



THE UNITED STATES ARMY WAR COLLEGE



# The Changing Character of War 1775-2016



**U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center  
Historical Services Division**

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The views expressed here are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Department of the Army, Department of Defense, or US Government.

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### **Executive Summary**

The potential changes in the operating environment (OE) and the character of war in the next 15-20 years are unknowable and history cannot provide a predictive model or “cookbook” to anticipate future events. The last 250 years, however, have provided many examples of shifts in the character of war caused by emerging technology, political shifts, economic changes and diplomatic crises. This context may prove very useful for senior leaders. There will doubtless be technological advances in the future, and some may be “game changers.” Intellectual development is just as important as technological development. The Army learned during the interwar years between the world wars that maintaining intellectual capital was critical to later success. Technological change is constant, and all armies adapt to it, yet not all technological changes affect the character of war. The machine gun and the computer, for instance, revolutionized tactics, but had little effect beyond the battlefield. The advent of submarines, airplanes, and nuclear weapons, however, fundamentally altered how war is conducted—the character of war. These case studies address periods during which the character of war changed.

The first case study examines the British defeat in the American Revolution, 1775-83, which was not inevitable. Nonetheless, British leaders faced a change in the character of war unlike any previous experience. Strength in conventional combat operations could not win alone. Few British leaders understood American political conditions, several aspects of which struck a sensitive and common chord at home in England. War broke out during a period of drawdown and retrenchment, so British forces were not postured for rapid success. Victory became elusive as the war dragged on and other major powers capitalized on the British predicament. Thus, the war transformed from a local rebellion, to insurgency, to world war with five theaters, among which North America was a low priority. British leaders then had to decide how to envision the post-war world and the type of relationship to establish with America.

The World War I case study documents how the outbreak of the Great War demonstrated how war can result from seemingly minor events unrelated to a nation’s interests. While it is possible, having entered a war, to apply funding and resources

quickly, it takes a long time for the resources to have any effect. World War I saw great technological advances that heralded the future. The US quickly embraced some, such as the airplane, but was slower to adopt others, such as the tank. Since the seeds of the Second World War were planted in the effective end of the first, American political and military leaders should not expect quick, clean and easy victories.

The case study on the Interwar Years, 1919-1939 examines how the Army dealt with its leanest years. With paltry budgets and a tiny force scattered in small units across the continental United States, Hawaii and the Philippines, the Army had great difficulty in training and modernizing. The Army's saving grace was the preservation of intellectual capital through the Army school system. Despite limited research, development and acquisition budgets, the service still kept abreast of technologies for when resources became available.

The Cold War provided perhaps the longest period of single-focused policy and strategy, and is addressed into two case studies. The first addresses the period 1945-1973. This period brought the changes in the character of war, as the newly bi-polar world reacted and adapted to the new reality of nuclear weapons. The Cold War offered a firm, narrowly focused national security policy, and the opportunity to "test" the enemy in "hot" proxy wars, large and small. The Vietnam War showed that conventional forces with equipment and doctrine to fight a large conventional war were often inadequate for unconventional warfare.

The second Cold War study examines the period 1973-1991. The end of the Vietnam War and the end of the draft signified another shift in the character of war. For the first time in its history, the United States had a professional Army. Creating the Army was than just recruiting—it included changes in equipment, doctrine, education, tactics and even strategy. Going to war with a professional Army is fundamentally more different than doing so with a draft Army.

The major change to US operations in the past half-century has been the move to purely or primarily humanitarian and peacekeeping operations. The US has deployed troops to Somalia, the Balkans, Haiti, Honduras, Sinai, the Philippines, Japan and Malaysia during the last quarter of the century. Yet these small scale contingencies have not removed the necessity of long war deployments such as Iraq and Afghanistan, nor has it removed the danger of "big" wars as a resurgent Russia indicates. In addition to these conflicts, the growing danger of criminal and terrorist organizations further complicate what has come to be called "hybrid" war.

The exact operating environment of 2030-2050 cannot be known. These case studies provide not a road map to the future, but lessons from the past to help plan for the environment.

## Case Study 01: From Insurrection to Global Conflict, 1775-1783

**Summary:** On October 22, 1777, the British Commander-in-Chief for North America, Lt. Gen. Sir William Howe, offered his resignation to King George III and his ministers in London. His departure in May, 1778 signaled the close of the first chapter in the colonial rebellion, marked with sweeping battlefield victories but campaigns that failed to deliver strategic success. The frustration and downright ambivalence of numerous serving officers in North America also perplexed the King and his administration in Whitehall. This change in the character of war defied previous British wartime experience. The 18<sup>th</sup> century as a period of limited war lacked the notion of decisive battle. However, states and their armies had few constraints and restraints when dealing with rebellion. The British Army had considerable experience in Ireland and Scotland. The Thirteen Colonies were different and posed more than a mere revolt. The War of American Independence was a complicated evolution from localized rebellion to a widespread insurgency, which then escalated to a global conflict with other major powers.

**Discussion:** The change in the character of war during the American Revolution, proved a troubling and mystifying development for both British military commanders and policymakers. Challenges in the application of the elements of national power of diplomacy, information, military and economics provide a comprehensive picture of why the might of the British Empire failed to quell a localized rebellion promptly.

Economic factors drove the conditions that sparked rebellion. Crippling war debt from the Seven Years' War, 1756-63 (French and Indian War) and the anticipated costs of post-war governance and security in North America led British policymakers to seek new sources of revenue. A series of taxation laws imposed on the Colonies generated little revenue, but ignited great debate about Parliament's right to levy taxes on the Colonies, which were not represented directly in that legislative body. Punitive measures worsened the crisis, eventually leading to the first military engagement at Lexington and Concord in April 1775. The revolt then inaugurated a new, expensive war. Indeed, the expense grew exponentially as the Government was forced to sustain a long war across a sea line of communications over 3,000 miles long.

The same economic factors after 1763 had resulted in major force reductions in both the British Army and the Royal Navy. Both services had to initiate wartime expansions, which took time; however, funding was eventually forthcoming. The established practice to hire foreign forces as contractors provided trained troops quickly, though this was a very expensive option. Even with them, Crown Forces in North America never reached above 50,000 troops, concentrated heavily on the Eastern seaboard. Military commanders realized that they required the support of the Loyalist population, including the raising of Loyalist regiments. Too few troops and the vast expanse of the area of operations presented a complex dilemma. The British Army could win battles and conquer certain areas, but it was never strong enough for a comprehensive occupation of all thirteen colonies to protect those sympathetic to the Crown. The Loyalists needed help. Despite the protestations of prominent Loyalists, in retrospect there were far fewer Loyalists than British leaders expected. Early in the

conflict the rebels had not only ousted royal governors, but also dominated and took over both colonial legislative and militia institutions.

The revolt in the American colonies was unlike any of the previous Scottish or Irish rebellions and showcased a critical informational element. The rebels who had resorted to arms against the King and Parliament did so invoking the rights of Englishmen. Their local institutions were direct developments of English parliamentary practices – which they argued Parliament itself was now subverting. While the British went to war with nominal popular support, the Americans' arguments highlighted deficiencies in the British system in need of reform. As the war dragged out, English domestic support waned, until it became anti-war. The political and constitutional debate also underlined cultural and social linkages utterly absent in British operations against the Irish and Scots. Soldiers in North America faced fellow Englishmen, stirring ambivalence amongst the officer corps how to wage the war, even though rebellion generally merited ruthless suppression.

When Maj. Gen. Sir Henry Clinton received his appointment as the new Commander-in-Chief for North America in May 1778, he inherited a global conflict in which his theater was no longer the main effort. French entrance into the war in February 1778 transformed its scope. The Spanish joined in 1779 and the Dutch in 1780. By 1781 Britain faced an armed neutrality in Europe initiated by Russia. British diplomacy failed to obtain any allies during the war. The European powers hoped to take advantage of the British predicament. Strategists in London needed to prioritize among North America; the West Indies, i.e. the Caribbean; Europe, i.e. European waters; the Mediterranean especially Gibraltar; and the East Indies, especially India.

British defeat in America beginning in 1775 was not inevitable. Nonetheless, the conditions which confronted military and naval commanders were daunting. Few understood American political conditions. British opportunities to triumph after 1778 when the war became global were few. British leaders then needed to weigh the viability of remaining in North America in the context of its other global challenges. The only British options seemed to be to impose a bitter stalemate, further hurting the American economy and society, potentially damaging chances for a lasting peace.

## Insights

- Policymakers in London failed to appreciate the nature of the rebellion in America. These issues were not unlike those faced by American military policymakers during the Vietnam War or in Afghanistan and Iraq.
- Senior political leaders will decide if the nation must wage a war of choice. The decision must account for military and naval drawdown and underfunding. The British went to war after twelve years of military and naval drawdown and underfunding. Expectations of rapid expansibility followed by rapidly-decisive expeditionary operations will not likely be attainable.
- Containment of conflict 250 years ago was hard; 21<sup>st</sup>-century conditions may render escalation most likely. Adversaries await opportunities to hurt a major

power or superpower. Britain was utterly alone in the years before the Revolution; the sustainable Patriot cause set the conditions for major-power cooperation to concentrate against Britain.

- British efforts in North America were hampered by lack of effective intelligence. The failure to appreciate the American psyche and overestimating the number of Loyalists proved disastrous.

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*"It was our schools that saved the Army"*

*--Gen. Lawton Collins, USA*

## **Case Study 02: Interwar, 1919-39: Technological Advances and the Development of Intellectual Capital**

**Summary:** The lean years between World War I and World War II were difficult for the Army, but the focus on intellectual capital during these years helped preserve the Army. Research and development of new technologies remain critical.

**Discussion:** The Treaty of Versailles in 1919 was only one of six formal treaties necessary to end the Great War on all fronts. The United States was not a formal Allied member, but rather a Non-Associated Power, that negotiated a separate series of agreements. All proved inadequate to promote a lasting peace. They did not resolve sources of conflict; indeed, they likely sowed the seeds of future war.

The Great War had seen technological developments that far outpaced the tactics and doctrine of the time, and dramatically increased the lethality of modern armies. The war had introduced the concept of weapons of mass destruction, with poisonous gas used liberally and effectively. Other weapons such as artillery and machine guns (most often massed and employed in a similar manner as artillery) proved the value and shock effect of these weapons. The war also introduced completely new technologies such as the tank and airplane, which despite limited effective usage in this war would become decisive in the next.

Post-war sentiment was also decidedly anti-military. Governments slashed military budgets. Armies were especially vulnerable, as politicians and their electorate were numb from the losses of the First World War and recoiled at future embroilments requiring major troop deployments. The 1930s were worse, given the economic disaster symbolized by the 1929 Stock market crash.

The US War and Navy Departments struggled with shrinking budgets and end strength as the Great Depression deepened, and international arms restrictions prevented much research and development. The drawdown after WWI was as dramatic as the mobilization had been. Boasting some 4,000,000 men after Armistice Day, 1918, the Army had reduced by 68% six months later. Within two years that number would fall to 200,000 and would continue to drop over the next decade. The War Department fell victim to a Congress that only half supported its efforts: it authorized an Army end strength in 1920 of 280k, but failed to appropriate money to fill the ranks. The War Department enjoyed an \$11B budget in 1920 (\$151T in 2016), but by 1924, the budget had been slashed to \$522 million (\$6.5 billion in 2016), a 96% decrease.

The Army War College functioned as the “thinking” branch of the War Department General Staff (WDGS) and began developing color-coded war plans in the 1930s using various scenarios for coalition warfare against potential enemies. The interwar planning efforts were prescient because they looked at not only at strategy, operations, and tactics, but also industrial mobilization and deployment.

With units ridiculously understrength (one officer on duty with each battalion, in some cases), the Army realized that the only hope for training lay with a robust school system. Under these austere conditions, the Army decided to invest in intellectual capital. Army Chief of Staff John J. Pershing remembered the critical need for trained officers during WWI and placed a priority on officer development. He reopened the Schools of the Line (later named Command and General Staff College) and the Army War College and charged them with capturing and using the lessons learned from the Great War.

The physical challenges of mobilizing for World War II remained significant, but they would have been even more difficult to overcome without the years of planning that preceded execution. In addition to the schools, professional journals provided the opportunity to share lessons learned across the force. It also allowed spirited intellectual debate on many topics, especially technology and tactics. Many of the junior officers of this period who would become the great leaders of World War II penned articles for *Infantry Journal*, *Cavalry Journal* and others.

All services sought to understand the changes in the character of warfare seen in WW I, and how they might yet further evolve. Unfortunately, anti-military sentiment and inadequate funding hurt experimentation and sometimes encouraged military conservatism. The timing was most unfortunate as the 1930s witnessed rapid acceleration in technological developments. The tank, however lightly armed and armored, was cutting edge compared to its WW I predecessors. High-performance metal monoplanes were evolving faster than air forces could incorporate them. Truck development beckoned widespread motorization. Communications capabilities advanced with technology, allowing more command and control. The services however, were often bogged in parochial budget fights. They could not obtain requisite funding levels to pay for expansion and rearmament with continual upgrades. Often nations' militaries faced similar challenges or they could not afford so. Fascist Italy, Nazi Germany, and militaristic Japan enforced controlled economies, but still could not eliminate all restraints and constraints.

There was wide and deep discussion within the Army over how to proceed. Military leaders largely anticipated that the next change in the character in war was upon them. The dilemma was to understand the optimal and feasible solution for their army, commensurate with military culture, political endorsement, domestic sentiment, and funding. The tank received intense focus, but there were central questions over its use. Was it a breakthrough weapon? Was it the primary killer of enemy tanks? Tanks required some sort of motorized or mechanized infantry and artillery arms as well.

Several armies tried to make sense of recent experience. The British campaigned in Iraq, Jordan, Yemen, and the famed Northwest Frontier of India. Worst of all, by 1936 they faced an Arab urban insurgency in Palestine. The French conducted operations in Syria and Indochina. They labored with the cultural divides of the Metropolitan Army and the Army of Africa, besides independent Colonial Troops.

The Germans were starting virtually from scratch, emerging from defeat and imposed limits on force size and composition. They knew they wanted to defeat France quickly, and unlike the ultimate failure of 1918. The French sought to exploit the experience of 1918 with methodical battle, capitalizing on firepower. The British viewed the 1914-18 deployment of a mass army as an aberration. The Italians turned to widespread mechanization late. They anticipated operations in the mountainous north and had serious limits in economic strength and industrial capacity. The U.S. Army labored under heavy anti-military and isolationist sentiment which saw defense investment in general as unwise and army investment as particularly pointless and unnecessary. Their evolutionary development did not view the tank as a tank killer.

Airpower had no single proposed solution either. The option for the U.S. Army Air Forces (USAAF) and the Royal Air Force (RAF) was to place preeminence with the strategic heavy bomber. Airpower theorist Giulio Douhet argued that strategic airpower was the key to avoiding the bloody losses of the Great War. The Americans developed a different approach focused on the destruction of key industrial capacity. They understood that there would be many civilian casualties, but victory would come at far less cost. Moreover, certain airpower elements were not alone in their faith placed in heavy bombers. Numerous senior civilian leaders, in and out of political power, feared the potential effects on their civil populace, their industry, and their morale.

There were other routes. German heavy bomber proponent Gen. Walther Wever became Luftwaffe Chief of Staff upon its creation, but died unexpectedly in an air crash. The Luftwaffe looked to a more balanced force and closer work with the Army. The French *Armée de l'Air* faced chronic issues of political policy, industrial organization, and defense prioritization. The RAF exercised the concept of air control or aerial policing in areas such as Iraq and Palestine. An RAF officer was the joint force commander. Aviation squadrons substituted for a large Army presence. Land forces, often locally raised and maintained, were under his command. At this time the RAF operated two armored car companies in Iraq. Ultimately, theory and practice merged on the battlefields of World War II for implementation and further change.

### **Insights:**

- The most important commodity the Army must maintain during a drawdown or reduced fiscal resources is intellectual capital. The Army must maintain its mental agility, both at an individual level and as a service. This includes not only education and training, but public discussion and debate through professional journals. With the exception of *Parameters* and *Military Review*, most professional journals have become simply “house organs” for a particular branch.

- Research and development must continue, and it must be iterative. The US military cannot afford to be hobbled by a research, development and acquisition system that is so slow that technology has advanced by the time the product or weapon is produced. Despite the valuable lessons learned from World War I, the US entered World War II with tanks that were already obsolete. But they did have good ideas prepared for new technology as wartime money became available.
- The crude general use of poison gas fundamentally altered the character of war by introducing the concept of WMD—a great fear that motivates US policy today. The next WMD is unknown: gas in World War I, firebombing in World War II, then the nuclear age, anthrax, the 9/11 attacks, sarin gas. The US military must prepare not just for the next WMD, but for the next terror weapon. A too-narrow focus only on the NBC threat may blind us to other terror weapons such as suicide bombers and cyber hackers as yet unidentified.

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### Case Study 03: Cold War I, 1945-1972: From MAD to Limited War and COIN

**Summary:** The Cold War fundamentally altered how the United States viewed the rest of the world. For over 50 years it shaped US diplomacy, policy, strategy, military structure, and national economy to deal with atomic weaponry in a bipolar world of two superpowers. Army leaders experienced the first, large, peacetime force structure in American history. They had to deal with warfare that ranged from strategic nuclear through tactical nuclear weapons, to a new form of limited war, involving conventional forces, special operations forces, and emerging counter-insurgency practices.

**Discussion:** Two events in the mid-twentieth century fundamentally altered the character of war: the atomic bomb and the division of Europe after World War II. The incredible destructive power of the atomic bomb altered both the political and military dimensions of warfare. The Soviet Union's increasingly aggressive moves hardened US and Western resolve.

The famous secret "Long Telegram" of George F. Kennan on February 22, 1946 from the American Embassy in Moscow laid the groundwork for American understanding of the post-WW II world, and led to the Truman Doctrine from March 1947 hardening American attitudes towards the USSR. Kennan's equally famous article "The Sources of Conflict" in the July 1947 issue of *Foreign Affairs* presaged the NSC Report NSC-68 "United States Objectives and Programs for National Security" on April 14, 1950 which framed the defense policy of containment for four decades. Strategists generally believed implicitly in the monolithic nature of the Communist threat, with the Soviet Union "pulling all the strings."

The Soviet closure of Berlin in 1948 was a provocative gesture, while the resulting Berlin Airlift demonstrated the lengths to which the US and its Western allies were prepared to show resolve. The formation of NATO in 1949 and the Warsaw Pact in 1955 solidified a bipolar world. The stakes rose further after public Soviet espousal of "national liberation" wars, and popular uprisings in Yugoslavia and Hungary.

The Army needed to maintain a large peacetime force for the first time in its history, but still fought familiar budget battles and argued for relevancy. The Korean War of 1950-53 underlined that shortsightedness, and caught the Army under-resourced with world-wide commitments. Divisions in Japan on occupation duty lacked one-third of authorized infantry and artillery when they were alerted to deploy to Korea. The Army was hard pressed even to provide the theater commander with a corps HQ to provide requisite higher tactical command and control.

The Korean War's largely conventional forces and tactics should have played to Army strengths. The 1949 Field Service Regulations (FSR) focused on fighting in all types of terrain with no accounting for a nuclear battlefield. Army firepower inflicted heavy casualties on the North Koreans and later Chinese masses, but could not achieve traditional, outright victory. Strategic bombing was even less decisive than had been its WW II progenitor. The South Koreans, meanwhile, waged their own messy

counterinsurgency (COIN). The Armistice in 1953 stopped the conflict with no clear end to the war. This uneasy peace typified a new kind of limited war with deep and wide political constraints and restraints to prevent superpower escalation.

The insufficiency of a strategy based on nuclear massive retaliation led to three major policy changes in a decade. President Dwight D. Eisenhower's New Look strategy first promulgated in 1953 attempted to apply large military power while maintaining economy of force. Strategic air power came to the fore as the force of decision; a large nuclear stockpile and the means to deliver it seemed to obviate the need for a large ground Army. Nuclear weapons, their efficacy seen at Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, changed the dynamics of warfare. Their destructiveness created perceptions that conventional forces, especially landpower, were irrelevant. The nuclear stockpiles beckoned mutually assured destruction (MAD) in the event of a nuclear exchange. Hence, American massive retaliation revealed a lack of options other than resort to nuclear weapons.

The inherent flaws of MAD became apparent after a few years, and the Eisenhower Administration began work on a "new" New Look strategy that incorporated tactical nuclear weapons into the arsenal. The Army, meanwhile, dealt with the tactical implications of nuclear weapons in the 1954 Field Service Regulations (FSR). The pentomic division of 1956 represented the next generational change of Army adaptation. The same division had to function worldwide on both conventional and nuclear battlefields. Hence, its organization was sweepingly different, formed around five semi-independent infantry battle groups to operate dispersed. Unfortunately, the pentomic division was a failure due to inadequate resourcing in personnel, equipment, enabling technology, and funding.

The Army's next study in 1960-61 was the "Reorganization Objectives Army Division (ROAD) 1965" to meet existing and emerging threats. ROAD centered upon a division base with three brigades, and established the first mechanized infantry divisions to join infantry and armored; airborne divisions soon joined them. Battalion types were the building blocks. The Army had multi-purpose units with capability to fight on nuclear and non-nuclear battlefields. ROAD transformed the Army into the familiar division with three brigades— a structure essentially unchanged until modular force in the twenty-first century. The Army under ROAD structure grew to 1.3 million Soldiers in 16 divisions, with a projected 5 divisions for Germany alone. Personnel authorizations, however, were short to achieve these goals.

President John F. Kennedy rejected the New Look as unworkable and unfeasible. He introduced the new strategy of Flexible Response, which offered a range of non-nuclear options for deterrence. Flexible Response reinforced and added momentum to the Army's more holistic thinking on emerging threats. NATO aside, by late 1961 there were Military Assistance Advisory Groups (MAAGs) and Military Missions in 40 countries. This resulted in 42 percent of the active Army being deployed overseas.



The Vietnam War seemed to present a situation to demonstrate American flexibility and responsiveness outside the European scenario: a weak US ally under attack from a Soviet client state. Small deployments grew to keep pace with a growing advisory mission from 1954. Large-scale military intervention from March 1965 to prevent South Vietnamese government collapse changed the complexion of the war, and pitted the Army, and Marine Corps, against NVA regulars, VC Main, and VC guerilla forces. Military commanders faced an apparent policy/strategy mismatch with significant restraints and constraints. Conventional weapons and tactics with vaunted American firepower linked to new air-mobile techniques were insufficient, and their integration with perceived cutting-edge counterinsurgency (COIN) doctrine was problematic to achieve the policy goal of a free and independent South Vietnam. The decline of American popular will and support after the 1968 Tet offensive was a serious blow. The war ended with the formal Treaty of Paris in 1973, but South Vietnam's collapse in 1975 haunted the Army for decades afterward. It was America's first loss in war, and the ensuing, post-war negative credibility for the Army took years to overcome.

### **Insights for 2030-2050:**

- There is great similarity between the Army's 1960s engagement with MAAGs, JUSMAGs, and Military Missions and the current Regionally Aligned Force (RAF). The major difference is the current lack of assigned forces to the GCCs, the CinCs of the Cold War.
- Vietnam was the Army's first bloody, frustrating COIN experience. Army senior leaders must avoid the perception that OIF and/or OEF are the 21<sup>st</sup>-century equivalents. They must eliminate an emerging feud between "conventionalists" and "COINdinistas" quickly. An Army remedy to atrophied major combat operations (MCO) skills should not eliminate the need to plan and train for a range of military operations (ROMO).
- The Reorganization Objectives Army Division (ROAD) 1965 was the basis to win the Cold War. The Modular Force established the Brigade Combat Team (BCT) as the new force structure. The Army requires greater flexibility of mind -- not necessarily force structure -- to meet the challenges of today and tomorrow. It should showcase BCTs as the tip of an all-arms spear which brings unmatched capability and capacity with an array of BCTs and support brigades throughout the depth of an AO.
- Challenges to integrate the entire effort in Vietnam highlighted the stove-piped nature of the big war and COIN. Strategic resiliency will have to demonstrate a prowess in combined-arms, joint, special-forces, combined/coalition, and inter-agency operations. Unfortunately, there are signs that inter-agency skills have already deteriorated.
- Army operating concepts and new doctrine still proceed faster than Army educational systems. However, the greatest challenge is bona-fide talent

management in personnel systems, from promotion boards to assignment utilization.

- Force structures must also adapt quickly to technology and doctrine. The Pentomic Division had flaws, but never reached a full trial. The ROAD structure (and its successor, Division 86) were adaptations to meet the likely Soviet “big war” scenario.
- Doctrines must also adapt to changing enemies and circumstances. The New Look strategy proved unfeasible in a changing world that no longer accepted total war as the only option and again the promise that new technology could eliminate or reduce the need for ground combat proved false. President Kennedy’s decision to name his strategy “Flexible Response” reflects the new concept of “limited” wars and the need to tap other options.
- Beware of the easy option. The US military has been very successful in the “big” war and less so in the smaller, messier wars. The end of the Vietnam War saw the Army in particular turn away from the UCW and COIN operations, but toward the more comfortable, conventional war.

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## Case Study 04: Cold War II, 1973-1991: Building a Professional Army

**Summary:** The Cold War entered a second phase from 1973 in terms of a change in the character of warfare, specifically in the character of military operations. Withdrawal from Vietnam provided the opportunity for the Army to conduct serious, introspective contemplation. Senior leaders from Gen. Creighton Abrams through the next four CSAs did so – and in a sweeping fashion, both widely and deeply. Army change came at a time with significant changes in warfare. The late Cold War years witnessed another level in the operational tempo of modern war. The Army’s ability to remake itself and adapt to ongoing changes in warfare set the stage for the lightning success in the Persian Gulf War. That transformation resulted in the utter rejection of COIN and irregular warfare.

**Discussion:** The end of the Vietnam War saw a very deliberate, intellectual overhaul of the Army. This process focused on a different Army to deal with the anticipated challenges of conducting warfare for the rest of the century. Few appreciated the scale and scope of this renaissance. Building a professional Army proved to be more difficult than a conscript Army.

As the post-Vietnam War drawdown dipped below even pre-war levels, Army Chief of Staff Gen. Creighton Abrams faced a similar situation as had his predecessors after World Wars I and II: declining budgets and a shrinking end strength. Ever mindful of the wretched state of the Army when the Korean War began, Abrams was conscious of how the needs of the Army war in Vietnam had drained the Army’s personnel and equipment pools. With that war over, Abrams began to “rebalance” the Army towards Europe, ensuring that more Army units were filled and doing the same for the General Reserve.

Abrams also launched a modernization and expansion plan. The Soviet threat remained very real, and the National Security Strategy still required planning for two major simultaneous wars. He saw a critical shortage in active duty combat formations, and developed a plan to increase the number of active component divisions from 12 to 16, without increasing the Army’s overall end strength.

The Yom Kippur War in October, 1973 provided the catalyst for modernization of both weapons and doctrine. This short, but very destructive war between Israel and a coalition of Arab states demonstrated the need for no-notice readiness, seamless combined arms operations, and the most advanced technology available. New anti-tank and air defense missiles made the battlefield a deadly place. The Army already had several new items in development, but data gained from the Arab-Israeli War drove changes. The technological developments resulted in the “Big 5”: the M1 Main Battle Tank, M2 Infantry Fighting Vehicle, Patriot Missile System, UH-60 (Utility) Helicopter and AH-64 (Attack) Helicopter.

The changes in doctrine were more sweeping than the equipment changes. Army doctrine shifted from a defensive posture, “Active Defense,” to an offensive posture,

“Airland Battle.” In a move designed both to harvest slots and refocus the Army, Abrams dissolved the Continental Army Command (CONARC) and created Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) to manage all Army schools and training in the Army, and created Forces Command (FORSCOM) to provide command and control for all stateside units. The re-evaluation and development of training extended from the individual Soldier competencies through brigade-level combined arms operations. In order to do the latter, the Army developed the Combat Training Centers (CTC) that gave the most realistic combat training simulations possible.

The great emphasis placed on rapid and decisive action with combined arms training targeted a monolithic Soviet threat on the plains of Northwest Europe, and Army forward stationing reflected it. By the mid-1980s 255,000 of 780,000 Soldiers, nearly one-third of the active force, was permanently stationed in Germany.

Largely forgotten, the later Cold War years continued widening expansion in worldwide Army engagement. Exercise Bright Star in Egypt and participation in Multinational Force Observers (MFO) in the Sinai beginning in 1980 symbolized increasing American attention to the Middle and Near East. US-sponsored insurgencies and counterinsurgencies in Central America, Africa, and Afghanistan strove to stem the Communist tide. While not large, these initiatives, heavily building partner capacity (BPC) and security force assistance (SFA) in today’s vernacular, remained part of the containment strategy. While the Army prosecuted a host of military assistance missions around the globe, genuine mental preparation for limited war, especially COIN, in stability operations neglected. Contingency deployments to Grenada and Lebanon in 1983, and Panama in 1989 revealed such shortfalls.

The abrupt and definitive end of the Cold War set the Army adrift. The single, unifying principle, containment of Communism, that had defined Defense efforts for over half a century, was gone. The loss of the nation’s single existential threat actually posed an existential threat to the Army. The Army grappled for the next several years with a world that seemed the opposite of the Cold War world: ill-defined enemies, vague missions, and little time to plan.

Operation Desert Storm had provided a an excellent close to the Cold War; it provided a victory lap in essence, proving the value of the Army’s training plan to threat point. Yet nothing that came afterward resembled conventional war at all. The Army sought to embrace the new, uncertain strategic environment with strategies addressing: “Low Intensity Conflict (LIC)” and “Military Operations Other Than War (MOOTW).” Operations Urgent Fury (Grenada, 1983) and Just Cause (Panama, 1984) seemed to validate the need for these strategies. These operations, however, failed to define the Army’s role in the Post-Cold War world. They provided the opportunity for use of advanced technology and lighter force structures, but employed in the same way as a heavy force. Most of the Post-Cold War era engagements proved to be very different.

The United States’ status as the world’s only remaining superpower, and the strength of its military as demonstrated in Just Cause and Desert Storm, complicated the national policy and strategic picture. The public clamoring for a “peace dividend” and

therefore a smaller, CONUS-based military clashed with a new policy of “Engagement and Enlargement” and the developing requirements to perform humanitarian operations.

The Army had performed political stabilizations before: Lebanon in 1958 and the Dominican Republic in 1965, both as part of the containment of Communism. It had also coordinated humanitarian operations for domestic disorders such as Hurricane Agnes (1972) and Hurricane Andrew (1992). The Post-Cold War world, however, revealed many more ambiguous situations that often combined a humanitarian relief with peacemaking and peacekeeping stability missions such as: Somalia (1992-93), Cuban Refugees (1993), Northern Iraq (1994-96), Rwanda (1994-97), Bosnia-Herzegovina (1996-2014) and Kosovo (1999-Present). With the exception of the first two, US commitments lasted much longer than expected.

The Balkan mission inaugurated a new character of war that saw relatively few combat operations, but a longer term commitment of large numbers of troops. The length of this commitment contradicted original estimates and strained US resources and support. The pace of operations increased at the same time with multiple other smaller deployments executed at the same time that the Balkans missions continued.

### **Insights for 2030-2050**

- The post- OEF and OIF world appears very different from the halcyon days of the “easier” Cold War. The most obvious difference is the lack of a clear enemy. Indeed, since the early 1990s the Army and joint force have borne criticism trying to cast China and now a resurgent Russia as the new enemies. The Army should articulate its ability to counter current adversaries from steady-state actions.
- There is a great similarity between the Army’s Cold-War engagement and the current Regionally Aligned Force (RAF). The major difficulty is the current lack of assigned forces to the Geographic Combatant Commanders given a heavily-CONUS-Based force. Continuing these missions may require a different force structure.
- The Army also has the majority of Army Executive Agent (EA) responsibilities in DOD as well as the bulk of Lead Service actions enable JIIM forces and elements. This is expected to remain so in the future and Army force structure and budgeting must support it. While the BCT seems to be a promising combat structure for the future, evolving missions may require different structures in order to maintain readiness across the force.
- Army operating concepts and new doctrine still progress faster than Army educational systems. However, the greatest challenge is effective talent management in personnel systems, from promotion boards to assignment utilization.

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## Case Study 05: The Ambiguity of Hybrid War 1991-2016

**Summary:** The concept of warfare is a continually evolving process. This evolution of insurgency from the Vietnam War into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century created a change in the character of war as insurgencies transformed from independent guerilla units raiding conventional forces to organized, state-sponsored organizations executing complex, coordinated operations with conventional weapons systems. Modern examples include: the state sponsored militias in Syria, fighting to help President Bashar Al-Assad maintain his tenuous grip on power, to Pro-Russian extremists in the eastern Ukraine, fighting their neighbors with conventional weapons systems and military support provided by Moscow. This movement towards “hybrid war” as termed by Frank Hoffman, presents new challenges to conventional force commanders seeking to secure global national interests.

**Discussion:** Land component commanders face a myriad of problems due the complexity of the human nature. Naval and air commanders deal primarily with natural problems created by oceanic or atmospheric conditions. Weather reports, sea states, tidal charts and meteorological reports are some of the tools used to provide some state of predictability during operations. Ground commanders from platoon through theater level deal with the unpredictable human element in their areas of operation. Variables in gender, language, religion, societal structure, race, culture and creed contribute to this unpredictability. It is this “gray” area that insurgencies flourish, using the local population as both recruiting grounds and concealment. Insurgencies played and continue to play a pivotal role in military operations ranging from the Zealots that opposed the Roman occupation forces in Judea to the militias of varying loyalties fighting for the future of Syria.

The concept of insurgency is not new to military commanders, national policymakers and historical scholars. What has changed is the leaders ability to adapt new technologies, increasing lethality and effectively communicating the insurgents’ mission and ideology to a worldwide audience. These advancements allowed insurgents the capability to develop small, loosely coordinated cells, then to create maximum damage and terror among the civilian population or military targets when directed. Leaders of nation-states recognized the value of arming and training insurgent forces during in the Post-World War II period. The increasingly destructive capabilities of nuclear weapons made national leaders reticent to use conventional forces against each other for fear that conflict escalation could lead to employment of nuclear weapons, creating unprecedented destruction and loss of life. Instead, the leaders of both the United States and Soviet Union fought wars by proxy in nations such as Vietnam and Afghanistan. In Vietnam, Soviet military advisors armed, trained and equipped troops of the North Vietnamese People’s Army and its insurgent component, the Viet Cong, fighting both American forces and their ally, the Republic of Vietnam. Less than a decade after the close of the Vietnam War, Soviet armored columns rolled into Afghanistan to support its failing “puppet” government. The Soviets waged a cruel and costly war with the insurgent Mujahedeen. This Afghan-based insurgent group was trained by US military advisors and equipped with the latest military technology

including the shoulder-fired, anti-aircraft Stinger missile. In 1989, after exhausting large amounts of blood and treasure, Soviet forces withdrew.

The collapse of the Soviet Union gave rise to the creation of the non-state actor. Fueled by ideology, religious beliefs, or nationalism these groups used attacks on local civilian population or military targets to draw attention to their cause. Their ability to freely move about in local civilian populations, and skill in creating crude weapons, from easily obtainable materials made it difficult for government and law enforcement agencies to detect their activities. On September 11, 2001 members of Al-Qaeda launched the largest foreign attack on American soil since the burning of Washington in 1814. These coordinated attacks on multiple targets demonstrated an increase in the lethality and sophistication of terrorist capabilities. Just as concerning was the widespread infiltration of terrorists into the continental United States began to concern leaders, the military and police forces. Efforts to stop and apprehend these groups require close coordination among local, state and Federal law enforcement, Government intelligence agencies and the US Armed Forces. The newly created Department of Homeland Security took on this daunting task, providing coordination and oversight on all foreign and domestic terrorism operations.

Less than a year after the ground invasion of Iraq and the toppling of the Saddam Hussein regime, American ground forces found themselves engaged in a bitter fight with insurgent groups like Al-Qaeda in Iraq. Relying on crude weapons, a large civilian population and fanatical devotion, the insurgents attacked US military outposts and convoys, frustrating Soldiers and Marines trained in conventional tactics. The insurgents also avoided large scale battles where vaunted American firepower could be used. The wide dispersion and rotation of US troops gave the guerillas the opportunity to attack and terrorize local populations. Combating insurgents in Iraq and Afghanistan became so widespread that in 2006 the US military issued a field manual, FM 3-24 focused on counterinsurgency operations. After exhausting troops and resources in an attempt to stabilize post-war Iraq, US forces officially withdrew in 2011. The value of supporting insurgencies was not lost on nation states who viewed them as a cost effective means of advancing their national interests without fully employing conventional forces.

In December 2007, Frank Hoffman wrote a monograph titled *Conflict in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: The Rise of Hybrid Wars*. Hoffman's essay focused on the delineation between conventional, asymmetric (insurgent) and what he termed "hybrid" warfare. This new categorization of war incorporates:

A range of different modes of warfare, including conventional capabilities, irregular tactics and formations, terrorist acts including indiscriminate violence and coercion and criminal disorder. These multi-modal activities can be conducted by separate units, or even by the same unit, but are generally operationally and tactically directed and coordinated within the main battlespace to achieve synergistic effects.

The demonstrated value of insurgent groups and the willingness of nation states to support them created the environment for hybrid warfare. Examples abound in crises through the world. In 2006, the insurgent group Hezbollah, backed with Iranian rockets and guidance initiated a war with Israel in a neighboring nation, (southern) Lebanon.

Although Israel responded with overwhelming firepower and force, including preparing for a ground invasion, the United Nations intervened and condemned Israeli actions. While Hezbollah's casualty count far exceeded IDF losses, Israel was seen as overaggressive and lost credibility in the eyes of many in the international community. In Syria, the regime of Al-Assad provides military support and operational direction to militias that support his hold on power. In eastern Ukraine, Moscow provides conventional military weapons systems and military advisors to Pro-Russian Separatists fighting to return their territory to the Motherland.

### **Insights:**

- The introduction of hybrid warfare presents a number of challenges to military commanders and national policymakers with large conventional forces. The challenge of facing hybrid enemies is their varied nature. Future commanders must learn the enemy's nature and capabilities quickly, and just as swiftly adapt to it. These may include tracking down and eliminating insurgent cells, but it may also mean defeating conventional-type forces. The United States for the most part has used these means effectively through employing unmanned aerial vehicles and special operations units in attacks against high value targets such as Osama bin Laden and his lieutenants. Regardless, insurgent groups continue to proliferate and carry out attacks on civilian targets.
- Groups selected for state sponsorship and support receive training on modern weapons systems, tactics and operational coordination increasing their lethality. Employing these groups is a double-edged sword for the national leaders who choose this course of action. While one group is cooperative today, that does not necessarily mean they will be so in the future, potentially turning on its former benefactor. The Mujahedeen, which served so effectively in Afghanistan, turned on the United States when it deployed forces to Saudi Arabia during Operation Desert Storm.
- The problems created by hybrid warfare require vigilance and close coordination among a wide range of military and civilian law enforcement and intelligence agencies. State sponsored support of insurgent groups to advance national interests appears to be an inexpensive remedy to a short term goal, but the long term ramifications based on historical precedents can be dangerous to those states that engage in these activities.

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