

Letters . . .

INTERWAR YEARS

To the Editor—Frederick Kagan has written another excellent synthesis of history and derived wisdom. His “Strategy and Force Structure in an Interwar Period” (*JFQ*, Spring/Summer 01) is both well supported and direct in its advice. There is, however, a crucial gap in the logic underpinning his recommendations.

Kagan outlines his recipe for accomplishing readiness (shaping, maintaining, and preparing) while simultaneously acknowledging but skipping lightly over the crucial point that almost no democracy accomplishes this task in the absence of an identified and sustained threat. In other words, he is preaching to the choir while neglecting the rest of the flock. What confronts the United States is not a lack of resources but rather the absence of sustained political will.

Perhaps it is time thinkers and actors on the national stage consider other methods to act on Kagan’s thoughts on readiness. While actions such as those pursued by the Creel Commission would likely be illegal today, other routes can be explored. Kagan is undoubtedly correct in saying that this is an interwar period. The conundrum is bringing that realization to the national security community and selling it to the rest of America.

—MAJ Robert Bateman, USA
Center for Strategic and International Studies

To the Editor—While I agree with Frederick Kagan’s overall message—that the United States must have the goal of “prolonging the current epoch of peace and prosperity as long as possible and being ready to fight and win the conflict that will ultimately end it”—I question some of his assertions as well as his seemingly contradictory conclusion about the best way to accomplish that goal.

First, I am astonished at Kagan’s limited definition of what it means “to shape” the global environment. In his view, America “must continually shape the international environment by the use of force or its threat, and by stability and peace operations when appropriate.” He advocates “aggressive involvement” as “the best way” to accomplish these three tasks. I think he has his priorities backward. While it is true that, as the national military strategy states, “The Armed Forces help shape the international environment primarily through their inherent deterrent qualities,” that deterrent capability provides a backdrop to the true means of shaping the environment: “foster[ing] the institutions and

international relationships that constitute a peaceful strategic environment by promoting stability; preventing and reducing conflict and threats; and deterring aggression and coercion.”

Next, Kagan decries withdrawing forces from overseas in favor of long-range strike capabilities because that “would immediately increase instability by signaling that America is no longer committed to the peace.” As evidence, he points to past aggression by North Korea, North Vietnam, Iraq, and Serbia. But what he fails to recognize is that the US global presence was greater, not less, when that aggression occurred and it did not deter it.

In writing off U.S. nuclear capabilities as having become “largely irrelevant to regional security,” Kagan reveals the greatest fault of his argument: a singular focus on fighting the last war (indeed, perhaps even a war of 60 years ago). We would be naïve not to realize that inherent in the U.S. abandonment of the strategy of two nearly simultaneous major regional conflicts is the option of resorting to nuclear weapons should an aggressor exploit the U.S. preoccupation elsewhere.

Fourth, in discussing force structure, Kagan argues that “the real test will be how many troops are ready to go without notice at any time.” But the real test is how rapidly the military transportation system can get those troops to the battlefield. The problem with force structure is not the number of divisions or air expeditionary forces, but whether we have adequately addressed throughput.

Finally, Kagan concludes that the Army should adopt a brigade-sized model similar to that recommended by Douglas Macgregor in *Breaking the Phalanx*. But he wants to have things both ways, claiming that “any force short of 15 divisions” would be insufficient for the future but then argues that the division is a relic of the Cold War that must be abandoned.

While the historian Kagan seems to want the Nation to prepare to again defeat the forces of Nazi Germany, history suggests that the best way to prolong an epoch of peace and prosperity is through prevention, early intervention, and deterrence. The joint force has a critical role in all three.

—MAJ Peter C. Giotta, USA
Joint Military Intelligence College

To the Editor—The guiding tenets of national security strategy—shape (the international environment), respond (to the full spectrum of crises), and prepare now (for an uncertain future)—are being put to the test as events unfold in the wake of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Frederick Kagan argues in “Strategy and Force Structure in an Interwar Period” that “military preparedness is urgent in periods of apparent peace just like during periods of tension.” How right he is.

Allied efforts to defeat al Qaeda and Taliban, and subsequent operations to root out terrorist cells in Yemen, the Philippines, Somalia, Sudan, and possibly other countries, do not demonstrate America’s unpreparedness for war or a lack of military readiness. But that’s not the point. Operation Enduring Freedom is not the kind of two-front major theater war Kagan had in mind.

Events in Afghanistan bear out Kagan’s comments on shaping, which aims to maintain “peace and stability in regions of vital national interest” lest a power vacuum occur “when traditional structures collapse.” Yet after the defeat of the Soviets in Afghanistan, what vital interests remained? As it turned out, there were several thousand vital interests, but those did not become apparent until later.

The functions of shaping are engagement and deterrence. Engagement helps demonstrate U.S. commitment and resolve while fostering conditions conducive to the spread of democratic capitalism. Deterrence, on the other hand, is demonstrated only by failure. Cold War thinking survives when it comes to deterrence: “Nuclear phantoms still survive in our minds,” quipped a Russian panelist at a conference on emerging threats. We’ve known for some time that it takes something other than a nuclear arsenal to deter terrorist aggression, and shaping with boots on the ground forward presence is part of the deterrence equation.

Interestingly, the war against terrorists illustrates another of Kagan’s points: “A great power that can meet only one major challenge at a time makes it more likely that a second enemy will take advantage of that power’s preoccupation with the first.” He offers that the “focus on the European conflict in 1941 was a precondition to the Japanese attack on British and American possessions in the Pacific.”

Boots on the ground also serve another purpose when it comes to employing long-range precision weapons. As Operation Enduring Freedom shows, and as Kagan argues, no matter how capable airpower might be, it is even more so when applied in a joint way, with combatants on the ground to accurately target enemy positions.

Although the war against terrorists must occupy much of our energy and resources, it is a major regional war—or two simultaneously—that worries Kagan. We must currently execute the toughest parts of national security strategy. While involved in a fight, we must also continue shaping activities. In addition, we must prepare by transforming the force to meet future threats. Even more worrisome is that too much emphasis might be placed on technology without considering innovations in organization and doctrine.

Emphasizing the need to maintain readiness during transformation, the author cites organizational changes the Air Force and Marine Corps have already made. He calls on the Army to do the same

and “abandon the Cold War model of Army organization.” The division structure does not accord with the way we currently train or operate, which focuses on brigade training and deployments. This is likely to result in a volatile readiness mix within divisions called upon to fight in a major conflict.

At the core of Kagan’s force structure argument is what he describes as an “unfounded assumption: in 1990 the active components of the Armed Forces were prepared to defeat a Soviet attack and, since that threat was clearly much greater than any threat or combination of threats today, the military in this interwar period should be smaller and less costly. This assumption does not accord with historical reality; it prejudices the question of what force structure we need, coming to what is clearly a wrong answer.”

A relative lack of funding and resources for militaries is a longstanding issue, especially in democratic countries. Rueful of America’s wealth, an Italian general observed at a NATO reserve forces conference, “You have the first and second best military in the world.”

Kagan is right to call for increased resource allocation during interwar years. That the largest increase in defense spending in 20 years had to come on the heels of a national catastrophe is somewhat ironic. But it may be sufficient to put our defense orientation, posture, and transformation activities on the right track.

—Charles F. Hawkins

Historical Evaluation and Research
Organization

To the Editor—The interwar years show that democracies are slow to recognize and prepare for danger, according to Frederick Kagan. In fact, they demonstrated the reverse. Britain and France confronted Germany in 1940 with superior material strength. The Germans had 2,439 light and medium tanks, of which over 1,700 were light, against 3,079 Allied tanks, most of which were medium or heavy; 7,378 German artillery pieces faced 13,974; 3,369 Nazi aircraft faced 4,981; and 135 *Wehrmacht* divisions confronted Allied 152. Nor should one forget the immense investment in the Maginot Line. Further, contrary to the myth of German might cultivated by the Nazis, the relative strength of antagonists was much the same throughout the 1930s. The Nazi domination of Europe cannot be attributed to either an untimely recognition of the threat or an unwillingness to meet it.

So why were the Germans not deterred? The answer is Adolf Hitler. Gerhard Weinberg makes it clear that der Führer was absolutely bent on war, not merely as a means to his insane objectives but as an end in itself. Such a monster was not to be deterred, only destroyed.

While defeating the Nazis was the only option, World War I and abortive attempts to enforce the Versailles treaty had eroded any possibility of public support for preventive war. For over sixty years, Neville Chamberlain and Munich have served as the paradigms of “peace at any price.” Chamberlain, however, fully represented the temper of his people in 1938. Britain had gone to war in 1914 because it felt the costs of German hegemony over Europe to be unbearable.

The lessons of history are often complex and are seldom easily applied. More specifically, the evidence suggests that, in this instance at least, democracies were able to recognize and respond to the threat within the context of their normal political processes. The fact that their generals could not put this power to use should not obscure that fact. A more subtle interpretation of the record suggests that the trip wires for preventive war, the strictures of Versailles, were poorly calculated to maintain public support. Further, though Hitler fortunately remains unique, it would appear that criminals and madmen are not easily deterred by a rational calculation of the odds; they can only be defeated.

Public support—the willingness to “pay any price, bear any burden”—was, is, and should remain the foremost bulwark of international stability. A hyperactive, overly interventionist foreign policy that drains resources and mires the Nation in moral ambiguity only exhausts that stout willingness to do what is both right and necessary.

—MAJ Wade Markel, USA
Army Transformation Office

RETHINKING SO/LIC

To the Editor—I read “Special Operations Forces after Kosovo” by Charles J. Dunlap, Jr. (*JFQ*, Spring/Summer 01–02) with great interest. Against the background of Kosovo and Afghanistan, the cooperation between Special Operations Forces and the Air Force could serve as a model for new operational concepts. These operations have shown that modern information technology provides the responsible commanders the optimal means to coordinate such actions. The preeminent strategic importance of air operations has become evident.

The vision Giulio Douhet—the airpower theorist of the interwar period—formulated 1921 in *The Command of the Air* could be reality in a few years. Although it is difficult to compare wars—remembering Clausewitz’s observation that they are like chameleons—the offensive operations in Afghanistan may allow the conclusion that the Air Force—as an instrument of asymmetric warfare—is able to have decisive impacts on the outcome of wars.

Due to the opportunities given by modern networks of systems for reconnaissance, command and control, and the engagement of

weapons, the areas of operation become transparent. These systems in combination with unmanned aerial vehicles clearly show that we can speak of a real revolution in military affairs. But technological conditions are only part of what is needed. As Admiral Bill Owens pointed out in *Lifting the Fog Of War* and in a speech to the Clausewitz Society in Berlin, it will be important to combine technology with coherent doctrine.

In the future, the wider spectrum of engagement of the Air Force against maneuvering tank units could shift the weight from maneuver to firepower. Against the background of synchronized operations between the Air Force and Special Operations Forces, linear battles such as we observed during the Persian Gulf War will become less meaningful. The Army—driven by the vision of General Eric K. Shinseki—has drawn sound conclusions from that new situation. The lean structures of the new interim brigades and especially their means for reconnaissance and intelligence are similar to the organization of Special Forces. With planned new equipment, these Army forces could become active at the same time through the whole depth of an area of operations and work closely with the Air Force. Robert Scales describes such operations in a monograph called “Future Warfare Anthology,” published by the U.S. Army War College in 2001. Technology and doctrine alone are not sufficient. It needs commanders on all levels who are able to manage the huge amount of information and—for the conduct of an operation—to distinguish important from superfluous information.

—Bruno Lezzi
Neue Zürcher Zeitung

To the Editor—As a former director of Operations, Plans, and Policy for U.S. Special Operations Command, I am compelled to comment that “Special Operations Forces after Kosovo” by Charles Dunlap is a thinly-veiled service-centric attack by a non-SOF officer on Army Special Operations Forces: rangers, Special Forces, psychological operations, and civil affairs. The author’s appreciation of the future of SOF ground operations is limited to “snatch missions.” His assumption that unconventional warfare is a dying concept is thoroughly disproven in Afghanistan. His understanding of PSYOP is limited to the tactical (broadcasts and leaflets), and he desires to civilianize civil affairs, not understanding its combat roles of campaign deconfliction and support and management of displaced personnel and prisoners. Finally, he states that SOF shouldn’t execute counterdrug missions, one of the better training vehicles for Special Forces. Such are the results when one draws sweeping conclusions from a small conflict.

—MG Geoffrey C. Lambert, USA
U.S. Army Special Forces Command

To the Editor—Charles Dunlap began his article by asserting that “Allied Force was the first major operation in which aircraft achieved victory without the need for a land campaign.” This is patently wrong and only serves to undermine the spirit of joint operations.

Despite claims about precision and ability, airpower did not force the enemy to abandon the battle. That was achieved by the credible threat, indeed the reality, of engaging U.S. ground forces, as embodied by Task Force Hawk. Slobodan Milosovic did not give the order to withdraw until the Russians told him U.S. ground forces were coming and that if his forces did not withdraw, Russia could not help them. The fact that Serb forces largely withdrew—intact—is a testimony to the inability of airpower to destroy tactical combat forces in the field despite its effectiveness when it went “downtown,” destroying strategic targets such as bridges, road and rail networks, and the power supply.

The Allied Force Munitions Assessment Team and Joint Intelligence Team Survey concluded that airpower expended some 14,000 bombs—mostly precision guided munitions (PGMs)—against combat forces in the field and destroyed 14 tanks, 18 armored personnel carriers, and 20 artillery/mortars—not much of a return on our investment and not a very effective means of providing fire support to special operations forces.

Of the 6,766 sorties planned, over half were aborted due to weather and a third were adversely affected by weather. Fewer than half of the targets were effectively engaged. Moreover, from 15,000 feet pilots cannot tell a tank from a derelict car with a pipe sticking out of the windshield. The report stated: “Almost completely unchallenged, Yugoslav forces could disperse and hide. . . . When revealed, slowness in the sensor-controller-shooter sequence often gave them enough time to relocate [and hide] before attacks began.”

With the documented inability of airpower to be 24/7 and all-weather, the only remaining means of supporting joint Special Forces in the littorals is with naval surface fire support (NSFS).

The difficulty of meeting NSFS needs stems from the Navy’s inability to provide a volume of fires: a large enough platform (ship) to carry both multiple guns and sufficient ammunition, and a weapon system that delivers a large enough payload with the lethality to destroy armored or hardened targets in a manner that is tactically responsive and affordable in large quantities. In short, that is the problem with missile solutions for NSFS. The Marines know their requirements can be met with reactivated battleships. General James Jones stated, “I regret we took them [battleships] out of service before we had actually fixed the naval surface fire support problem.” Unfortunately, the purse strings are held by a

Navy plagued by a groundless, indeed irrational, prejudice against battleships.

The NSFS gap can be quickly and affordably closed by extensively modernizing *USS Iowa* and *USS Wisconsin* to create a new class, the battleship guided-missile (BBG). This could be accomplished in about a year for \$1 billion—the original cost of the ill-fated *USS Cole*. Each BBG would provide 96 much needed Tomahawks much sooner with an ability to perform more missions and at half the cost of alternatives.

In September 1992, the Navy officially shifted from a blue water to a brown-water (littoral warfare) strategy. With this shift, the Navy acquired an increased responsibility for providing troops ashore with reliable, tactically-responsive, accurate, high-volume NSFS under all conditions. Without this support, our troops ashore run the risk of needless heavy casualties, being defeated, or both.

—Major Tracy A. Ralphs, USAR
Suffolk, Virginia

To the Editor—The article by Charles Dunlap has been partially overtaken by events. The Afghan campaign has taught the defense establishment and the citizens who fund it more about modern Special Operations Forces (SOF) than any informed analysis ever could. A picture of bearded Special Forces soldiers on horseback, carrying laptops in their rucksacks, is worth a thousand words.

A major lesson of Afghanistan is that SOF are the glue that enables joint, interagency, and multinational forces to function as a team. Linkage with American aircraft, the Northern Alliance resistance, CIA operatives, and NATO special forces troops illustrated what the SOF community has known all along: humans are still more important than hardware. Rather than being marginalized, Special Forces have been brought to the center of the new security architecture.

What is surprising about Dunlap’s article is that it comes from the Air Force, the service that eliminated Special Operations from its doctrine during the 1980s. Indeed, the consistent refusal of its leaders to buy special operations aircraft was a key reason that Congress finally had to direct the formation of U.S. Special Operations Command. It is gratifying to hear that the service has accepted SOF (even its own) as a legitimate player in joint operations.

It is equally gratifying that the CIA has realized that technology cannot replace human sources of intelligence. Another picture Americans will not soon forget shows CIA agent Johnny “Mike” Spann inside the Mazar-e-sharif prison just before he was murdered by terrorists. SOF is the link between the CIA and DOD on the ground.

Two things make SOF special: the capability to insert small numbers of highly trained, independent

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thinkers behind enemy lines to train and advise guerrilla forces in their own languages, and the capability to conduct surgical operations in confined spaces. Starting with hostage rescue, certain units have developed the tactics for attacking an enemy where no technology can get them—in underground bunkers and caves. The genesis of this adaptation appeared a decade ago with the threat of weapons of mass destruction developed and controlled underground.

Dunlap is rightly concerned about SOF being spread too thin, a very real danger in a community whose mantra is *quality, not quantity*. If the community cannot grow beyond bureaucratic and physical limits, the challenge of retaining focus must be met through specialization within SOF. SEALs are still in the mountains and Green Berets are still in the water. A key advantage of joint organization has been squandered.

Islands have always functioned as engines of evolution. The bureaucratic isolation of Special Operations Forces has produced an evolution in joint-mindedness from which all can learn. The paradox of a community apart becoming the glue for others can be explained by good leadership, joint doctrine, and realistic training with foreign militaries and in joint exercises around the globe.

—CAPT Paul Shemella, USN (Ret.)
Naval Postgraduate School

EXPERIMENTATION

To the Editor—In “Reassessing Joint Experimentation” (*JFQ*, Spring/Summer 01–02), Thomas Cooke gets to the heart of the problem with future experimentation. The problem is hampered by the debate between those who want to take us into the unknown and those who want to build bridges from the current to the future force. Cooke uses the word *revolution* without an adequate definition. A revolution in military affairs requires a catalyst. In the past it has been technologies such as the stirrup, horse, gunpowder, flight, or wireless communications. What is the enabler today for a revolution in warfighting? The major area that offers promise is information technology.

Joint Vision 2010 and *Joint Vision 2020* attempted to harness information technology to take the joint force into the 21st century. Those familiar with the program believed joint experimentation should focus on those joint C⁴ISR capabilities that information technology will change and that will empower the force to apply the military art in a different way. Many also believed new capabilities that would be a part of this new joint force are the purview of service experimentation programs/labs. Piggybacking on service experiments was a wise way to enhance joint C⁴ISR capabilities and also to allow the services to verify their experimentation in support of joint operations. Cooke’s arguments on

the conflict between using planned exercises for experimentation are valid and point out the competition for assets between the need to train and the need to experiment. However, in a budget-constrained environment, this conflict cannot easily be resolved. The article also astutely points out that there is inappropriate competition among CINCs over experimentation.

I applaud Cooke for a well-written and thought-provoking article. However, this debate has gone on for seven years and is a primary reason the program has had so many starts and stops. It is time for those with such ideas to provide *concrete* thoughts on the asymmetric threat that would drive us to revolutionary change and explain *how* to get to the future they envision.

—Col John A. Clauer, USMC
Philadelphia Consortium (Villanova
and University of Pennsylvania)

UNCONVENTIONAL STRATEGY

To the Editor—“A New Twist in Unconventional War: Undermining Airpower” by Gary Webb (*JFQ*, Spring/Summer 01) does a service by defining a mode of warfare that is very real but not widely recognized in the arena of air superiority. Recognition of the kind of war is being fought is a first step in winning it. For this he deserves our appreciation.

Many of Webb’s observations are insightful and useful. Veterans of operations over Iraq have complained about our strategy, and many of his assertions justify that concern. Our strategy is defensive, reactive, and expensive without having sufficient suppressive effect on Iraqi efforts to rebuild an offensive potential.

However, as the author proceeds into more detailed description and prescription, he wanders dangerously off track. He ascribes a Maoist-type approach to Iraqi guerrilla warfare, appearing to engage in what one CINC has called “data-free research.” He offers no evidence that the three-phase method is being used or is even known.

There are in fact other approaches a guerrilla fighter might use. At sea, there is a form of unconventional warfare that has been practiced and is currently being planned by potentially hostile but weak navies that I call delay, disruption, denial, and demoralization (D⁴). In this form of maritime warfare, the weaker side attempts to get a lucky hit on a key ship type in hopes of slowing things down to get some strategic wiggle room, possibly dissuading further enemy advance due to the lack of the ship’s combat potential, or maybe demoralizing the enemy populace due to the high casualties that normally attend the loss of a ship (everybody being aware of the Somalia debacle).

While it is easy to imagine the Iraqis pursuing a D⁴ strategy, one can also interpret their actions as opportunistic—just stirring up the environment to get us to make a mistake. Another possibility is that their actions are meant only for domestic consumption—to maintain military morale or popular legitimacy by standing up to the Americans. If Baghdad is acting on any of these motivations, it is hard to see how Webb’s strategy of indirect dominance would solve the problem. Moreover, as a strategy of reprisal, it does not appear that it would seize the initiative as he asserts. Webb goes on to state that the threat of retaliation may discourage further mischief. Again, he offers no basis for his thinking, and the sad history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a cautionary example of the ineffectiveness of reprisal strategies.

Airpower is a potent and essential tool in the arsenal of democracy, but it is just one of many and should not be wielded in isolation. Hacking our way through the Gordian knot of Middle East politics will require more than the blunt instrument of military force. Webb’s recognition of a guerrilla mode of air warfare is both brilliant and useful, but his concept of indirect dominance gets us off track.

—Robert C. Rubel
Naval War College

