

## Our Strategic Intelligence Problem

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Our national intelligence system will never meet our unrealistic expectations, nor can it ever answer all of our needs. No matter what we do or change or buy, intelligence agencies will remain unable to satisfy our government's appetite for knowledge. This isn't defeatism, but realism. We had better get used to the idea.

This does not mean that our intelligence system cannot be improved. It can. Nor does it imply that our leaders should be less demanding. Stressing the system enhances its performance. But our fantastic expectations must be lowered to a level more in accord with our present and potential capabilities.

And we *must* end the decades-old practice of blaming flawed intelligence for broader policy failures. For all of its indisputable shortcomings, the U.S. intelligence community has become a too-convenient scapegoat for erroneous decisions made by a succession of leaders indifferent to the substance of intelligence, but alert to the advantages of politics. If we want to improve our comprehensive security, we need to begin with a sharp dose of realism regarding what intelligence can and cannot deliver. We do not expect our health-care system to return every patient to perfect health. It is just as foolish to expect perfect intelligence.

While there are real, endemic problems within our intelligence system, the greater problem may be with the expectations of the public, the media, and our Nation's policy-makers. From indefensible defense-contractor promises to the insidious effects of Hollywood's long-running fantasy of all-seeing, all-powerful intelligence agencies, the lack of an accurate grasp of what intelligence generally can provide, occasionally can deliver, and still cannot begin to achieve results in reflexive cries of "Intelligence failure!" under

circumstances in which it would have been impossible—or a case of hit-the-lottery luck—for intelligence to succeed.

Despite the political grandstanding over a catalytic tragedy, any probability of preventing 9/11 through better intelligence work was a myth. Our enemies out-maneuvered and *out-imagined* us so boldly that none of those who now insist that they warned us offered any useful specificity before the event. In retrospect, many matters appear far simpler and more linear. We cannot believe that a general was so foolish in battle, forgetting that our privileged view is far different from that confronting the general amid the chaos of war. Looking back, it appears obvious that, by 1999, there was an unsustainable hi-tech bubble in the stock market—but how many of us nonetheless bought in near the top? Charges that "They should have seen it coming!" are usually wrong and rarely helpful. The only useful question is "*Why* didn't we see it coming?"

Sometimes the answer is that the system's attention was elsewhere. But the answer also might be that a given event was impossible to prevent without a phenomenal stroke of luck. The problem with luck is that it is not very dependable. September 11th was not only an intelligence failure, it was also a law-enforcement failure, an airline failure, an architectural failure, a fire-and-rescue failure, a long-term policy failure, and a failure of our national imagination. Our enemies told us openly that they intended to attack us. From Langley to Los Angeles, we, the people, could not conceive that they meant it. Even those of us who wrote theoretically about massive attacks on lower Manhattan have no right to claim prescience. We did not truly envision the reality. Our collective belief systems needed to be shaken by images of catastrophes on our soil.

Similarly, our military had to undergo a succession of asymmetrical conflicts to begin to shake its cold-war-era mindset. No succession of briefings, books, or articles could have had the impact of the suicide bomber and the improvised explosive device. Likewise, in military intelligence, we are beginning to see a generational divide between yesterday's technology-über-alles managers—who continue, for now, to be promoted—and a younger generation of intelligence officers who have endured the brutal human crucibles of Iraq and Afghanistan, and who do not expect a van full of electronics to do all of their work for them. Because it routinely deals with life-and-death issues, tactical intelligence, long a backwater, might improve more profoundly than strategic intelligence in the coming years.

If the events of the past decade (or century) should teach us anything about the relationship between the intelligence community and our national leadership, it is that the more reliant any policy or action is on the *comprehensive* accuracy of intelligence, the more likely it is to disappoint, if not humiliate, us with its results.

Intelligence can help leaders shape their views, but it is not a substitute for leadership. Senior members in the intelligence world must share the blame for our unrealistic expectations. In order to secure funding for ever-more-expensive technologies, too much was promised in return. While technical assets, from satellites to adept computer programs, bring us great advantages in amassing and processing data, even the best machine cannot predict the behavior of hostile individuals or governments.

The salvation-through-technology types do great damage to our intelligence effort. They deliver massive amounts of data, but become so

mesmerized by what technology can do that they slight the importance of relevance. And humans are messy, while technology appears pristine. Furthermore, there are massive profits to be made on the technology side (and good retirement jobs for program managers); thus, Congress leans inevitably toward funding systems rather than fostering human abilities.

There is no consistent lobby for human intelligence, language skills, or deep analysis. Despite occasional bursts of supportive rhetoric on Capitol Hill, the money still goes for machinery, not flesh and blood. Recent personnel increases remain trivial compared to our investments in technology. Yet, we live in an age when our security problems are overwhelmingly human problems. Despite a half-decade of reorganizations near and at the top of the intelligence system, we remain far better suited to detecting the movements of yesteryear's Soviet armies and fleets than we are at comprehending and finding terrorists. (In Washington, the immediate response to any crisis within a government bureaucracy is to rotate the usual suspects at the top, not to address the pervasive reforms required—and no one in our government understands the concept of “sunk costs.”)

Nor do our intelligence difficulties end with our inability to locate and kill Osama bin-Laden, who will be eliminated eventually, just as Abu Musab al-Zarqawi was. Our hi-tech intelligence architecture even failed in many of the spheres in which it was supposed to excel. Consider just a few examples of the system falling short when required to perform:

- During the air campaign to break Belgrade's hold on Kosovo, the Serbian military fooled our overhead collectors with decoy targets composed of campfires, old hulks, and metal scraps. Hundreds of millions of dollars in precision munitions went to waste as we attacked improvised charcoal grills. It took the threat of American ground troops to force a sloppy diplomatic compromise—a 6-week air effort hit only a handful of real targets.

- Notoriously, our hundreds of billions in collection systems could neither confirm nor deny that Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction as we moved toward war. Our intelligence system proved so weak that it could offer nothing

substantial to challenge or support the position assumed by decision-makers. Without convincing evidence to the contrary, the existence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq became little more than a matter of opinion. Opinion then attained the force of fact in the build-up to war. The lack of reliable sources in Iraq and agents on the ground left the satellites searching desperately for the slightest hint that the Baghdad regime was armed with forbidden weapons. We were no longer collecting—we were conjuring. Conjecture hardened into conviction. And we went to war focused on finding chemical rounds, rather than on a convulsive population.

- None of our technical collection means detected the wartime threat from the Saddam Fedayeen or other irregular forces. As then-Lieutenant General William Scott Wallace, the Army V Corps commander on the march to Baghdad, observed, the enemy we ended up fighting (albeit successfully) was not the enemy the intelligence community had briefed. Commanders learned as they fought, after our best intelligence had promised them a different war. In Iraq, we couldn't see what we wanted to see, so we refused to see what we didn't want to see. We relied so heavily on technical collection means that we forgot to *think*.

- Not a single one of over a hundred attempted “decapitation” strikes with precision weapons succeeded in killing the targeted individual during the initial stages of Operation Iraqi Freedom—even though most of the sites were destroyed. The concept remains sound in theory, but our ability to hit targets has far outstripped our ability to identify them accurately. It's just plain hard to find people who are doing their best to hide. Even now, our successful strikes against terrorists rely far more often on tips, interrogations, and the processing of captured material than on national collection means. On the ground in Iraq, military intelligence personnel diagram the human relationships among our enemies much as their British predecessors would have done 80 years ago (although we can do our sketching on computer screens).

- Satellites famously can read a license plate (and more). But they

rarely tell you whether that battered Toyota contains an innocent civilian, a suicide bomber, or a terrorist chieftain. If the enemy declines to use communications technologies, we are back to the human factor to do our target spotting.

The problem with the human factor is that the technocrats who dominate the intelligence community just don't like it. The “metal benders” see technology as reliable (and immune to personnel management problems), even if that reliability isn't germane to our actual needs. The more our security problems take on a human shape, the more money we throw at technology. A retired psychiatrist I know points out that one form of insanity is to repeat a failed action obsessively. By that measure, our intelligence community is as mad as Lear on the heath.

Only human beings can penetrate the minds of other human beings. Understanding our enemies is the most important requirement for our intelligence system. Yet, “understanding” is a word you rarely, if ever, find in our intelligence manuals. We are obsessed with accumulating great volumes of data, measuring success in tonnage rather than results. Instead of panning for gold, we proudly pile up the mud.

Two things must happen if our national intelligence system is to improve. Within the intelligence community, we need to achieve a more effective balance between our default to technology and the slighted human factor. At the top of the game, intelligence is about deciphering what an enemy will do before the enemy knows it himself. The very best analysts can do this, if only sometimes. But occasional successes are better than consistent failures. However imperfect the results, who would deny that a better grasp of the mentalities, ambitions, fears, jealousies, schemes, and desires of our opponents would have offered us more in the days before 9/11 or in the build-up to the invasion of Iraq (or now, in dealing with Iran) than any series of satellite photos?

If we want to improve the quality and usefulness of the intelligence that reaches our nation's leaders, we need to accept the primacy of the human being in intelligence. Instead of the current system, in which people support technology, we need our technologies to support people.

The other thing that must be done—and this is terribly hard—is for all of us, from the Oval Office, through military commanders, to the Wi-Fi crowd down at Starbucks, to have rational expectations of what intelligence can provide and how reliably it can perform. The technocrats continue to insist, against all evidence, that machines can solve all of our intelligence problems, if only we develop and buy more of them. But this age of Cain-and-Abel warfare, of global disorientation, and of a sweeping return to primitive identities and exclusive beliefs is characterized by its raw, brutal humanity. Far from bringing us together, the computer age has amplified our differences and reinvigorated old hatreds. A new, global ruling class profits, while the human masses seethe.

Nothing is a greater challenge for the intelligence system than the individual human being who hates us enough to kill us. How do we spot him in the crowd before he acts? *Why* does he wish to kill us—perhaps committing suicide in the process? How do we find him in a city's wretched crowding or amid remote tribes? What happens when he gains access to weapons of mass destruction? The long-term costs to our country from 9/11 proved to be

far greater than the 3,000 casualties we suffered that morning. What second-, third-, and fourth-order effects might even a small nuclear blast trigger?

We can defeat states with relative ease. Individuals are tougher. At present, we know approximately where Osama bin-Laden is, but we lack the specific awareness to strike him with a single, politically tolerable bomb. To have a reasonable chance of killing or capturing him, we would have to send in a large ground force, potentially igniting all Pakistan and bringing down the military regime that, tragically, is that country's sole hope. So we wait for the whispered word that will tell us what we need to know. After all of the hyper-expensive collection systems have failed, we find ourselves relying on bribes, informers, and luck, and attacking huts and caves rather than command bunkers and missile silos.

Our intelligence system can do more to protect us than it has done, but, even reformed, it will not detect or stop all of our enemies. We need to do better, but we will never perform perfectly. Intelligence is, at last, about people—on both sides. And human beings are imperfect. Yet, amid the tumult confronting us today, the imperfect human offers

more hope for intelligence successes than the perfect machine.

Decision-makers have to accept that they must live with a large measure of uncertainty. (Generals have had to do so since the Bronze Age.) Even the intelligence estimate that captures today's issues with remarkable acuity might be upended by a single distant event tomorrow. There are few, if any, static answers in intelligence. The problems we face from foreign enemies are throbbing, morphing, living, often-irrational manifestations of human problems that are themselves in the process of constant change. Intelligence *moves*. Even the best strategic intelligence provides only not-quite-focused snapshots and rough-compass bearings, not detailed maps to a predetermined future. The iron paradox of any intelligence system is that to expand its effectiveness you must recognize its limitations.

Blaming faulty intelligence for policy failures is the ultimate case of the workman blaming his tools. Even the best intelligence can only inform decisions. It cannot be forced to make them.

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## MR Book Reviews

### Featured Review

**COBRA II: THE INSIDE STORY OF THE INVASION AND OCCUPATION OF IRAQ**, Michael R. Gordon and Bernard E. Trainor, Pantheon Books, New York, 2006, 603 pages.

Michael R. Gordon and Bernard E. Trainor have delivered the second of their histories of U.S. wars in the Persian Gulf, and it might not be their last since there is grist for still another book. In the title, *Cobra II*, Gordon and Trainor promise to deliver on the invasion and the occupation of Iraq. Frankly, the title tantalizes, but the book really does not address the occupation of Iraq; rather, it looks only at the beginning of that effort.

Gordon and Trainor set their thesis

quite clearly in the first sentence of the foreword when they assert that *Cobra II* "will provide an inside look at how a military campaign that was so successful in toppling Saddam Hussein's regime set the conditions for the insurgency that followed." They effectively follow through on that promise. The result, despite the small criticism of not meeting the full promise of the title, is a book that is quite good and useful to those who serve and those who send others in harm's way.

Several of the topics that emerged in Gordon and Trainor's first book, *The General's War*, remain relevant more than a decade after the first Persian Gulf War. Chief among these are that planning, personalities, and

perception mattered in Operation Iraqi Freedom, much as they did in Desert Storm. Thucydides was the first historian to consider these themes, and they are still critical to the tale of war. As in the classical era, making war remains a political act of which military operations are but a part. Gordon and Trainor lucidly lay out the story of how perception and personality played decisive roles in planning for the war and the subsequent occupation from the moment the administration cast a baleful eye on Iraq.

The authors develop their narrative in two parts. First they show how the planners failed to account for the requirements of occupation because they used much of their time planning and debating the size

of the force and the basic concept for the campaign to topple Saddam Hussein. Second, neither the administration nor its military minions had much interest in planning for a long occupation or for the possibility of insurgency. Gordon and Trainor argue that the administration believed little needed to be done and that Central Command, led by General Tommy Franks, underestimated the difficulty.

At times, *Cobra II* is surreal. There emerges from the book a sense of implacable destiny at work in Tampa, Camp Doha, Washington, and everywhere someone developed PowerPoint® charts, conducted a briefing, or considered the coming war. Reading *Cobra II* is like reading about the *Titanic*. We find ourselves hoping the Captain will reduce the *Titanic's* speed or that the officer of the deck will order all engines astern rather than a course change, or that the lookout will see the iceberg looming ahead in time to avert the crash. But of course the *Titanic* does hit the iceberg and in the end it sinks. All that remains is to deconstruct the event, hoping to understand why the tragedy happened and how we might avoid similar mistakes in the future.

*Cobra II* is a first cut at analyzing the process of planning the war in Iraq; it provides some preliminary analysis that will enable future understanding of what happened and why. For the most part Gordon and Trainor make their points by letting the actors speak for themselves.

Among the planners, Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld stands out. He looms above the process and all of those around him, driving the decisions that not only led to the war, but to those that determined how the war would be fought and how the occupation would be undertaken. But Rumsfeld was not alone in planning the war effort, and Gordon and Trainor devote their first eight chapters to the other players and the almost Byzantine machinations that characterized the planning effort.

Franks may have been the only protagonist who actually challenged Rumsfeld. It appears, however, that even the redoubtable general avoided confronting Rumsfeld when he could. Sometimes he mollified the Secretary, as he did when he appropriated the phrase “shock and awe,” which the Secretary liked. Although

Franks used the phrase, he merely sipped rather than drank the Kool Aid® of that concept. Sometimes he listened politely to Rumsfeld or his favorites and did nothing. In that vein, perhaps the most amazing scene in the book is the one in which Rumsfeld sends Colonel Douglas Macgregor to teach Franks the art of campaign planning. Gordon and Trainor suggest that Macgregor found favor with Rumsfeld because, as they put it, “some long-standing critics of the Army leadership felt they had an ally at the top.”

Fairly early in the planning cycle, Macgregor, at Rumsfeld's behest and through the good offices of Senator Newt Gingrich, flew to Tampa. There Macgregor briefed Franks on how to defeat Saddam with only 50,000 troops and how to do so in 96 hours. Both the numbers and hours resonated with Rumsfeld. According to Gordon and Trainor, Franks listened attentively, made hearty gestures of affirmation, gave Macgregor a challenge coin, and sent him on his way.

What Gordon and Trainor suggest in these eight chapters is that much of the planning stemmed from conviction rather than careful analysis. The Pentagon's chief conviction was that Saddam's regime, weakened by defeat and long-term isolation, would collapse upon receipt of a few stoutly administered blows landed with laser-like precision on just the right weak points. Moreover, little effort would be required afterward except to hand over the keys to the palaces to some Iraqi government.

Gordon and Trainor argue effectively that the planning effort was flawed by poor communication and a top-down approach that brooked almost no contrary points of view. There are a number of passages, however, where the authors refer to positions held by key players without documenting a source or making it clear that the passage actually represents a conclusion they have reached, not the thoughts of the person they are writing about. Still the book is convincing. More important, Gordon and Trainor do not bash only Rumsfeld; they rightly hold both Soldiers and civilians responsible for spending too much time debating the right size force to produce the collapse and too little time determining what to do once success was achieved.

The authors' campaign narrative is quite good and avoids the meanwhile-back-at-the-ranch syndrome that sometimes characterizes narrative accounts of big campaigns. Gordon and Trainor tell the tale of commanders and Soldiers from top to bottom while maintaining a sense of context about what is happening elsewhere. Faithful to the task they set themselves, they discuss the transition from major combat operations to “occupation.”

Gordon and Trainor remind us that collaboration between government leaders and Soldiers remains essential. This was obvious to Clausewitz, and it remains obvious today; but it is still not any easier to do. Overall, *Cobra II* is a well done, useful reminder that warfare remains the province of humans and will therefore continue to be as complex and dynamic as the humans who make it. We can learn from this and may be more likely to do so because the experience is fresh. By attempting to tell the story before all of the facts are known, Gordon and Trainor took serious risks. But there is a payoff here for them and for those who must plan and execute operations.

**COL Gregory Fontenot,  
USA, Retired, Lansing, Kansas**

**FIGHTING FOR FALLUJAH: A New Dawn for Iraq**, John R. Ballard, Praeger Security International, Westport, CT, 2006, 184 pages, \$44.95.

Written by John Ballard, commander of the Marine Corps' 4th Civil Affairs Group in Iraq, *Fighting for Fallujah* is a first-hand account of how Marine-led Coalition forces retook the city of Fallujah from insurgent elements in November 2004. Much deeper than just a story about the most intense urban combat Marines have participated in since Hue, Ballard's insider narrative educates readers on how Coalition forces learned from early mistakes and were then able to gain the support of the Sunni population despite destroying their city.

The book begins by taking readers through the events leading up to the fight, including the gruesome murders of three Blackwater contractors, Fallujah I, and An Najaf, illustrating how Coalition forces continued to learn from their missteps and then applied the lessons they

learned to the upcoming fight. Using informative charts and endnotes, Ballard explains how the Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF), with the mission to destroy the terrorist elements and then restore the city to its residents, planned and then executed the retaking, resettlement, and reconstruction of Fallujah.

Ballard moves back and forth easily among the tactical, operational, and strategic levels. Planning considerations for interagency coordination, information operations, civil affairs operations, and the integration of coalition forces and their important contributions are all covered in detail. The effects of political requirements on MEF planning and execution are framed around Iraqi Prime Minister Ayad Allawi's need to demonstrate that his fledgling government would not allow insurgents to dominate one of their cities and that it could care for its people. With the hope that others can learn from the MEF experiences, the book concludes with lessons learned about the full spectrum of operations currently ongoing in Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Ballard acknowledges that the changing situation in Iraq makes it hard to claim a lasting success in Fallujah or any other battle, but he offers as proof of the MEF's success the large number of Sunnis in Fallujah—more than in any other city—who turned out to vote in January 2005.

Written in a style that is both educational and easy to read, *Fighting for Fallujah* is an important contribution to understanding the complexity of urban operations in Iraq.

**LTC Dennis S. Burket,  
USA, Retired,  
Fort Leavenworth, Kansas**

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**I, NADIA: Wife of a Terrorist**, Baya Gacemi, Paul Cote, and Constantina Mitchell, trans., Bison Books, a division of the University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, 160 pages, 2006, \$24.95.

One can acquire an appreciation for Islamist militant tactics, outlooks, and world vision from many sources. One such source is this small but extraordinary book, written by Algerian journalist Baya Gacemi. *I, Nadia* describes the

life of an Algerian Armed Islamic Group (GIA) emir's wife, a woman the author met through a program offered for female victims of Islamist violence. Originally written in French under the title *Moi, Nadia femme d'un émir du GIA*, the book represents the kind of reading U.S. forces need to undertake in the Global War on Terrorism. The University of Nebraska Press has made such works in French available to American readers through its France Overseas series. This is the third book that focuses on French history and colonial policy.

Readers begin to grasp the danger of a jihadist society as the GIA takes over the small hamlet of Hai Bounab in the 1980s. Villagers and farmers are torn between supporting a government they view as out of touch with their poverty and the jihadists, whom they see as defenders of the poor. The GIA is initially supported by a portion of the population, who provide material aid, but the support erodes when the GIA's racketeering and murder for hire spills over into the butchering, raping, and kidnapping of women. The book also details how Ahmed rises within his GIA cell, and it describes, though not very clearly, his warped views on Islam (which seem to derive from extremist views in Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia).

Nadia knew Ahmed only 3 months before she married him. Naively, she thought she could change his harsh and intolerant views on Islam. Ahmed, who knew little about the Prophet Muhammad's regard for women, verbally abused his bride on their wedding night and made it known to her that she would be cooking for the entire group (the GIA cell to which he belonged). Nadia's life turned into one of virtual slavery and physical abuse, and eventually she was abandoned. Ahmed justified his unwillingness to lift a finger to help his wife, saying: "We must preserve our strength to wage war on the tahgout (oppressor)."

We see a microcosm of a sick, Taliban-like Islam being enforced in the villages and homes of GIA terrorists. Ahmed quotes more from jihad theorist Sayed Qutb than he does from the *Quran*. The book's beauty is that it captures the jihadists' language, giving us a real feel for the way these people think and operate. Helpfully,

Gacemi includes a glossary.

I read this book to try to understand the mechanics of GIA-controlled neighborhoods and villages. Gacemi gives a vivid account of hidden doors and extortion, and how GIA members simply took what they wanted in the name of jihad. By the end I was anxious to see how Nadia escaped from the jihadist world she had entered.

In a 2005 letter to Mussah Al-Zarqawi, Al-Qaeda strategist Ayman Al-Zawahiri urged leaders to learn from how easily the Taliban fell in Afghanistan and not to isolate communities. Readers should ponder the wisdom of the decision made by Algeria's military to deprive Islamists of their political victory in 1991. It is because Islamist radicals enter the political process with such contempt for democracy that one must be cautious in legitimizing them politically. For those interested in learning how jihadists and militants are perverting Islam, Gacemi's book is a good place to start.

**LCDR Youssef Aboul-Enein, USN,  
Gaithersburg, Maryland**

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**NEW GLORY: Expanding America's Global Supremacy**, Ralph Peters, Sentinel, New York, 2005, 283 pages, \$24.95.

*New Glory* is riveting and hard hitting. As always, Peters puts in words what others only think about saying. With opinions and recommendations that are controversial, insightful, and prophetic, the former intelligence officer and much-published author addresses many topics, particularly why the U.S. must adjust its military, diplomatic, intelligence, and business strategies.

Peters' main premise is that the United States must redirect its national strategy to the southern hemisphere and base its overall strategy on support for human rights. He also argues articulately that the U.S. should break ranks with its current allies in Western Europe (with the exception of the United Kingdom).

*New Glory* makes the case that to contain radical Islamic fundamentalists and terrorists, the United States must focus on making inroads into the countries that border the Middle East: India, Indonesia, and South Africa. India, the world's largest democracy, is a highly educated state

and a traditional enemy of Islam; Indonesia, also a democracy, is a strategically located, moderate Muslim state; and democratic South Africa, because of its economy, education, technology, and political influence, is the major actor on the African continent. These should be the centerpieces of our new national strategy.

By creating mutually beneficial relationships with these three countries, America can stress freedom and democracy while at the same time forming a bulkhead against the failing despotic governments of the Middle East and their increasingly influential radical elements. Peters also believes the United States must pay more attention to Latin America, a critical region that we have ignored for far too long.

Peters contends that the driving forces behind U.S. strategy must be human rights and democracy, irrespective of region. America must stand for what is right and must not be afraid to act either with its allies or, if necessary, alone in its pursuit of democracy. *New Glory* argues convincingly that it is both morally wise and strategically prudent to support the oppressed no matter where they are found, even to the point of using force to free them.

*New Glory* could be improved with more quotes, better documentation, and a bibliography. That said, the book is a must-read for anyone interested in U.S. national strategy and military affairs, or in universal human rights, freedom, and democracy.

**LTC Brian Ebert, USA,  
Fort Leavenworth, Kansas**

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**WEAPON OF CHOICE: ARSOF in Afghanistan**, Charles H. Briscoe, Richard L. Kiper, James A. Schroder, and Kalev I. Sepp, Combat Studies Institute Press, Leavenworth, Kansas, 2004, 399 pages, \$61.00.

This may be one of the toughest books you ever tried to find. The press run was limited, and copies have been snapped up by the special operations community. Now, you need special connections to get a copy. That's a shame, because the book is an absolute gem.\*

*Weapon of Choice* is an authorized history of army special operations in Afghanistan from 12 September

2001 to 15 May 2002. Charles H. Briscoe, Richard L. Kiper, James A. Schroder, and Kalev I. Sepp had unprecedented access and the stern direction to "disclose no secret before its time." This was a rather daunting task, but the authors carry it off well and tell an accurate, fascinating story. However, in keeping with the secrecy surrounding the special operations community, practically every name in the book is a pseudonym and practically everyone in a photograph has a black bar across his face—it's a bit like reading a 1959 edition of *The Police Gazette*. *Weapon of Choice* is a comprehensive book covering special forces, rangers, special forces aviation, civil affairs, psychological operations, and support forces.

*Weapon of Choice* is destined to be a primary source for future study of the war against the Taliban and Al-Qaeda. Unfortunately, the book is not designed to support study and research: It has no index, footnotes, or bibliography. Also, a list of key actors would have been helpful, the maps are of poor quality and there is not enough of them, and the PowerPoint® maps and charts are fuzzy, as are some photographs. Finally, the book is printed on clay-coated paper, which makes it physically heavy and hard to record notes on.

These points aside, *Weapon of Choice* is an absolute must for anyone studying contemporary history or lessons learned from early U.S. Army special operations efforts in Afghanistan. It relates how skilled, brave Americans overcame severe obstacles to lead the attack on the Taliban and Al-Qaeda. Good luck in finding the book. It is well worth the search.

\*Note: the U.S. Government Book Store is offering *Weapon of Choice* for sale online at <http://bookstore.gpo.gov/>.

**LTC Lester W. Grau, USA, Retired,  
Fort Leavenworth, Kansas**

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**DARWIN AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS: On the Evolutionary Origins of War and Ethnic Conflict**, Bradley A. Thayer, The University Press of Kentucky, Lexington, 2004, 425 pages, \$40.00.

Bradley A. Thayer has an intriguing idea: Use hard science to exam-

ine topics in the soft sciences to see if the latter can benefit from the stronger underpinnings of the former. Specifically, he tries to apply evolutionary biology to the biggest issues in foreign relations, war, and ethnic conflict.

Current theories of international affairs—including warfare and ethnic conflict—rest on belief rather than fact. One way to assess and firm up these theories is to give them a hard-science foundation, specifically evolutionary biology. Thayer contends that warfare and ethnic violence have evolutionary benefit. Individual survival mechanisms are a primary cause of group conflict between and within states.

Taking a scientific approach, Thayer defines and explains evolution, describes the major criticisms of the theory, then counters those criticisms. He shows how individual survival applies to both current theories of warfare: rational choice and realism. He discusses historical and contemporary instances of warfare and ethnic conflict to see if there really is definite survival advantage in conflict. Thayer also discusses the warfare of ants and chimpanzees to show similar evolution in dissimilar species.

In a side trip, Thayer discusses the epidemiological balance of power that favored the Europeans in the western hemisphere, but worked to their disadvantage in Africa and Asia. According to him, the biological evolution was in the germs, not human beings. He returns to his major focus and takes on group relations, xenophobia, and ethnocentrism as he joins the debate over whether the underlying causes of contemporary ethnic conflict have primordial or modern origins.

Thayer finds that nothing in his theory explains the immediate causes of a specific event. Proximate causes are outside the scope of evolutionary studies; biology is irrelevant to those seeking the specific causes of a Kosovo or Rwanda in order to head off the next conflict. What evolutionary biology does is examine general underlying human tendencies. Those can be shaped through environmental alteration. Civic education and media portrayals of inclusiveness can transform isolated and xenophobic groups into a broadly inclusive multicultural

society. Integration reduces conflict by enlarging the in-group and shrinking the out-group. Reducing the triggers for the evolved tendencies toward violent behaviors can help to head off the violence.

Thayer's intent is not to provide a comprehensive exploration of the many applications of evolutionary biology to the study of international affairs; he only wants to touch the surface to show how a hard-science approach to a soft subject can work. He succeeds admirably, and his book deserves careful reading.

**John H. Barnhill, Ph.D.,  
Houston, Texas**

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**IMPERIAL GRUNTS: The American Military on the Ground**, Robert D. Kaplan, Random House, New York, 2005, 372 pages, \$27.95.

*Imperial Grunts* provides compelling insights into present-day American imperialism and the multifarious challenges facing U.S. forces as they prosecute the Global War on Terrorism. Using the "ground up" approach, Kaplan takes the reader on an odyssey of many of the world's hotspots as seen through the eyes of those implementing U.S. foreign policy: Soldiers and Marines. Deftly demonstrating that imperial success is more often associated with low-tech methods and the dexterity of America's military, Kaplan's work is timely in highlighting the realities of contemporary U.S. military operations.

From the individual efforts in Mongolia of Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Parker Wilhelm, who was determined to make the descendants of Genghis Khan the "peacekeeping Gurkhas" of the American Empire via a remote U.S. civil affairs team in Lamu, Kenya, to the Marine's first battle of Fallujah, Iraq, Kaplan skillfully captures the diverse nature of the responsibilities undertaken by America's warrior-diplomats.

Kaplan features such personalities as retired U.S. Army Lieutenant Colonel Bob Adolph, employed by the U.N. in Yemen, and numerous Special Forces personnel deployed in Afghanistan, Colombia, and the Philippines. He introduces a host of remarkable Americans, each charged with the complex task of implementing U.S. policy in foreign

lands. Given their extraordinary devotion to duty in trying conditions, it is little wonder that Kaplan has nothing but admiration for these individuals.

While he rightly praises the skill and resourcefulness of Special Forces Soldiers and Marines, Kaplan is not afraid to highlight some of the wider challenges associated with contemporary U.S. operations. Washington's predilection for joint commands comes into question, as does the issue of force protection measures. But it is the ubiquitous unease regarding rules of engagement (ROE) that is a common theme throughout the book. "If they would just loosen the ROEs, give us the assets and some helicopter platforms, this whole guerrilla siege of Arauca Province would be over in six months," states a frustrated Special Forces captain in the Philippines.

Kaplan also addresses the inherent friction between the institutional Army—headquarters-based, risk-averse, and uniform in appearance—and the realities of those located in the distant corners of the world. A Special Forces lieutenant colonel in Afghanistan cautions, "It doesn't get the beards, the ball caps, the windows rolled down so that we can shake hands with the hajis and hand out PowerBars® to the kids, as we do our patrols. Big Army has regulations against all of that. Big Army doesn't understand that before you can subvert a people you've got to love them, and love their culture."

Skillfully written, engaging, and thought-provoking, *Imperial Grunts* is strengthened by carefully researched historical preambles. From America's involvement in the Banana Wars to Great Britain's approach to the northwest frontier of India, the book provides historical context to a contemporary challenge faced by a combatant command. Combined with the insightful thoughts of those on the ground and Kaplan's untiring journalistic energy, the book is a resounding success.

The first of two volumes, *Imperial Grunts* is an absorbing and knowledgeably written depiction of the practical challenges facing the U.S. military at the tactical level. It may become a must-read for Soldiers, those keen on joining the Army, and

those looking for a light read, but *Imperial Grunts* is not a scholarly text. Nonetheless, Kaplan has an important story to tell, and he does it admirably.

**MAJ Andrew M. Roc, British Army,  
Fort Leavenworth, Kansas**

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**THE NORTH KOREAN PEOPLE'S ARMY: Origins and Current Tactics**, James M. Minnich, Naval Institute Press, Annapolis, MD, 2005, 164 pages, \$27.95.

James M. Minnich, a U.S. Army foreign area officer in the Republic of Korea (ROK), leveraged 23 years of military experience as he crafted his study of the historical development, current organization, and tactics of the North Korean People's Army (NKPA). A graduate of the Republic of Korea Army College with Korean language skills and rare access to senior ROK Army personnel, Minnich utilized valuable primary source materials. The annotated bibliography alone makes this text an outstanding addition to the shelf of any military or civilian assigned to the Korean peninsula. Minnich's expertise in North Korean tactics is undeniable, and the list of known personalities in the field of security studies who have positively reviewed this book is impressive.

The text is divided into two sections: The first recaps North Korea's military development since the Japanese occupation prior to World War II; the second is an unclassified, authoritatively well-referenced exposition of modern North Korean tactics. Interestingly, the most easily overlooked attribute of this book is its appendices. Comprising fully one-third of the book's pages, they range in scope from a list of influential personalities to the complete framework for the command and control structure of the NKPA.

It should be noted that for all of its merit, the book leaves many questions unaddressed with respect to the NKPA's ability to successfully wage a future war based on their proposed tactics. The doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership development, personnel, and facilities methodology might have been a useful technique for conducting a comprehensive review of the NKPA's current capabilities and

potential for aggression based on funding, recruiting, and training.

This interesting, quick-reading book offers a unique opportunity to peer into the organization and tactical training of one of Asia's most hostile armies. Minnich has given us an unmatched reference volume, and I strongly recommend it to all serious-minded theater security personnel.  
**LTC Daniel M. Frickenschmidt, USA, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas**

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**THE GERMAN WAY OF WAR: From the Thirty Years' War to the Third Reich**, Robert M. Citino, University Press of Kansas, Lawrence, 2005, 428 pages, \$34.95.

Robert M. Citino's *The German Way of War* is yet another book that analyzes the Prussian-German culture and military art of war through the ages. What makes this book different is that Citino lays out a solid argument that the German way of war was consistent over a long period of time, from the Seven Years' War to the Napoleonic Wars, through the rest of the 19th century under Moltke's art of war, and finally through World Wars I and II. In each of these time periods, Citino describes the events and discusses patterns common to all Prussian-German military operations.

For readers familiar with German military history, Citino's conclusions are not surprising. For instance, that the Prussian-German military instilled within its culture the ability to execute operational-level maneuver using the "envelopment" form of maneuver has long been known. But Citino offers more. To enable and enhance this form of maneuver, the Germans trained their officers to aggressively seize the initiative and to attack the enemy's flank, both flanks, or even better, the enemy's rear. Because of this aggressiveness and the desire to strike quickly for a decisive advantage, Citino points out that logistical disaster loomed if the battle or campaign lasted too long.

So why study a military that championed the doctrine that quick and decisive warfare is the key to long-term victory, but ultimately failed in two world wars? Although many of Citino's conclusions about the German military are not new, his lessons learned are certainly worthy of further consideration for our own

doctrine. Everyone wants a quick and decisive war, but what happens when they can't get one?

**LTC Scott A. Porter, USA, Retired, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas**

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**PRIVATE PERRY AND MISTER POE—The West Point Poems, 1831**, Edgar Allan Poe, William F. Hecker III, ed., Louisiana State University Press, Baton Rouge, 2005, 165 pages, \$19.95.

Concerning his edited work of Edgar Allan Poe's edition of 1831 poems, Army officer and former West Point professor William Hecker states that "it had become apparent that no one had truly put together a detailed assessment of Poe's four years of military discipline or seriously tried to connect that experience to his aesthetic." One of the main reasons for writing this edition of Poe's West Point-era poems is the dearth of scholarship on his military experience, particularly that of his West Point years. A widespread misinterpretation among academia and wider audiences concerning Poe is that he disdained his military experience. Hecker carefully lays to rest the specious nature of this long-held assumption.

Poe (1809-1849), who enlisted in the Army in 1827 under the name Edgar A. Perry, will always be an American favorite. Millions of us have read his horror stories and poems, all wrought from his supremely macabre twist on the anti-Classical nature of Romanticism, and critics have addressed seemingly every aspect of Poe's life and works. Notwithstanding the latter, the crux of Hecker's thesis centers around the fact that "[j]ust as biographers dismiss the important connections between Poe's military life and his poetic visions, critics, likewise, fail to consider the possibility that military culture might be embedded in his poetry." For example, Poe's training in constructing and firing artillery rounds could have contributed to the apocalyptic visions of "The City in the Sea" and "The Fall of the House of Usher."

In the book's foreword, noted poet Daniel Hoffman states, "It is remarkable that no biographer, scholar, or critic of Poe's life and writings has, until now, inquired what...were the

effects of his army experiences on his literary work." Hecker goes far in correcting this situation. One of the more enlightening points he explores is the affinity between Poe's prosody and military order, particularly field movement and close-order drill: Both needed metrical precision to be effective.

Poe made the puzzling choice to enlist in an era when enlisted service was disdained as a lowly occupation. He lived the arduous regimen of that life, learning the discipline and precision of an artilleryman. Through contemporary documents, Hecker builds an accurate picture of what enlisted life for Poe must have been like. He outlines in detail the reasons behind his enlistment and his ultimate dissatisfaction with that way of life. Hecker also tracks the changes in Poe's motivation and his perceptions of the officer corps, which would culminate in his dismissal from the Corps of Cadets in 1831 on charges of "gross neglect of duty."

The most valuable parts of the book are Hecker's introduction and Gerald A. McGowan's afterword. McGowan provides further enlightenment on Poe's poetic language and identity, as well as his employment of martial names throughout his oeuvre. Both men offer valuable interpretations of Poe's life and literary works and perceptive insights into his brief sojourn in the American military. In the end, Hecker hopes that "critics [will] begin to explore and publicly discourse about the critical and symbiotic relationship between the American nation, its literature, and its military."

As for the poetry itself, these 1831 poems will likely prove, for most, to be quaint irrelevancies compared with the Gothic genius most of us have enjoyed so much in *The Raven and Other Poems*, perhaps Poe's most enduring collection. The handful of 1831 poems Hecker discusses in his introduction could have sufficed to get his valuable thesis across to his audience. Still, this is a scholarly work, one that adds to our understanding of American literature's infamous dark genius.

*Editor's note: Major William F. Hecker III was killed by an IED in Najaf, Iraq, 6 January 2006.*

**MAJ Jeffrey C. Alfier, Ramstein Air Base, Germany**



## Telling the Afghan Military Story

Lieutenant Colonel Pamela Keeton, *U.S. Army Reserve, Retired*—Having served in CFC-A public affairs during 2004-2005, I read with interest Lieutenant Colonel Charles W. Rick's March-April 2006 *Military Review* article "Telling the Afghan Military Story . . . Their Way!" Everyone who has served in public affairs in Afghanistan has faced similar challenges: how to reach the media with news and information, how to work at an appropriate level with the developing government of Afghanistan, and how to reach the Afghan people with accurate and timely information. The lessons learned by Ricks and others who have served there are valuable to future PAOs who will serve in places like Afghanistan. I wish to correct three points made by Ricks.

First, while my staff didn't use a bicycle to deliver CFC-A press releases to the Afghan media, we didn't rely solely on technology either, because we knew many local media did not have access to the Internet. We hired a contract driver to hand-deliver our press releases to the Afghan media outlets, and we employed a wonderful young Afghan interpreter to make sure our releases were structured in a way that would be understood by the Afghans. If requested, this same driver would transport Afghan reporters to our press conferences because many did not have access to transportation.

Second, while the CFC-A public affairs office was available at the media operations center during the presidential elections to answer questions regarding the coalition's role in the election, we did not write messages for General Zaher Azimi or any other Afghan government spokesmen. Our presence at the media center was very limited.

And finally, a large committee of representatives from many inter-

national and U.S. agencies worked with the palace staff to help them plan media operations for the inauguration. It was Afghan President Hamid Karzai's desire to have as many officials from the provinces as possible witness the inauguration; unfortunately the inaugural hall would only hold approximately 300 people. At the same time, the head of security for the palace limited the number of news media to approximately 20, including reporters and technicians. Everyone involved in the planning knew that the first inauguration in the history of Afghanistan would draw hundreds of news media from around the world, so it was agreed by all to use a media pool approach for the event. I believe Ricks was present for some of these meetings.

Notices went out to media organizations around the world informing them of this decision and urging them not to send reporters because they would be turned away. The planning committee knew that the media would still come, in hopes of being let in to the event. The committee asked the palace for permission to set up a tent approximately 100 meters from the inaugural hall. They provided live audio and video feeds as well as Internet access and refreshments. Unfortunately, and unknown to the committee, palace security had enclosed the media area with fencing. We suspect everyone involved was quite astounded at the number of news media that showed up to the palace the day of the event. Yes, they were packed into the media operations center, but it is unfair to blame anyone—especially the coalition public affairs office—for the situation. The Palace's public affairs office did its best to ensure that local, regional, and world media were treated fairly with regard to access to the inauguration.

Those of us in Afghanistan in the fall of 2004 served at an interesting time and we all learned many valu-

able lessons. The level of coordination and cooperation between the U.S. military, NATO forces, the United Nations Assistance Mission Afghanistan, the government of Afghanistan, and a host of others was, according to some, unprecedented. Interestingly, almost no one has attempted to officially capture those experiences for future operations. Many thanks to *Military Review* for providing a forum through which those who have or are serving around the world in various types of operations can share lessons learned and ideas for the future.

## Correction

Footnote 10 in the article "Telling the Afghan Military Story" should read . . . U.N. General Assembly Security Council Report A/59/581-S/2004/925 . . . ; the link in footnote 10 should read <[http://www.unama-afg.org/docs/ UN-Docs/repots-SG/2004/2004-925.pdf](http://www.unama-afg.org/docs/UN-Docs/repots-SG/2004/2004-925.pdf)>.

## Kudo for IO

Joel K. Harding, *Senior Military Analyst, SAIC Strategies Group*—I work for SAIC in Information Operations and I just wanted to let you know that Colonel Ralph O. Baker's article, *The Decisive Weapon: A Brigade Combat Team Commander's Perspective on Information Operations* (May-June 2006 *Military Review*), was enthusiastically and favorably reviewed by a whole slew of Ph.D.s at NDU, the JMIC, the Naval Post Graduate School and others. The team, which I call my Greybeards (even though one is female), was struggling with defining IO metrics and your article proved timely and informative. I want to thank you for such a great piece!

In my opinion this was one of the best articles I have ever read regarding IO. You truly defined the problem, implications, repercussions, end states, and defined success. I'd love to hear and read more, if you ever get the opportunity!