Embracing threatlessness: Reassessing U.S. military spending

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All sorts of notions and propositions are churned out, and often presented for consideration with the prefatory works: "It is conceivable that..." Such words establish their own truth, for the fact that someone has conceived of whatever proposition follows is enough to establish that it is conceivable. Whether it is worth a second thought, however, is another matter. It should undergo a good deal of thought before one begins to spend much money on it.
-Bernard Brodie, 1978

After examining an important U.S. Defense Department policy document, Benjamin Friedman observes that rather than estimating the varying likelihood of potential national security threats and coming up with recommendations on that basis, it "contends simply that `managing risk' compels the United States to prepare for all of them," and concludes that we should "retain the weapons and forces we have, with a few tweaks)."1

A sensible defense policy should, in contrast, not focus on and evaluate the threats that plausibly exist, but it should design its force structure in accordance with their disparate likelihoods. In the process it should keep in mind Bernard Brodie's admonition about what might be called "conceivablism" and about what he dubbed at the same time "worst case fantasies."2

I attempt to carry out - or at least to sketch - such an exercise here.3 On evaluation, it seems the United States lives in an environment that is substantially free from threats that require a great deal of military preparedness. Although the United States will need to maintain some military forces to work its way out of the 9/11-induced wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, an examination of problems that lurk in current conditions and on the horizon suggests that the country may well be substantially exaggerating the urgency of the threat environment. In consequence, it appears to be over-spending to confront real or imagined threats - if "conceivable" ones - that may be of only very limited significance and likelihood.

Major war

A sensible place to begin the consideration is with an examination of the prospects for a major war like World War II.

Although there is no physical reason why such a war cannot recur, it has become fairly commonplace to regard such wars as obsolescent, if not completely obsolete.4 Leading or developed countries continue to have disputes, but, reversing the course of several millennia, none seems likely seriously to envision war as a sensible method for resolving any of these disputes.

Europe, once the most warlike of continents, has taken the lead in this. It was on May 15, 1984, that the major countries of the developed world had managed to remain at peace with each

other for the longest continuous stretch since the days of the Roman Empire.5 That rather amazing record has now been further extended, and today one has to go back more than two millennia to find a longer period in which the Rhine remained uncrossed by armies with hostile intent.6

"All historians agree," observed Leo Tolstoy in War and Peace in 1869, "that states express their conflicts in wars and that as a direct result of greater or lesser success in war the political strength of states and nations increases or decreases."7 Whatever historians may currently think, it certainly appears that this notion has become substantially obsolete. Prestige now comes from other factors, such as making economic progress and putting on a good Olympics.

The Cold War did supply a set of crises and peripheral wars that engaged leading countries from time to time, and it was commonly envisioned that doom would inevitably emerge from the rivalry. Thus, political scientist Hans J. Morgenthau in 1979 said: "In my opinion the world is moving ineluctably towards a third world war - a strategic nuclear war. I do not believe that anything can be done to prevent it. The international system is simply too unstable to survive for long."8 At about the same time, John Hackett penned his distinctly non-prescient book The Third World War: August 1985.9 Such anxieties obviously proved to be over-wrought, but to the degree that they were correctly focused on a potential cause of major war, that specific impetus no longer exists.

World War III, then, continues to be the greatest nonevent in human history, and that happy condition seems very likely to continue. There have been wars throughout history, of course, but the remarkable absence of the species' worst expression for two-thirds of a century (and counting) strongly suggests that realities may have changed, and perhaps permanently. Accordingly it may be time to consider that spending a lot of money preparing for a "conceivable" eventuality - or fantasy - that is of ever-receding likelihood is a highly questionable undertaking.

The challenge of a rising power

In a globalized economy, it is actually better for the United States if China (or Japan or Brazil or India or Russia or anybody else) becomes more prosperous - for one thing, they can now buy our stuff (including our debt). However, eschewing such commonplace economic logic, there has been a notable tendency to envision threat in China's rapidly increasing prosperity on the grounds that at least some countries that have lots of money will necessarily invest a considerable amount of it in military hardware and that this will cause them consequently to come to feel impelled to target the United States or to carry out undesirable military adventures somewhere.

This fashionable conceivablist line of thought has a recent precedent. Japan's impressive economic rise in the late 1980s led to similar alarmed breast-beating, culminating in another decidedly non-prescient book, The Coming War With Japan, published in 1991.10 Applying the same questionable thought processes to China, the alarmed are given little pause by the fact that China has built far fewer nuclear weapons than it easily could have, and they continue essentially to maintain that it would be better for the United States if China, and presumably the rest of the world, were to continue to wallow in poverty.

China's oft-stated desire to incorporate (or re-incorporate) Taiwan into its territory and its apparent design on other offshore areas do create problems - ones that world leaders elsewhere should sensibly keep their eyes on, and ones that could "conceivably" lead to an armed conflict

to which American military forces might appear relevant. But it is also conceivable, and far more likely, that the whole problem will be worked out over the course of time without armed conflict. The Chinese strongly stress that their perspective on this issue is very long term and that they have a historic sense of patience. Indeed, if China eventually becomes a true democracy, Taiwan might even join up voluntarily or, failing that, some sort of legalistic face-saving agreement might eventually be worked out. Above all, China is increasing becoming a trading state, in Richard Rosecrance's phrase.11 Its integration into the world economy and its increasing dependence on it for economic development and for the consequent acquiescent contentment of the Chinese people is likely to keep the country reasonable. Armed conflict over the issue would be extremely - even overwhelmingly - costly to the country, and, in particular, to the regime in charge, and Chinese leaders seem to realize this.

In the meantime there is a danger of making the issue into a threat by treating it as such - by refusing to consider the unlikelihood of a worst-case scenario as well as the consequences of fantasizing about it, and by engaging in endless metaphysical talk about "balancing" as if it had some coherent corollary in physical fact. In this respect, special consideration should be given to the observation that, as one scholar puts it, "although China looks like a powerhouse from the outside, to its leaders it looks fragile, poor, and overwhelmed by internal problems." Provocative "balancing" talk, especially if military showmanship accompanies it, has the potential to be wildly counter-productive, and special heed should be paid to the warning that "historically, rising powers cause war not necessarily because they are innately belligerent, but because the reigning powers mishandle those who challenge the status quo."12

Policing wars

One possible use of American military forces in the future would be to send them into countries to depose regimes that, out of either incompetence or viciousness, are harming their own people, or to stop civil wars and to set up competent governments. Most international law authorities agree that, if such actions are mandated by the Security Council of the United Nations, they are legal and acceptable.13

In the aftermath of the Cold War, a number of such actions have been carried out by individual developed countries or by coalitions of them in such places as Panama, Kuwait, Somalia, Bosnia, Kosovo, East Timor, Sierra Leone, Afghanistan, and Iraq. It is highly unlikely, however, that these ventures are the wave of the future and will justify the maintenance of much military force. As it happens, there is little stomach for such operations. There are at least three problems.

First, there is a low tolerance for casualties in such applications of military force: a loss of a couple of dozen soldiers in chaotic fire-fights in Somalia in 1993 led the mighty United States to withdraw, particularly when polls found that 60 percent of the American public agreed with the extreme contention that “nothing the US could accomplish in Somalia is worth the death of even one more US soldier.”14

Second, the experience with policing wars has been accompanied by an increasing aversion to the costs and difficulties of what is often called “nation-building.” Third, there is little or no political gain from success in such ventures. If George H. W. Bush failed to receive a lasting boost from the American public for the way he applied the U.S. military at remarkably low cost to drive Saddam Hussein’s Iraq out of Kuwait in 1991, it is exceedingly difficult to imagine an operation that could do so.

These considerations have been driven into the highest relief by the exceedingly messy and costly wars the United States has waged in Afghanistan and Iraq. Any aversion to casualties and, certainly, to the costs and responsibilities of nation-building have been immeasurably heightened by this experience.

Many people in the American military envision these kinds of missions to be the future face of war, and counter-insurgency, willfully forgotten after the Vietnam War disaster, has re-entered the military classroom. However, it is much more likely that these ventures will be the last of their type. World War II inspired a World War syndrome, and none has taken place since. The Korean War inspired a Korea syndrome (on both sides), and none has taken place since. Vietnam famously inspired a Vietnam syndrome, and none has since taken place for the United States (though the USSR stumbled into its own version in Afghanistan). Somalia inspired a Somalia syndrome and any subsequent intervention by developed countries in local conflict in the remainder of the 20th century was kept highly limited - to assistance and maybe to some bombing from high altitudes or, in the case of genocide in Rwanda in 1994, simply to distant hand wringing. The disasters in Iraq and Afghanistan, though receiving much more supported at first than earlier ones because they seemed to involve direct national interests, are highly likely to lead to an effective Iraq/Afghan syndrome built on a clear and overwhelming dictum, "Let's not do that again."15

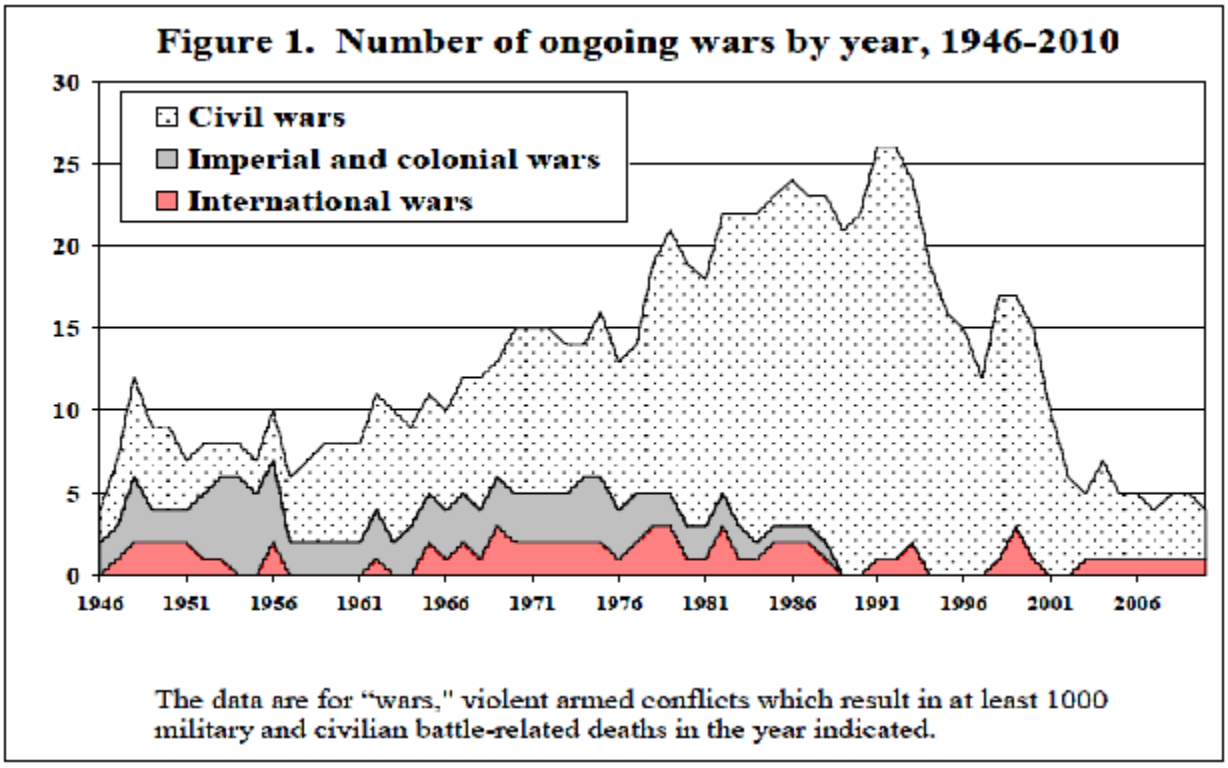
The growth of this syndrome shows up clearly in public opinion data. Since 1945, a key poll question about engagement in foreign affairs has been posed periodically: "Do you think it would be best for the future of this country if we took an active part in world affairs, or if we stayed out of world affairs?" After the 1999 policing war in Kosovo, Americans became less keen on intervention - an interesting reaction, since the military action there had been something of a success at least in its own terms - as those choosing the "stay out" option rose to near all-time high of 34 percent. Right after 9/11, the figure dropped to a low of 14 percent, and after a brief rise, declined again to 14 percent at the beginning of the Iraq War in 2003. Since that time, however, the "stay out" option has become considerably more popular. By 2006, the last time the question was asked, fully 38 percent embraced the sentiment - the highest ever registered. This does not necessarily mean that old-fashioned isolationism is emerging: the United States is unlikely to withdraw from participation in the global economy, disengage from international political organizations, or cease to be a citizen of the world community. However, stung by the Iraq and Afghanistan miseries and deeply concerned about the extensive debt they generated, the public is likely to remain exceedingly hostile to anything that looks like a repeat performance.

The palpable reluctance of the developed world to get militarily involved in Liberia and Darfur in 2003 is also indicative of the process. So is the impressive unwillingness to use military force in the various risings of the Arab Spring in 2011 when military efforts were restricted to delicate tinkering around the edges and to the lobbing of munitions from a safe distance - and then only in one instance, that of Libya.

Actually, the problems that policing wars were designed to handle may be resolving themselves. In the last couple of decades, there has been a marked decline in the number of venal tyrannies and, as figure 1 suggests, in civil wars.

Insofar as policing military forces might be useful, the most promising possibility seems likely to be in the construction of a viable international force through the United Nations.16 Among the advantages is that participants would be international civil servants/volunteers, not representatives of any specific country - thus, their deaths in action would stir only indirect

concern in their home countries. Among the key questions, however, are whether developed countries will be willing to pay for such an enterprise, whether the international organization can put together a truly capable military force, and whether the Security Council can be counted



on to manage, fund, and deploy it effectively.17

Rogue states

Over the course of the last several decades, the United States has variously sensed threat from small counties led by people it found to be decidedly unpleasant. These rogue states (as they came to be called in the 1990s) were led by such devils de jour as Nasser, Sukarno, Castro, Qaddafi, Khomeini, Kim Il-Sung, and Saddam Hussein, all of whom have since faded into history's dustbin.

Today, such alarmed focus is directed at teetering Iran, and at North Korea, the most pathetic state on the planet. Except in worst-case fantasies, however, neither country presents a threat of direct military aggression - Iran, in fact, has eschewed the practice for several centuries. Nonetheless, it might make some sense to maintain a capacity to institute containment and deterrence efforts carried out in formal or informal coalition with concerned neighboring countries - and there are quite a few of these in each case. However, neither country is militarily impressive and the military requirements for effective containment are far from monumental and do not necessarily need large forces-in-being. Moreover, the Iraq syndrome seems already to be having its effect in this area. Despite nearly continuous concern about Iranian nuclear developments, proposals to use military force to undercut this progress have been persistently undercut.

The Gulf War of 1991 is an example of military force being successfully applied to deal with a rogue venture - the conquest by Saddam Hussein's Iraq of neighboring Kuwait. This experience does not necessarily justify the maintenance of substantial military forces, however. First, Iraq's invasion was rare to the point of being unique: it has been the only case since World War II in which one UN country has invaded another with the intention of incorporating it into its own territory. As such, the experience seems to be much more of an aberration than a harbinger. Second, in a case such as that, countries do not need to have a large force-in-being because there is plenty of time to build a force should other measures to persuade the attacker to withdraw, such as economic sanctions and diplomatic forays, fail. And third, it certainly appears that Iraq's pathetic forces - lacking strategy, tactics, leadership, and morale - needed the large force thrown at them in 1991 to decide to withdraw.18

Proliferation

The proliferation of nuclear weapons has been far slower than has been commonly predicted over the decades, primarily because the weapons do not generally convey much advantage to their possessor.19 Nonetheless, an aversion to nuclear proliferation continues to impel alarmed concern and was a chief motivator of the Iraq War, which essentially was an antiproliferation war.

The war proved to be a necessary cause of the deaths of more people than perished at Hiroshima and Nagasaki combined, and the subsequent and consequent Iraq syndrome strongly suggests there will be little incentive to apply military force to prevent, or to deal with, further putative proliferation. As noted, the continuing lack of enthusiasm to apply force to North Korea and Iran suggests the validity of this observation.

It seems overwhelmingly apparent that history is on the side of democratic, capitalist South Korea while the North is a bizarre, sometimes almost comical, relic (or caricature) of a bygone and increasingly forgotten era. There is no need to take risks or act impetuously to hurry this historical process along. All that seems likely to be required in this case, as with the devils du jour of the Cold War era, is judicious, watchful, and wary patience.

Much the same seems to hold for Iran. At the outset of the Iraq War in 2003, some neo-Conservatives suggested sending it and an other regimes in the area a two-worded note: "You're next." As noted, in the wake of the Iraq experience, that sort of thing isn't heard any more; nor are the once-common, and urgent, calls for bombing Iranian nuclear facilities. Any efforts to slow nuclear developments in Iran or elsewhere are likely to be non-military.

Terrorism

Any threat presented by international terrorism has been massively inflated in the retelling. The chief demon group, al-Qaeda, consists of perhaps 100 to 200 people who, judging from information obtained in Osama bin Laden's stronghold when he was murdered in May 2011, are primarily occupied by dodging drone missile attacks and complaining about the lack of funds.20 Other terrorist groups around the world may be able to do intermittent mischief, but nothing that is sustained or focused enough to recommend the application of military force. In all, extremist Islamist terrorism claims some 200 to 400 lives yearly worldwide outside of war zones, about the same as the number of people who drown in bathtubs in the United States.21

It seems increasingly likely that the reaction to the terrorism attacks of September 11, 2001, was massively disproportionate to the real threat al-Qaeda has ever actually presented. An analogy might illustrate. In November 1963, a miserable, ridiculous little man with grandiose visions of his own importance, managed, heavily because of luck, to murder the President of the United States. Stunned by the event, many have maintained that such a monumental event could not be caused by such a trivial man - the proportions seemed all out of whack. In September 2001, a miserable, ridiculous, tiny group of men - a fringe group of a fringe group - with grandiose visions of its own importance managed, heavily because of luck, to pull off by far the most destructive terrorist act in history. As with Oswald, there has been a general reluctance to maintain that such a monumental event could have been pulled off by a trivial group, and there has consequently been a massive tendency to inflate the group's importance and effectiveness.22

At the preposterous extreme, the remnants of the tiny group have even been held to present a threat that is "existential." Rare indeed have been such observations as those from Glenn Carle, a 23-year veteran of the Central Intelligence Agency, where he was deputy national intelligence officer for transnational threats: "We must not take fright at the specter our leaders have exaggerated. In fact, we must see jihadists for the small, lethal, disjointed and miserable opponents that they are." Al-Qaeda "has only a handful of individuals capable of planning, organizing and leading a terrorist organization," and although it has threatened attacks, "its capabilities are far inferior to its desires."23

The main, and essentially only, military efforts to deal with terrorism were the ventures in Iraq and Afghanistan, and both of these were quite disproportionate to the supposed danger presented. More to the point for present purposes, however, the military approach has been substantially discredited by the costly and extended wars that evolved from American intervention. That is, to the degree that terrorism requires a response, it is one that calls for policing and intelligence work and perhaps for occasional focused strikes conducted by small units far more than it calls for large military operations.24

Policing the "global commons"

Particularly in an age of globalization and expanding world trade, many, especially in the Navy, argue that a strong military force is needed to police what is portentously labeled the "global commons." However, there seems to be no credible consequential threat, beyond those to worldwide shipping. There have been a few attacks by pirates off Somalia, exacting costs in the hundreds of millions of dollars a year from a multi-billion dollar industry which, surely, has the capacity to defend itself from such nuisances - perhaps by the application on decks of broken glass, a severe complication for barefoot predators. In the unlikely event that the problem should become severe, it would not need forces-in-being; it could be dealt with by newly formulated forces designed for the specific purpose.

Non-issues

In addition to these considerations, conceivablists have variously and imaginatively come up with a string of other potential problems that, in my view, justify little concern or, as Brodie would put it, even "a second thought." And, in particular, they scarcely justify massive expenditures to keep a military force-in-being.

There is, for example, great concern about an impending invasion by cybergeeks. For the most part, however, such ventures are essentially forms of crime or vandalism, and do not require military preparations.

The country's dependence on oil imports from the Middle East has been an issue for the better part of a half-century now. The rhetoric and political posturing surrounding it will likely continue for the rest of eternity, barring a large technological breakthrough such as fusion power. However, unless the country plans to invade other countries in order to seize their oil, the need for a military force-in-being to deal with this problem is far from obvious. Any oil disruptions are likely to be handled by the market: if supply diminishes, price increases, and people buy less. Not much fun, but much more likely than imperial invasion, especially after Iraq.

The Palestine/Israel dispute may or may not be resolved by the end of the millennium, but the value of maintaining large American military forces seems to be irrelevant to that resolution. Americans might eventually be part of a force to help police a peace settlement, but, if so, they can be recruited if the need ever becomes evident.

Many people are greatly concerned about the potential for, and the consequences of, global warming. Yet, the need to maintain a military force to deal with this problem is scarcely evident, although the shut-down of all military vehicles on land, in the air, and on the sea might reduce warming vapors somewhat.

The country certainly faces major economic problems - as does the world - but the military is of little importance here, though large cuts in military budgets would temper the budget problem some.

There are many other issues that are frequently, if questionably, promoted as national security threats - AIDS in Africa, for example, or "complexity." The value of military forcesin- being scarcely seems relevant to any of these.

Hedges

On the chance that there is some occasional misjudgment in the screedery arrayed above, it may be sensible to judiciously keep some military on line and viable to cover such "conceivable" contingencies that might actually come into being and require a military response. There is justifiable concern about defending friends and allies. But Europe scarcely faces threats, while Taiwan and South Korea seem largely capable of taking care of themselves, as does Israel which is mainly concerned with threats that are sub-state anyway.

Accordingly, the maintenance of some small rapid-response forces and of a small number of nuclear weapons may be prudent, and the ability rebuild should be maintained. It seems to me, however, that to spend half a trillion dollars yearly to cover unlikely fantasies borders on - indeed, considerably o'ersteps - the profligacy line.

My observations are neither pacifistic nor isolationist. The argument is that large military forces are not needed in the current or likely future threat environment, not that they are inherently evil or that there are no conditions under which they should be instituted or deployed. In addition, there is no suggestion that the United States should withdraw from being a major and important world citizen. The generally desirable processes of increasing economic inter-connectivity and of globalization make that essentially impossible anyway.

There would of course be risk in very substantially reducing the military, but there is risk as well in keeping it going in its current massiveness. Any unforeseen dangers in cuts must be balanced against the sizable gains made possible by forgoing the substantial financial outlay required to service conceivablist, or worst-case fantasy, contingencies. After all, had the country (like Costa Rica) had no military in 1965, it could not have gone into the Vietnam fiasco and the lives of 55,000 mostly young Americans would not have been taken from them. Had it had no military in 2003, it would never have ventured into the Iraq fiasco and several thousand Americans (and a hundred thousand Iraqis) would still be alive. This grim consideration should be brought up whenever conceivablists fantasize.

Notes

1 Benjamin H. Friedman, "The Terrible 'Ifs'," Regulation, Winter 2008: 35.

2 Bernard Brodie, "The Development of Nuclear Strategy," International Security, Spring 1978: 68, 83.

3 On this approach, see also Christopher J. Fettweis, Dangerous Times? The International Politics of Great Power Peace (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2010).

4 For an early examination of this proposition, see John Mueller, Retreat from Doomsday: The Obsolescence of Major War (New York: Free Press, 1989; reprinted and updated edition, edupublisher.com, 2009). See also Fettweis, Dangerous Times.

5 Paul Schroeder, "Does Murphy's Law Apply to History?" Wilson Quarterly, New Year's 1985: 88. The previous record, he notes, was chalked up during the period from the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815 to the effective beginning of the Crimean War in 1854. The period between the conclusion of the Franco-Prussian War in 1871 and the outbreak of World War I in 1914 - marred by a major war in Asia between Russia and Japan in 1904 - was an even longer era of peace among major European countries. That record was broken on November 8, 1988. On some of these issues, see also Evan Luard, War in International Society (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986), 395-99; and James J. Sheehan, Where Have All the Soldiers Gone? The Transformation of Modern Europe (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2008).

6 Bradford de Long, "Let Us Give Thanks (Wacht am Rhein Department), November 12, 2004, www.j-bradford-delong.net/movable_type/2004-2_arcives/000536.html.

7 (New York: Norton, 1966), 1145.

8 Quoted, Francis Anthony Boyle, World Politics and International Law (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1985), 73.

9 (New York: Macmillan, 1979).

10 George Friedman and Meredith LeBard, The Coming War with Japan (New York: St Martin's, 1991). On this issue, see also John Mueller, Overblown (New York: Free Press, 2006), 109-111.

11 The Rise of the Trading State: Conquest and Commerce in the Modern World (New York: Basic Books, 1986).

12 Susan L. Shirk, China: Fragile Superpower (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 255, 261.

13 Christine Gray, "From Unity to Polarization: International Law and the Use of Force against Iraq," European Journal of International Law 13(1) 2002: 3-7. See also John Mueller, The Remnants of War (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010).

14 John Mueller, War and Ideas: Selected Essays (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), 177.

15 Mueller, War and Ideas, 217-19; John Mueller, "The Iraq Syndrome Revisited: U.S. Intervention, From Kosovo to Libya," foreignaffairs.com, March 28, 2011.

16 As suggested, for example, long ago in Brian Urquhart, "For a UN Volunteer Military Force," New York Review of Books, June 10, 1993: 3-4.

17 On the other hand, there seems to have been considerable success in peacekeeping (as opposed to peace-making). Thus, people in Africa and elsewhere seem to have become fed up with the civil warfare they have suffered in recent decades in which small numbers of thugs, often drunken or drugged, have been able to pulverize effective society through their predatory criminal antics, sometimes sustaining them for decades. In consequence of this disgust, there has been a strong willingness to accept and make effective use of outside aid and to establish effective (if hardly perfect) governments, a process that Virginia Page Fortna, among others, has interestingly explored: Does Peacekeeping Work? Shaping Belligerents' Choices After Civil Wars (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008).

18 On this issue, see John Mueller, "The Perfect Enemy: Assessing the Gulf War," Security Studies, Autumn 1995: 77-117.

19 John Mueller, Atomic Obsession: Nuclear Alarmism from Hiroshima to Al-Qaeda (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), chs. 7-8.

20 Greg Miller, "Bin Laden Documents Reveal Strain, Struggle in al-Qaida," Washington Post, July 1, 2011.

21 For an extended discussion, see John Mueller and Mark G. Stewart, Terror, Security, and Money: Balancing the Risks, Costs, and Benefits of Homeland Security (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), ch. 2.

22 For rare, perhaps unique, questionings of this tendency in the early years after 9/11, see John Mueller, "Harbinger or Aberration?" National Interest, Fall 2002: 45-50; and Russell Seitz, "Weaker Than We Think," American Conservative, December 6, 2004. See also Fawaz Gerges, The Far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

23 Glenn L. Carle, "Overstating Our Fears," Washington Post, July 13, 2008. See also Fawaz Gerges, The Rise and Fall of Al-Qaeda (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

24 President Barack Obama, in agreement with many, urged in a speech on April 11, 2010, that "the single biggest threat to U.S. security, both short term, medium term and long term, would be the possibility of a terrorist organization obtaining a nuclear weapon." This concern may well be overwrought: see Mueller, Atomic Obsession, chs. 12-15. However, insofar as it is valid, efforts to deal with it mainly require policing and intelligence, as well as international

cooperation on locking up and cataloging fissile material and on sting operations to disrupt illicit nuclear markets.