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by

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The United States Army's Experience in the Balkans and Transformation

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Abstract

The U.S. Army failed to heed warnings from Operation Joint Endeavor in Bosnia-Herzegovina in the mid-1990s that it was ill-prepared for low-intensity conflicts. Instead of altering the trajectory of the ongoing Army transformation, Army transformers continued to prepare for high-intensity conflict, an effort that culminated in the creation of the Interim Brigade Combat Teams. This study is an intellectual history focused on the debate between Army transformers and critics of transformation. It examines contemporary doctrine, opinions expressed in military journals and magazines, studies conducted by Army educational institutions, internal Army documents, and speeches from senior Army leaders. It also includes insights from interviews conducted by the author with key senior Army leaders of the time. This study concludes that Army transformers ignored evidence from Operation Joint Endeavor and the arguments of transformation's critics because of a prevailing Army culture favoring preparation for high-intensity conflict operations over all other activities.

The United States Army's Experience in the Balkans and Transformation

Military interventions in the Balkans in the late 1990s ably demonstrated that the U.S. Army was ill-prepared for low-intensity conflicts.¹ Likewise, a growing chorus of critics warned that the future portended not Gulf War-style high-intensity conflicts² but an increasing number of low-intensity conflicts. Army transformers, steeped in a U.S. Army culture that emphasized preparation to fight high-intensity conflicts over all other activities, ignored these warnings and continued the Army's transformation toward an ever more deployable, high-tech, networked force built to fight two nearly simultaneous "major regional contingencies" (high-intensity conflicts against conventional adversaries). This transformation culminated in the creation of the Interim Brigade Combat Teams. In the end, however, the two "major regional contingencies" America would fight were not against conventional adversaries but against insurgencies in Afghanistan and Iraq. And the U.S. Army was ill-prepared to fight them.

It is difficult to identify the specific character of an organizational culture. As Edgar Schein writes, the foundations of an organizational culture are "basic underlying assumptions" that are "unconscious, taken-for-granted beliefs and values." Organizational cultures have two categories of outward manifestation. The first category is "espoused beliefs and values" in the form of "ideals, goals, values, aspirations," "ideologies," and "rationalizations." The second and more visible category is "artifacts." These take the form of "visible and feelable [sic] structures and processes" and "observed behavior," both of which Schein writes can be "difficult to decipher."³

This study is an intellectual history of the debate between Army transformers and transformation's critics between the beginning of Operation Joint Endeavor in Bosnia-Herzegovina in December 1995 and the beginning of the War on Terror on 11

September 2001. This study will identify the “ideologies” and “rationalizations” and analyze “observed behaviors”⁴ that reflected the U.S. Army’s organizational culture to understand why this culture made Army transformers resistant to the changes that transformation’s critics proposed.

Before Bosnia

The U.S. Army of the early 1990s was still basking in the glow of Operation Desert Storm, the stunningly successful liberation of Kuwait from the Iraqi Army.⁵ The surprising results of the Gulf War seemed to validate the Army’s post-Vietnam War, high-tech approach to rebuilding—supplanting the superior numbers of the Soviet Army with superior American technology.⁶ The focus of Army transformers in the wake of the Gulf War was how to fight similar future conflicts better by exploiting information technology in what was commonly referred to as a “revolution in military affairs” (RMA). Transformers predicted that, in future wars, the U.S. Army would have “near ‘perfect,’ near-real-time intelligence...[and] sufficient lethality with precision strike systems, and [the] massing of lethal effects” to defeat any adversary.⁷

But the reviews for Desert Storm were not all glowing. Army transformers were concerned that it had taken nearly half a year to build up sufficient logistics, equipment, and combat forces to eject Saddam Hussein from Kuwait. And if the ground war had continued much longer than 100 hours, the U.S. Army might well have run out of critical supplies such as fuel and spare parts.⁸ Transformers believed that the Army had to become more deployable and sustainable.

Yet transformation would occur in the context of shrinking budgets and a shrinking force. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, Congress cashed in the “peace dividend”; defense spending fell and the Army shrank from 2.1 million before Desert

Storm to 1.4 million by the end of the drawdown in the mid-1990s.⁹ The Army stood down four of 16 divisions and eliminated one corps in Europe.¹⁰

Moreover, while the Army might be shrinking, the demands upon it were increasing dramatically. Between 1988 and 1992, the U.S. military participated in 12 separate U.N. peace-keeping or humanitarian missions.¹¹ By 1994, nearly 21,000 Soldiers were operating in 70 different countries.¹² The National Defense University's "Project 2025" concluded that the future held more of the same as "demographic pressures, religious and ethnic passions, and environmental constraints...continue to encroach upon and at times threaten [U.S.] interests."¹³ The future seemed to promise not Gulf War-style high-intensity conflicts but a growing number of low-intensity conflicts.

And more low-intensity conflicts did come. In the final days of his presidency, George H.W. Bush sent U.S. forces to Somalia to assist a teetering U.N. humanitarian assistance mission in that failed state. Under President William J. Clinton, the mission in Somalia expanded until 1,200 American Soldiers from the 10th Mountain Division and the 75th Ranger Regiment were engaged in what U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) commander Gen. Anthony Zinni would later call a "counterinsurgency operation, or...some form of war." In the cataclysmic, 17-hour battle on 3 and 4 October 1993, immortalized in the book and movie *Blackhawk Down*, 84 U.S. Soldiers were wounded and 18 were killed along with possibly 500 Somalis. U.S. forces were unceremoniously withdrawn five months later.¹⁴

The disastrous outcome of the war in Somalia should have caused the U.S. Army to question the limitations of the RMA-fueled transformation on which it had embarked

and to which it was still committed.¹⁵ Instead, the debate over the lessons of Somalia became embroiled in political recriminations. Defense Secretary Les Aspin was blamed for—and later resigned over—his failure to send armor to Somalia. The Clinton administration was blamed for “mission creep.” And Samuel Huntington led a chorus of national security experts questioning the wisdom of “nation building.”¹⁶

Meanwhile, the U.S. Army continued to march headlong toward ever more optimized, networked, high-precision capabilities. The Department of Defense undertook a “bottom-up review” (BUR) that predictably concluded that the U.S. military needed to be prepared to fight two “major regional contingencies” (MRCs)—large, high-intensity conflicts.¹⁷ To prepare for these conflicts, the Army began developing “Army XXI” through prototyping and experimentation with “Force XXI” (the 4th Infantry Division at Fort Hood, Texas).¹⁸ Army Chief of Staff General Gordon R. Sullivan predicted that Army XXI would face enemies ranging from “agrarian war lords...[and] industrial armies,...[to] an information age peer.” Regardless of the enemy, Army XXI would “be able to locate enemy forces quickly and precisely,” distribute that information “among all committed forces,” and “observe, decide, and act faster, more correctly and more precisely” than the enemy.¹⁹ Army XXI would also fix the Army’s deployability problems, better “projecting and sustaining combat power.”²⁰ The Army XXI concept paid lip service to the need to fight across the range of military operations,²¹ but was fundamentally designed to dominate a high-intensity conflict environment.²² This concept seemed to assume that an Army that excelled at high-intensity conflict would have no problem operating in a low-intensity conflict environment.

Low-intensity conflict, on the other hand, was a neglected area of U.S. military thought in the early 1990s. The Army's conception of low-intensity conflict—captured in the 1990 *FM 100-20, Military Operations in Low-Intensity Conflict* and the 1992 *FM 7-98, Operations in a Low-Intensity Conflict*—had serious flaws.²³ For instance, the *FM 7-98*'s chapter on peace keeping began with the unenthusiastic epigraph (italics are from the manual), "*Peacekeeping isn't a soldier's job, but only a soldier can do it,*" attributed to an "Anonymous Member, *Peacekeeping Force.*"²⁴ Army doctrine on low-intensity conflict also suffered from the contemporary relegation of insurgency/counterinsurgency to special operations forces (SOF). Restricted by Congress' post-Vietnam aversion to military interventions, the Reagan-era model for insurgency/counterinsurgency in places like Honduras and El Salvador was to use small special forces elements. This SOF mission was codified by the Goldwater-Nichols Defense Reorganization Act of 1987.²⁵ After Desert Storm, U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM) convinced the Defense Department to designate psychological operations and civil affairs as SOF missions as well.²⁶ The U.S. Army's abdication of responsibility for insurgency and counterinsurgency was reflected in its doctrine; both activities were tasks best reserved for SOF. Moreover, the United States' proper role in counterinsurgency was only to support a host nation that presumably a) existed and b) was capable of combatting an insurgency.²⁷

Counterinsurgency receded even more from Army doctrine in the 1993 *FM 100-5, Operations* and the 1995 *JP 3-07, Joint Doctrine for Military Operations Other than War*; in *FM 100-5*'s figure showing the range of military operations, counterinsurgency is not even listed with the other operations that occur in a "conflict" environment (an ill-

defined gray area between “war” and “peacetime”).²⁸ The 1993 *FM 100-5* also replaced the term “low-intensity conflict” with the dubious “operations other than war” (OOTW).²⁹

General Sullivan himself justified this diminution of low-intensity conflict in favor of a laser focus on exploiting the RMA to better prosecute high-intensity conflicts, arguing, “We cannot optimize the force for a single threat. We must instead build a force with the capability to win in the most important contingencies, while retaining the versatility, flexibility, and residual force to win across the range of uncertainty inherent in our forecasts of the future.”³⁰ Elsewhere, he wrote, “Nation-building is not an Army issue, but the Army is prepared to support those agencies of the government which are directly concerned with that task.”³¹ These were all corollaries to Sullivan’s oft-repeated core belief: “The Army exists to fight and win the nation’s wars.”³² High-intensity conflicts were “the most important contingencies”³³ while low-intensity conflicts were an unwelcome but unavoidable tax on Army resources. This sheds much light on the replacement of “low-intensity conflict” with “operations other than war” in Army doctrine.

Operation Joint Endeavor

In the aftermath of the Cold War, the former Yugoslavia shattered along ethnic and religious lines into four separate countries.³⁴ In and around the country of Bosnia-Herzegovina, militia forces and criminal gangs—armed with everything from small arms to armored vehicles from the former Yugoslav Army—engaged in brutal acts of ethnic violence against each other and in murder and ethnic cleansing against civilian populations that killed as many as 250,000 people and rendered over two million more refugees or internally displaced people.³⁵

As the fighting grew, so did concern in European capitals that the fighting might spread to the neighboring states of the Balkans. In February 1992, in an effort to halt

the fighting, the United Nations (UN) established the UN Protection Force (UNPROFOR), a multinational force that eventually included 38,000 troops from 37 different countries spread across over 7,000 bases in the former Yugoslavia. But the weak mandate of the force, its lack of cohesion, and the potpourri of national caveats from the contributing nations rendered this force impotent; UNPROFOR was largely a spectator to the violence rather than a peace enforcer.³⁶

No ethnic or religious group was innocent in the conflict; all engaged in violence against civilians and ethnic cleansing. But Bosnian Serbs were guilty of some of the worst atrocities of the war, including the murder of between seven and eight thousand Bosniacs at Srebrenica in full view of Dutch peace keepers, 100 of which were taken prisoner.³⁷

In 1994, the United States and NATO began to gradually escalate military pressure—primarily through air strikes. In December 1995, the warring parties signed the Dayton Accords, ending the fighting and delineating lines between the warring parties in Bosnia-Herzegovina.³⁸ A provision of the Dayton Accords was an international Implementation Force (IFOR) that would, among other things, establish and enforce a zone of separation, protect the civilian populace, and create the conditions for the reestablishment of civil governance.³⁹

IFOR had a much more robust mandate and many fewer national caveats than UNPROFOR, making it a much more effective force; it could compel compliance from each faction.⁴⁰ V Corps and future U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) commander Lt. Gen. John Abrams commanded U.S. Army Europe (USAREUR) (Forward) in Bosnia.⁴¹ The core of the U.S. contingent, Task Force Eagle,

was the division headquarters for the 1st Armored Division with two armored brigades, an aviation brigade, and attached enablers such as engineers, field artillery, military intelligence, and military police. Altogether, the U.S. contribution to the 60,000-man IFOR was 17,500 troops.⁴²

Today, the shape of Operation Joint Endeavor looks eerily similar to the stability phase of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Bosnia-Herzegovina was divided into three Multi-National Divisions (MNDs). American forces assumed control of MND-North (MND-N) and assumed varying degrees of authority over forces from countries including Russia, Turkey, Poland, and Denmark.⁴³ Prior to deployment, U.S. forces went through a rigorous train-up including a “mission readiness exercise” at the Combat Maneuver Training Center (CMTTC) in Germany.⁴⁴ Once on the ground in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Task Force Eagle executed forward operating base (FOB)-based operations and logistics. Units tried to balance force protection with the need to interact with the population; the tactic that emerged was four-vehicle convoy operations. Intelligence personnel and linguists were always in short supply.⁴⁵

Army leaders raised in the doctrine and tactics of high-intensity conflict struggled to meet the intellectual challenge of operating in an environment where mission success required dealing with civilians, establishing civil governance, practicing the “art of street diplomacy,” and exercising a nuanced application of force under strict rules of engagement (ROE).⁴⁶ Officers grappled with the complex web of history, family ties, and ethnic and religious conflicts to weave together a political, economic, and social solution.⁴⁷ Young platoon leaders and company commanders were called upon to balance intimidation and negotiations, dismantle illegal militia checkpoints, and

understand and interpret their mandate from vague international accords drafted by diplomats a half a world away.⁴⁸ And as soon as a unit finally understood their area of operations (AO) and how to do all of these things, they rotated out to be replaced by the next unit.⁴⁹

While the level of violence was considerably lower and mines replaced improvised explosive devices (IEDs) as the top threat to foot and mounted patrols, in virtually every other way that mattered Operation Joint Endeavor was a scale model of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Yet instead of addressing its unpreparedness to fight a low-intensity conflict, the U.S. Army focused on what Operation Joint Endeavor revealed about continued problems with the deployability of the Army. Moving more than 9,000 people and 20,000 short tons of U.S. equipment into Bosnia-Herzegovina had required nearly 400 trains with over 7,000 railcars, over 1,400 sorties of cargo aircraft, over 400 buses, over 200 commercial truck convoys, and 42 military convoys.⁵⁰ The deployment was further complicated by the flooding of the Sava River, which overflowed its banks on 28 December 1995.⁵¹

Army after Next

In 1995, a Congressional panel, the Commission on Roles and Missions of the Armed Forces, concluded that two of the four most “significant security challenges and opportunities in the years ahead” were “Peace Operations” and “OOTW.” While the commission did equivocate slightly, saying that the “DOD [Department of Defense] must expand capabilities but without sacrificing its ability to fight the Nation’s wars,”⁵² this was still a clear shot across the bow, pressing Army transformers to begin taking low-intensity conflict seriously.

The joint force's response to this commission report, Joint Vision 2010,⁵³ was a defiant reaffirmation of the RMA and the U.S. military's focus on high-intensity conflict. The vision's goal was "achieving dominance across the range of military operations,"⁵⁴ but its "four operational concepts" were "dominant maneuver, precision engagement, full dimensional protection, and focused logistics."⁵⁵ And Joint Vision 2010 was even more explicit than the Army XXI vision in arguing that "operations other than war" were a lesser included military activity "Other operations, from humanitarian assistance in peacetime through peace operations in a near hostile environment, have proved to be possible using forces optimized for wartime effectiveness."⁵⁶

To justify ignoring low-intensity conflict, Joint Vision 2010 posited three ideas that would remain pillars of Army transformation thought until the Iraq War. First, future adversaries would transform in the same way that the U.S. military was transforming: toward ever higher technology and ever more integrated networks. Second, future adversaries would seek "asymmetry" by using the "information technology" of the RMA to negate U.S. military advantages rather than duplicate them capability-for-capability. And finally, adversaries could transform "very rapidly," "outrunning" the U.S. military's ability to react.⁵⁷ This final idea created an urgency to beat theoretical future adversaries to "dominant battlespace awareness" that would render the "battlespace considerably more transparent" for the winner.⁵⁸

General Dennis Reimer assumed his duties as the 33rd Chief of Staff of the Army in June 1995 and immediately endorsed the approach of his predecessor. He, too, insisted that the Army's purpose was to "fight and win our Nation's wars." Reimer would continue to build Force XXI.⁵⁹ But in February 1996, General Reimer placed his own

mark on transformation, initiating the “Army after Next” program, a series of semi-annual wargames augmented by continuous experimentation.⁶⁰ Projecting into the future to the year 2025, the Army After Next (AAN) would succeed Force XXI by achieving and maintaining “dominance” across every “domain” of warfare—the “air-, land-, sea-, space-, and cyber-domains”— through “knowledge and speed.”⁶¹ A “human” domain was conspicuously absent from the AAN concept.

This fact was not lost on a growing chorus of transformation’s critics who were beginning to question the Army’s approach. Commenting on the insufficiency of current OOTW doctrine, Dr. John W. Jandora from U.S. Army Special Operations Command insisted, “Military planning...must move beyond the Cold War mind-set and its preoccupation with standing, conventional forces” to consider the social, economic, and political aspects of the battlefield.⁶² Historian Jeffrey Record was more direct in his criticism of transformation: “Our present strategy portends an excessive readiness for the familiar and comfortable at the expense of preparation for the more likely and less pleasant.”⁶³

As the debate grew, urban operations became a focal point of discussion. As early as 1995, scholars like Stephen J. Blank and Earl H. Tilford, Jr. of the U.S. Army’s Strategic Studies Institute (SSI) began to point to the Russian debacle in Chechnya as an alarming example of a modern military force humbled by guerilla forces fighting in an urban environment, among a civilian population.⁶⁴ But debate over urban operations did not truly gain momentum until the AAN project stumbled across the problem during a wargame at the U.S. Army War College (USAWC). The December 1998 report on this wargame described the problem: every time the “red team” (enemy) was faced with the

technologically superior U.S. force of 2025, it would “dive into cities.” The enemy chose this course “for both operational and political ends.” The operational ends were to negate the AAN’s “advantages in speed and mobility” and “diminish the effect of a U.S. information advantage because forces are more difficult to locate, target, and assess.” The political ends were to embroil the local population in the conflict. The wargame report noted, “Urban operations will require a much higher degree of integration with local societies than has been the U.S. experience heretofore.” The report concluded by lamenting that “investigations into possible technological solutions provide no easy answers, thus far.”⁶⁵

This was asymmetry rearing its head in a way that Joint Vision 2010 had not anticipated—the enemy forcing the U.S. Army to fight a low-intensity conflict. Maj. Gen. Robert Scales, the commandant of the U.S. Army War College (USAWC), began to wrestle with this problem the following year. General Scales acknowledged that cities presented a challenge to the U.S. Army because they contained “millions of people that house [the enemy’s] political, cultural, and financial centers of gravity.” But his solution—sitting outside the city and waiting for the enemy to quit—missed the most important facet of this asymmetry: controlling these “millions of people” and the “political, cultural, and financial centers of gravity” they represented⁶⁶ were essential to the political ends that would prompt any U.S. military intervention in the first place.

Other Army transformers likewise tried to dismiss the problem of urban operations. Tim Thomas of Fort Leavenworth’s Foreign Military Studies Office (FMSO) dismissed the Russians’ challenges in taking Grozny from the Chechens as the product of the Russian Army’s state of decay rather than an example of urban operations

creating an asymmetry.⁶⁷ AAN experimenters Robert Hahn and Bonnie Jezior prescribed a dizzying array of high-tech salves—from jet packs to robots—for the urban operations problem.⁶⁸ For these analysts, cities were simply urban terrain—complex terrain that obstructed movement and obscured vision rather than complex, human environments essential to the political purpose of future wars.

Lester Grau and Jacob Kipp at Fort Leavenworth would not let Army transformers wish away the problem of urban operations. They first explained why the urban operations problem was not going to go away: “Urban combat is increasingly likely, since high-precision weapons threaten operational and tactical maneuver in open terrain.” But their analysis continued to the true heart of the “asymmetry” produced by urban operations: enemies would choose to fight in cities because they could “mobilize the city’s resources and population to their purposes.” For Grau and Kipp the inescapable quality of a city that made it a difficult and unavoidable military problem was that the population of the city was the political objective of a war. In light of this central fact, they insisted, both the Russian approach in Grozny—destroy the city—and the approach suggested by Major General Scales—“don’t go there”—suffered from “an utter disconnect between the political objective....and the military means.”⁶⁹

The problem of urban operations was sufficiently dire to prompt TRADOC commander Gen. John Abrams to commission a study. The results, from researcher Roger Spiller of the Combined Arms Center did not offer Army transformers any solace. Spiller echoed Grau’s and Kipp’s argument that the essential property of a city was its nature as a “human environment.” But Spiller added yet another layer to the urban operations problem by using historical examples to show that a city becomes an even

messier, more complex military problem as it begins to collapse under the stresses of war. He quipped that Army transformers had taken to calling anything they did not understand “asymmetry.” He added, “That asymmetric warfare would be associated with urban warfare is significant.” He concluded by urging the Army to stop all transformation until it could come to grips with the problem of urban operations.⁷⁰

Instead of focusing on the broader point made by transformation’s critics, that Army transformers had neglected low-intensity conflict and forgotten the political dimension of war, Army transformers focused on developing a solution to the problem of “asymmetry.” An SSI study did acknowledge that urban operations, insurgencies, and guerilla operations were asymmetric challenges to U.S. forces. However, this study clouded the issue by including Joint Vision 2010’s conception of asymmetry—based on the technologies of the RMA—that had dominated thinking in the AAN project before the emergence of the urban operations problem.⁷¹

This debate conflation of urban operations with “asymmetry” also obscured another important point. Some enemies—like the “red team” in AAN wargames—might choose to hide in cities as a direct reaction to America’s own asymmetry—its uncontested, high-tech dominance in high-intensity conflict. But many more enemies—like insurgents—would operate in of cities because of their need to influence the population. The problem was not the U.S. Army’s vulnerability to “asymmetry” but its unpreparedness for the political dimensions of low-intensity conflict.

Bosnia-Herzegovina was revealing the depths of this unpreparedness. Despite promises before the deployment that Operation Joint Endeavor would only last a year, Bosnians of all religions feared that the departure of international forces might lead to

renewed fighting. U.S. Army forces conducting OOTW in Bosnia-Herzegovina seemed to have no idea how to bring it to an end.⁷² The 1st Infantry Division replaced the 1st Armored Division in November 1996, the mandate for IFOR was extended, and the IFOR became the Stabilization Force (SFOR).⁷³ In 1997, USAREUR commander and future Chief of Staff of the Army Gen. Eric Shinseki took over as Commander, SFOR⁷⁴ and 1st Armored Division again assumed Task Force Eagle.⁷⁵ They were followed by the 1st Cavalry Division and the 10th Mountain Division before returning for a third rotation.⁷⁶ The mission would continue with no end in sight until well into the Iraq War.⁷⁷

Col. Tony Cucolo, reflecting on his experience as a battalion commander in Bosnia-Herzegovina, struck at the heart of the problem. He wrote that the “prevailing attitude among some senior leaders” was that solving political problems in Bosnia-Herzegovina “was ‘out of [Task Force Eagle’s] lane,’” yet “acting as [negotiators] was a sustained role throughout the battalion's deployment.” Despite this requirement, he added, “in-depth preparation of junior leaders in [negotiation] skills was very low on the training priority list” prior to the deployment.⁷⁸ Without the willingness and training to engage in the political dimension of low-intensity conflict, Task Force Eagle would never solve the political problems that threatened renewed violence and end the operation.

Instead, the “measures of effectiveness” (to borrow a term from OOTW doctrine)⁷⁹ were the avoidance of U.S. casualties, preventing wide-scale ethno-religious violence, and keeping the operation off of televisions back in the United States. By these measures, Operation Joint Endeavor was an overwhelming success.

Brigadier General James Dubik confronted this problem in an unpublished “thought piece” that he wrote in March 1999 while serving as Deputy Commander for

Operations for Task Force Eagle. Discussing how to “reduce the time our military forces would have to be involved or the size of the military force required after initial intervention” in low-intensity conflicts, Dubik suggested that the initial entry force in such operations be followed by a hypothetical “National Judicial Force” that would wrest the non-military, illegal levers of power from the leaders that the United States wished to supplant.⁸⁰ It is telling that Major General Dubik’s solution to the problem was that some force other than the U.S. Army should arrive and assume the duty of navigating the political dimensions of the low-intensity conflict. This idea would recur when he was charged with a critical element of Army transformation.

Professional Army critic Ralph Peters disagreed, insisting that navigating the political dimension of low-intensity conflict was the U.S. Army’s job—a job it refused to prepare to do.⁸¹ He wrote:

...our military is determined to be unprepared for missions it does not want, as if the lack of preparedness might prevent our going. We are like children who refuse to get dressed for school....

When the President is out of options and key interest groups or foreign leaders are clamoring for American action, we are going to go to school.⁸²

Peters added, “Military readiness is essential—but the military must be ready for reality, not for its fantasy war.”⁸³

While the debate between transformation’s critics and Army transformers continued, events developed in Serbia that would have a dramatic impact on transformation and short circuit this debate. In March 1999, in response to Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic’s ethnic cleansing of ethnic Albanians in Kosovo, NATO began a sustained bombing campaign aimed at ending the atrocity. But as the campaign wore on, it became clear that bombing was not going to be sufficient. The

Serbs had adopted precisely the tactics that transformation's critics had envisioned; among other tactics, the Serbian Army was hiding in urban centers among the civilian population.⁸⁴

Yet it was not this asymmetry, but rather the deployment of U.S. Army forces to the conflict, that changed the course of Army transformation. To counter Serbian tactics, U.S. Army AH-64 Apache attack helicopters, along with associated logistics and force protection support, were deployed to Albania, which they were to use as a base from which to launch more effective attacks against Serbian armor. The deployment soon devolved into a debacle. Facilities in and around the airfield were insufficient for the massive logistic requirements of the aviation unit. Two Army aviators were killed and their helicopters destroyed in a training accident while preparing for the specific requirements of the operation. By the time the aviation unit was in place and ready to operate, the war was over—Operation Allied Force had ended and Slobodan Milosevic had capitulated.⁸⁵ Things got worse when a succeeding U.S. armored force, Task Force Falcon, deployed into Kosovo to execute stability operations as part of Operation Joint Guardian. Streets were clogged with refugees and bridges could not support 70-ton M1 Abrams main battle tanks; the deployment ground to a near halt.⁸⁶

Critics used the episode to argue that the Army was too heavy and too slow, rapidly becoming irrelevant to modern warfare.⁸⁷ This event had an especially large impact on Army transformation since the operation was overseen by V Corps and future U.S. Army Forces Command (FORSCOM) commander Lt. Gen. John Hendrix.⁸⁸

Interim Brigades

On 22 June 1999, only weeks after the fiasco in Albania and Kosovo, General Eric K. Shinseki became the 34th Chief of Staff of the Army.⁸⁹ From the beginning of his

tenure, he had a very clear vision for the future of Army transformation.⁹⁰ He would create a whole new organization: the “Interim Force.”⁹¹ The first purpose of the Interim Force was to provide an interim organization for testing the tactics and organization of an eventual “Objective Force.” But the Interim Force also had another purpose: to cure the U.S. Army’s deployability woes.⁹² The Interim Force—equipped with medium-weight, 20-ton armored vehicles—would fill the gap between heavy forces, which were lethal, mobile, and survivable but took months to get to a theater of operations, and light forces, which were rapidly deployable but not survivable or self-sustaining beyond a few days. The Interim force would have the deployability of light forces and leverage the technologies of the RMA to provide the lethality and staying power of heavy forces. Moreover, this transformation was not going to happen in 2025; General Shinseki wanted the first Interim Brigade Combat Teams (IBCTs) fielded in three years.⁹³

To head the actual training, manning, and equipping of the IBCTs, General Shinseki chose Maj. Gen. James Dubik. The first two brigades chosen to transform into IBCTs were at Fort Lewis, Washington—one armor brigade and one light infantry brigade so that the Interim Force doctrine could benefit from the best practices of each type of force. FORSCOM commander General John W. Hendrix and TRADOC commander General John N. Abrams directly supervised Major General Dubik’s efforts.⁹⁴

In a massive bureaucracy like the U.S. Army, the adoption of a new combat system—let alone an entirely new type of unit—usually took a decade or more. In that respect, the creation of the Interim Brigade Combat Teams in only three years was a masterpiece of strategic leadership worthy of a study all its own.⁹⁵ But on a more

fundamental level, the effort must be judged a failure. The IBCTs did successfully bridge the deployability gap between light and heavy forces. But the IBCTs failed to bridge the more profound capability gap within the U.S. Army: a lack of competency in low-intensity conflict.

The Interim Force was unequivocally designed for high-intensity conflict. Even with the benefit of hindsight, when asked directly if the IBCTs were intended to address shortfalls in executing “operations other than war,” General (ret.) Shinseki still insists that the IBCTs were intended to dominate “conventional” operations.⁹⁶ This is confirmed by Lieutenant General (ret.) Dubik⁹⁷ as well as the documentary evidence from the time. The IBCT organizational and operational concept (O&O), which served as the blueprint for development of the IBCT,⁹⁸ repeatedly claimed that the IBCT was a “full spectrum, combat force.” But the O&O also acknowledged that the IBCT was “designed and optimized primarily for employment in small scale contingency operations” (smaller high-intensity conflicts).⁹⁹ The IBCT could only succeed in “stability and support operations” (SASO) with significant “augmentations.” Moreover, even with augmentation, it was only capable of serving in SASO “as an initial entry force and/or as a guarantor to provide security for stability forces.”¹⁰⁰ This was the reemergence of Maj. Gen. James Dubik’s “National Judicial Force,”¹⁰¹ a theoretical other force that would arrive to do the dirty work of navigating the political dimension of low-intensity conflict so that the U.S. Army did not have to.

The O&O paid little more than lip-service to concerns over urban operations and asymmetry. It repeatedly insisted that the IBCT was designed to dominate in “urban and complex terrain”¹⁰² and acknowledged that the future operating environment would entail

“asymmetry.”¹⁰³ But the conflation of “urban and complex terrain” is telling. The O&O never connected urban operations to dealing with a population or the loss of “information dominance”; “urban and complex terrain” was simply terrain that was complex, an obstacle to movement and observation that would be overcome by superior mobility and networks.¹⁰⁴ Likewise, asymmetry was stripped of its messy association with urban operations, guerilla warfare, or a civilian population. Instead it was defined in terms of enemy technologies that could deny access to a theater of operations or produce mass U.S. casualties.¹⁰⁵ The IBCT was a giant leap toward greater deployability and lethality, but not an answer to the problem of low-intensity conflict, particularly its political dimension, which transformation’s critics had described as the asymmetric challenge of urban operations.

Conclusion

In fact, the U.S. Army never solved the problems of low-intensity conflict or its political dimension. Army transformers could not claim that they were oblivious to the problem; Major General Dubik, General Hendrix, General Abrams, and General Shinseki had all served in the Balkans only a few years before they began work on the IBCTs. But each had deeply internalized the U.S. Army culture—with its underlying assumption that preparing for and fighting high-intensity conflicts was the Army’s overriding purpose. This culture rendered them impervious to conflicting data—a phenomenon that organizational culture theorist Edgar Schein calls “resistance to change”¹⁰⁶ and historian Thomas Kuhn calls the “suppress[ion of] fundamental novelties because they are necessarily subversive.”¹⁰⁷

Thus, when the twin towers fell on 11 September 2001, the stage was set for a slow-motion military disaster. The apparent “cheap” “win” in Afghanistan through SOF

and airpower further validated transformers in their conviction that technology could supplant numbers.¹⁰⁸ The U.S. Army that invaded Iraq in March 2003 was tragically ill-prepared for the character of warfare that it ultimately faced. While the depleted Iraqi Army rapidly melted before the advance of the vastly superior U.S. Army, it did not disappear. Instead, it hid amongst the population, evading America's high-tech surveillance and precision strike capabilities. Once Saddam Hussein's regime was toppled, the Iraqi Army reemerged, not as a conventional military threat but as an insurgency that severely challenged the United States' halting efforts to establish a new Iraqi government. Other adversaries also emerged, including Shi'a militias, Sunni Iraqi Islamists, and foreign terrorist groups.¹⁰⁹ As of this writing, America has spent thirteen years paying the price for its Army's initial unpreparedness for the low-intensity conflict it has faced in Iraq.

A strategy for training, manning, and equipping the U.S. Army for the future should acknowledge that both Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld *and* General Shinseki were right on the eve of the invasion of Iraq. During the planning and build-up to the invasion, Secretary Rumsfeld repeatedly insisted that the Army could do more with less—that the RMA had yielded an Army that was so lethal and fast that it could defeat the non-RMA-enabled Iraqi Army with a very small force. And General Shinseki famously told Congress that the stabilization of Iraq after the invasion would require hundreds of thousands of troops.¹¹⁰ The course of the war that followed clearly proved both men right.

The future U.S. Army, should be shaped by this insight. The Army should be bifurcated into high-intensity and low-intensity armies. Networked and highly mobile,

benefitting from all of the trappings of the RMA, a high-intensity army does not have to be that big. And with the savings in personnel, the Army can build its decisive, low-intensity army in the mold of the motorized force of the latter half of the Iraq War.

More importantly, this low-intensity army must arrive in a theater of operations trained and understanding the political dimension of low-intensity conflict. This means it must train *only* for low-intensity conflict. Fifteen years of the War on Terror have shown that an Army cannot be good at both at the same time; low-intensity conflict is not a lesser included subset of high-intensity conflict. Just as in Bosnia, Afghanistan, and Iraq, if the U.S. Army does not arrive at the next low-intensity conflict trained and ready, the next American war will be yet another war without end.

Endnotes

¹ Throughout this study, I use the term “low-intensity conflict” to refer to operations ranging from humanitarian assistance and disaster relief to counterinsurgency and counterterrorism operations. This is an imperfect choice but forty years of confused Army and joint doctrine have so muddle the categorization of the “range of military operations” or the “spectrum of conflict” that I have consciously chosen to avoid using any of the various terms—such as operations other than war, military operations other than war, or stability and support operations—that were in vogue during the period this study will consider. Of course, “low-intensity conflict” comes with its own historical baggage, being the term of choice for such operations in the late 1980s and early 1990s, but other terms, such as “small wars” miss the fact that such operations might be large (as in the case of the latter phases of the Iraq war) yet still have a character quite distinct from that of high-intensity conflicts.

² Through the remainder of this study, I use the term “high-intensity conflict” to describe combat against a conventional military force of industrial-age or greater technological ability. I consciously choose this term rather than war, conflict, or major combat operations for the same reason as explained in the previous note.

³ Edgar H. Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 4th ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 23.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Keith L. Shimko, *The Iraq Wars and America's Military Revolution* (New York: Cambridge University, 2010), Kindle Edition, locations 3027-3040.

⁶ *Ibid.*, locations 167-178.

⁷ Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Doctrine, *Reader's Guide, FM 100-5 1986 – 1993 Comparison* (Fort Monroe, VA: Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Doctrine, U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, 1993), 1.

⁸ Shimko, *The Iraq Wars and America's Military Revolution*, locations 2994-2998.

⁹ Allan R. Millett and Peter Maslowski, *For the Common Defense: A Military History of the United States from 1607 to 2012* (New York: Free Press, 2012) Kindle Edition, locations 11766-11770, 11805-11813, 12157-12172.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, locations 12157-12172.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, locations 12124-12134.

¹² Gordon R. Sullivan and James M. Dubik, *War in the Information Age* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, June 6, 1994), 13.

¹³ Institute for National Strategic Studies, *Project 2025* (Washington, DC: Institute for National Strategic Studies, National Defense University, May 6, 1992), 61-63.

¹⁴ Shimko, *The Iraq Wars and America's Military Revolution*, locations 2888-2901; Millett and Maslowski, *For the Common Defense*, locations 12260-12298.

¹⁵ Shimko, *The Iraq Wars and America's Military Revolution*, locations 3027-3040.

¹⁶ Millett and Maslowski, *For the Common Defense*, locations 12260-12298.

¹⁷ John Sloan Brown, *Kevlar Legions: The Transformation of the U.S. Army, 1989-2005* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History United States Army, 2011), Kindle Edition, locations 1989-2005.

¹⁸ Anne W. Chapman et al., *Prepare the Army for War, A Historical Overview of the Army Training and Doctrine Command 1973-1998* (Fort Monroe, VA: Military History Office, U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, 1998), 31-32.

¹⁹ Sullivan and Dubik, *War in the Information Age*, 15.

²⁰ U.S. Department of the Army, *Decisive Victory: America's Power Projection Army*, White Paper (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Army, October 1994), 8-9.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 11.

²² Shimko, *The Iraq Wars and America's Military Revolution*, locations 3504-3507.

²³ John B. Hunt, "OOTW: A Concept in Flux," *Military Review* 76, no. 5 (September-October 1996): 3-10; U.S. Department of the Army, *FM 7-98, Operations in a Low-Intensity Conflict*.

²⁴ U.S. Department of the Army, *FM 7-98, Operations in a Low-Intensity Conflict*, 4-1 – 4-9; rather than originating with an "anonymous member" of a "peacekeeping force," this quote has been attributed in various sources to former UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld or military sociologist Charles Moskos.

²⁵ David Fitzgerald, *Learning to Forget: US Army Counterinsurgency Doctrine and Practice from Vietnam to Iraq* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University, 2013), 79-81.

²⁶ U.S. Special Operations Command, *U.S. Special Operations Command History: 1987-2007* (MacDill Air Force Base, FL: U.S. Special Operations Command, 2007), 8-9.

²⁷ U.S. Department of the Army, *FM 7-98, Operations in a Low-Intensity Conflict*, 3-2.

²⁸ U.S. Department of the Army, *FM 100-5, Operations* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Army, June 14, 1993), 2-0 – 2-1.

²⁹ Hunt, "OOTW: A Concept in Flux."

³⁰ Gordon R. Sullivan and Andrew B. Twomey, "The Challenges of Peace," *Parameters* 24, no. 3 (Autumn 1994): 4-17.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² U.S. Department of the Army, *Decisive Victory: America's Power Projection Army*, White Paper (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Army, October 1994), 2.

³³ Sullivan and Twomey, "The Challenges of Peace."

³⁴ Robert F. Baumann, George Walter Gawrych, and Walter Edward Kretchik, *Armed Peacekeepers in Bosnia* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2004), 2-3.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 1, 4.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 27.

³⁷ Baumann, Gawrych, and Kretchik, *Armed Peacekeepers in Bosnia*, 27-28, 50; Millett and Maslowski, *For the Common Defense*, locations 12378-12396.

³⁸ Millett and Maslowski, *For the Common Defense*, locations 12366-12375, 12403; Baumann, Gawrych, and Kretchik, *Armed Peacekeepers in Bosnia*, 29-30.

³⁹ U.S. Army Europe, *Military Operations: The U.S. Army in Bosnia and Herzegovina*, AE Pamphlet 525-100 (Heidelberg, Germany: US Army Europe, 7 October 2003), 16.

⁴⁰ Baumann, Gawrych, and Kretchik, *Armed Peacekeepers in Bosnia*, 37.

⁴¹ U.S. Army Europe, *AE Pamphlet 525-100*, 16-17.

⁴² George W. Gawrych, "Show of Force," in *Armed Peacekeepers in Bosnia*, 120; Baumann, Gawrych, and Kretchik, *Armed Peacekeepers in Bosnia*, 94.

⁴³ U.S. Army Europe, *AE Pamphlet 525-100*, 20-21; Baumann, Gawrych, and Kretchik, *Armed Peacekeepers in Bosnia*, 94.

⁴⁴ U.S. Army Europe, *AE Pamphlet 525-100*, 12-13.

⁴⁵ Baumann, Gawrych, and Kretchik, *Armed Peacekeepers in Bosnia*, 95-6.

⁴⁶ Gawrych, "Show of Force," in *Armed Peacekeepers*, 126.

⁴⁷ Thomas T. Smith, "Forward," in *Armed Peacekeepers*, i-ii.

⁴⁸ Gawrych, "Show of Force," in *Armed Peacekeepers*, 126-127.

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⁵⁰ U.S. Army Europe, *AE Pamphlet 525-100*, 17-18.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 19-20.

⁵² Commission on Roles and Missions of the Armed Forces, *Directions for Defense: Report of the Commission on Roles and Missions of the Armed Forces* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1996), ES-4; Allan R. Millett and Peter Maslowski, *For the Common Defense: A Military History of the United States from 1607 to 2012* (New York: Free Press, 2012) Kindle Edition, locations 12192-12197.

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⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁵⁹ Dennis Reimer, "Where We've Been- Where We're Headed: Maintaining a Solid Framework While Building for the Future," *Army*, October 1995, reprinted in *Soldiers are our Credentials: The Collected Works and Selected Papers of the Thirty-third Chief of Staff, United States Army* ed. by James Jay Carafano (Washington, DC: Center for Military History, U.S. Department of the Army, 2000), 3.

⁶⁰ Anne W. Chapman et al., *Prepare the Army for War, A Historical Overview of the Army Training and Doctrine Command 1973-1998* (Fort Monroe, VA: Military History Office, U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, 1998), 52.

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