶⁴

A new professionalism

Small wars will require at once unique leadership and combatants. Perhaps we should seek a cross between the Duke of Wellington and Colonel T. E. Lawrence for leadership. Both were masters of the art of fighting small wars: intimately understanding their environment, their own capabilities, and the use of weak and unreliable allies. Wellington, better known for his coalition victory over Napoleon at Waterloo, demonstrated his true genius fighting 'from the sea', in an expeditionary manner, in Portugal, and using his 'special forces' and native allies in India. Lawrence's campaign against the Turkish forces in World War I is a near mirror image of operation Enduring Freedom. In a sense, this operation by design resembles a 'classic' colonial war without the occupation phase. The United States has spared its own troops, while using proxies and wisely avoiding taking sides and employing its own uncontested technology to assist its proxies to win quickly. One of the keys to this small war is the development of the human mind.

Many commentators of the *current* Afghanistan conflict mistakenly suggest the main lesson-learned is that small US combat teams on the ground and high-performance aircraft with precision-guided weapons can be and were coordinated under almost any condition. The real lesson-learned is that the American military education and training investment in its professional combatants in the mid-80s has paid dividends. The real qualitative difference in Afghanistan, Kosovo, Somalia, and Kuwait is in the military skill of US combatants. Officers attend rigorous professional military education institutions and are masters of their profession upon graduation.⁶⁵ Each education level builds upon the knowledge gained at previous levels. This mastery is both intellectual and practical. The specialized skills of US enlisted combatants increasingly gives their commanders confidence in their ability to be the 'strategic corporals' critical to small wars that have come under increasingly intense global media scrutiny. Small wars are no place for conscript soldiers or professional peacekeepers.

Training aside, another reason that small wars are not for conscripts and peacekeepers is that small wars are generally ruthless. The warrior does not abide humanitarian law or finely massaged rules of engagement (ROE). He understands and practices the 'legal stricture' developed in the Boar War's 'Rule 303' or Hafez Al Assad's infamous 'Hama Rules'.⁶⁶ And, it is

not only the warrior who is capable of atrocities. During the Russian occupation of Afghanistan, Afghan women were deliberately mutilated to draw Afghan Mujahideen out of their combat zone. Mujahideen were required to leave their village to escort each woman to a hospital inside Pakistan. As a Muslim woman, she could not travel alone but needed to be escorted by her cousins, the Mujahideen. No conflict is without savagery and atrocities. However, the propensity for this behavior appears to occur more frequently in small wars.

Conflict will continue to be the intercourse of the human race. Just as a horse would carry a man into action where his legs might not go and a helicopter will carry him further than the horse will go. Neither horse nor helicopter is any better than the heart of the man who holds the reins or handles the 'stick'. As Ernest Hemingway said, 'conflict is fought by human beings'.⁶⁷ His guarantee of the nature of conflict is as relevant today as 60 years ago when he so eloquently described it. It includes:

- Providence of uncertainty;
- Providence of chance;
- Providence of danger and courage is the first quality of a warrior;
- Providence of physical exertion and suffering;
- Demands resolution, firmness, and staunchness;
- Intercourse of the human race; and,
- Conflict is fought by human beings.

In this respect, soldiers and warriors are equal.

The way ahead

Today, some find it difficult to articulate a reason for sustaining a military, much less one as large as needed to meet the many and varied demands placed upon fighting small wars. The advocates for high-tech, standoff attack systems have found it too easy to argue that theirs is the way to quick and relatively cost-free victory. One

⁶⁴ Olga Oliker, *Russia's Chechen Wars 1994-2000: Lessons from Urban Combat*, POP: Rand, 2001, pp. 81-86.

⁶⁵ From *Professional Military Education, Today... and Tomorrow*, Military Education Directorate, J-7, Standard Briefing, Version Six, POP, P, May 3, 1996. PME entails the systematic instruction of professionals, officers, and enlisted in subjects enhancing their knowledge of the science and art of war. This is a 'cradle to grave' process that takes place at many institutions, such as the different staff colleges, war colleges, the Centre for Hemispheric Studies in Washington DC, the Asia-Pacific Centre in Honolulu (HI), the Marshall Centre in Germany and many others.

⁶⁶ Thomas Pakenham, *The Boar War*, New York: Random House, 1979, pp. 570-574. The expression playing by 'Hama Rules' is routinely used in Middle East conflicts and was originated in Thomas Friedman's classic *Beirut to Jerusalem*.

⁶⁷ *Men at War, The Best War Stories of All Time*, with an introduction by Ernest Hemingway, New York: Bramhall House, 1942, 1955, pp. xi-xxvii. This book contains 82 classic war stories of all time, selected by Hemingway to show what war is, how wars are won and lost, the great things and the little things, the courage and the pity of men and women at war.

distinguished member of the Marshall Center faculty, a scholar and a soldier, persuasively argues that today nations have really two choices: identify a 'niche' skill with which they can support a coalition's efforts at maintaining global stability, or abandon the defense business altogether and leave security to others.⁶⁸ However, history argues otherwise and cautions that militaries are a necessity. While the way we fight is changing, the essence of war is not. Conflict remains just as Carl von Clausewitz defined it, an act of force to compel the enemy to do our will. Because war is as much an intellectual as it is a physical endeavor, no enemy is defeated until he believes he is defeated. While conceivably it may be possible to break his will with enough air power, as the huge human and financial costs of operation 'Allied Force' demonstrated, at the end of the day, a physical presence is required. Indeed, we seem to turn to standoff attacks when the stakes appear low, but when real interests are at issue, land power provides the sustainability, close engagement capability, and the presence required for a victory. In small wars virtual presence is actual absence.

Great nations can afford to lose small wars; even long-lasting small wars like Vietnam. But, small nations do not have the luxury of finishing in a close, second place. Therefore, the first mission of any nation is as it enters the 21st century to strike a balance; to be both persuasive in peace, yet secure in conflict. How to do this is the question. In the future, just as in the past, the unexpected will happen; fog and friction will reign. 'Cyber fog

and cyber friction' will be just as deadly in the future as was the mud at Waterloo.⁶⁹ A military has to be competent on the battlefields we have known and on battlefields we are only beginning to comprehend.

Asymmetries have been a part of warfare since the Trojan War and future enemies will use whatever means are available, from cyber attacks to chemical and biological weapons, and commercial aircraft as well. Clausewitz understood that actual war is often far removed from the pure concepts of theory. Too often we seem to think of conflict as one-sided. Small wars are a real wrestling match in which one move elicits a countermove by the opponent. In that regard, if we put too much faith in technology, we can be sure that the enemy will move to obviate those advantages. A nation's center of gravity can also become a critical vulnerability. The ultimate lesson is that every war or conflict is no other but itself. Today, the international environment to which theorists address themselves is certainly more vast and diversified than that of the 19th century when Clausewitz reflected upon the world. And yet, a comparative study of theories then and now leaves the definite impression that war was both being perceived more keenly and explained more accurately by earlier observers than those set out today.⁷⁰ Given the 'end of history', or the end of the Cold War, some are tempted to think that worldwide communications and a global economy will relegate warfare to the trash bin of history. Even if the 100 or so conflicts currently raging around the globe do not argue

against the *naiveté* of this notion, history surely does. The popular thinking in 1912 found war inconceivable until the guns of August erupted in 1914, arguably precipitated by a small war.

The Gordian knot

Just as Gordius Phrygia fashioned a knot so complex as to defy conventional solutions, small wars have and will continue to evolve into a web of interrelated components capable of taxing any nation's intellect and resources. The future will consist of a world tinged by recurring instability and conflict, few nation against nation conflicts, more nation against non-nation state conflicts, lawlessness, and both natural and man-made disasters. Indeed,

*...while the face of war may alter,
some things have not changed
since Joshua stood before Jericho,
and Xenophon marched to the
sea...⁷¹*

But, while I see increased risk in this emerging environment, I also see increased opportunities to thwart aggression and increase prosperity. These openings, however, will only offer themselves to us if we are able to approach them with great mental flexibility. As a global community, we must endeavor to work together to create conditions and opportunities for stability and prosperity for all. In pursuing such lofty goals, how do we reconcile the necessity to elevate our diplomatic, political, economic, and information tools critical to such success with the very real necessity to ensure our *enduring national interests* are physically protected? Perhaps the answer lies in developing a mindset that appreciates the value of a cooperative approach to security. The Marshall Center continues to examine this as a means of building, *inter alia*, the trust, confidence, and transparency that is particularly well suited for the future leadership of our Gordian world.

⁶⁸ James Wither, presentation on RMA to Faculty Enrichment Seminar, George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies, Garmisch, Germany, January 10, 2002.

⁶⁹ The 'friendly fire' casualties to date in the Afghan conflict are small compared to Desert Storm where 35 of 148 US combatants killed in action were hit by US fire. Eleven of those US deaths occurred during accidental strikes by US aircraft against ground forces. Of 467 troops wounded, 72 were hit by friendly fire. For a superb study of the once and future

problem of friction and the Clausewitzian concept of future conflict, see Barry Watt's *Clausewitzian Friction and Future War*, McNair Paper #52, Washington, DC.

⁷⁰ Stephen J. Blank, Lawrence E. Grinter, Karl P. Magyar, Lewis B. Ware and Bynum E. Weathers, *Conflict, Culture, and History: Regional Dimensions*, Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama: Air University Press, January 1993, pp. xxxi.

⁷¹ G. MacDonald Fraser, *Quartered Safe Out Here: A Recollection of the War in Burma*, 1995.