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Iraq, Grand Strategy, and the Lessons of Military History

**2004 S.T. Lee Lecture
on Military History**

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**Final Draft
October 19 2004**

One way to learn military history is to live it. For many reasons, this is not the best way, either in terms of objectivity or in terms of the ability to examine history in the light of a full knowledge of the facts. Nevertheless, I am struck – as I begin this speech – by the fact that I first came into the national security business in the early 1960s, when it was a group of what might be called “neoliberals” that fatally misinterpreted the grand strategic realities that shaped the course of the war in Vietnam.

In the decades that have followed, I have been directly or indirectly involved in a long series of other wars and military actions. One was a grand strategic success of monumental proportions. Whatever our problems in assessing the situation at the end of World War II, and in our original plans for conflict termination in Germany and Japan, we evolved a grand strategy by the mid-1950s that mixed deterrence, containment, negotiation, alliances, and limited military action into an overall structure that helped force the peaceful collapse of the Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact.

I was also, however, involved in a wide range of conflicts where our grand strategy was far less successful. These conflicts included limited US interventions in Angola, in the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan; in Lebanon in 1982; in the “tanker war” that was part of the Iran-Iraq War; in El Salvador; in Somalia; and in Bosnia and Kosovo.

They involved the study of the US role in three major regional conflicts other than Vietnam: the Gulf War in 1990, the Afghan conflict in 2001, and now the Coalition invasion of Iraq. At the same time, I became involved in official and unofficial efforts to study the lessons of other conflicts like the October War, the Iran-Iraq War, the Falklands Conflict, and Israel’s invasion of Lebanon.

At no point did I ever set out to be a military historian, and if I have written military history, it has been as a means to an end. For me, military history has always been a tool to use in understanding the operational lessons of war, to examine tactics and technology, and to make policy recommendations. It has also been a means of constantly reminding myself of how often nations win battles and the combat phases of wars, without achieving their grand strategic objectives or winning the peace.

Perhaps this is why, as I study the course of or current wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, I have the odd feeling that I have lived military history to the point where I have come full circle. I now find myself studying the mistakes of a group of “neoconservatives” in Iraq, rather than “neoliberals” in Vietnam. Time and again, I am struck by the ways in which our approach to the war in Iraq repeats the strategic, tactical, and intelligence mistakes of Vietnam -- and indeed-- most of the other wars that I have lived through.

There are many reasons for this feeling. I recognize tactical mistakes, failures in human intelligence, ways of underestimating the enemy, exaggeration of the merits of technology over human factors, and failures to integrate civil and military operations. I recognize simple errors like rotating troops too quickly and the resulting lack of continuity in leadership and area expertise.

However, the truly serious problems I find to be all too familiar are the problems in grand strategy. They are problems in the strategic assessment of the need for conflict and of its potential political and diplomatic impacts. They are problems in planning and executing conflict termination, and in using stability operations and nation building to shape the desired grand strategic outcome. They are not failures born out of the failure to learn from the history of the fighting, but rather born out of the repeated failure to effectively make war an extension of diplomacy and politics by other means.

As Alfred Thayer Mahan put it in one of his writings, “...in a building... however fair and beautiful the superstructure, the end result is radically marred and imperfect if the foundation be insecure. So, if the strategy be wrong, the skill of the general, the valor of the soldier, the brilliancy of the victory, however, otherwise decisive, fail of their effect.”ⁱ

The Limits of Limited Military History

There are many reasons for our failures in Iraq and Vietnam, but the one I would like to focus on tonight is the way that we as a culture tend to think about military history. Anyone who has ever visited a military bookshop, the military section of a major bookstore, or the military history sections of the Internet, is all too familiar with how much of military history focuses on the “superstructure” of war and not on the “foundation.”

Professional historians may look more deeply, but the popular culture of military history focuses on fighting and battles, human interactions of combat, and the paraphernalia of war. It is amazing how many illustrated books have been written on military uniforms alone, and some have even been written simply on their buttons. The literature of military history is filled with specialized volumes on subjects like tanks, ships, swords and armor, or on individual combat elements like the history of Napoleonic riflemen.

At a somewhat broader level, book after book has been written on virtually all of the world's major military battles, and on virtually every aspect of tactics and strategy. Yet, most of these books fail to seriously examine grand strategy before, during, or after the fighting.

When military history does address entire wars, the normal pattern is to have an introductory chapter setting the stage for the battles to come, to write virtually the entire book about the course of the fighting, and to end with a chapter on the final battle that touches briefly on the peace agreement or immediate aftermath. Even the official histories of grand strategy in World War I and World War II tend to focus on the history of civil-military decision-making and see the end goal of war as the defeat of the enemy

There are notable exceptions – and some as old as Herodotus and Thucydides -- but far too often military history is decoupled from a detailed analysis of why wars occurred, from the analysis of grand strategic perceptions of the time, and from the political and grand strategic impact of military action. As Sir Basil Liddell Hart pointed out during World War II, “The discovery of uncomfortable facts has never been encouraged in armies, who treat the history as a sentimental treasure, rather than a field of scientific research.”ⁱⁱ

Some of the best history that *does* deal with the key issues in grand strategy is decoupled from military history. It either deals separately with the prelude to war or with its aftermath, and treats such history as separate from military history per se. There have been brilliant histories of the forces that have driven nations and peoples to war, and of the fallacies and errors in leadership that led to combat, but few such histories have followed through to analyze how these forces came to shape the details of the war that followed.

Similarly, there have been outstanding histories of the successes or failures of various “peaces,” but most are decoupled from the perceptions of decision makers and military planners in going to war, and from the analysis of how these perceptions changed with the course of battles. The fact that diplomacy and politics often become the captives of such battles, and that the need to shape an eventual peace becomes an extension of war by other means is not necessarily lost, but it is rarely given a central focus.

If one looks at the broader canvas of the military history of other nations and civilizations, it is also all too clear that that the grand strategic goals of any given side in going to war have normally been based on a massive miscalculation of what will happen once war begins. There is a consistent failure to understand how the grand strategy of the war changes during the conflict and becomes dictated by the course of the fighting and the conditions of the war. Most of all, history shows how often wars do not end with the last major battle, how rarely they end with well-planned conflict termination, and how many times “peace” actually consists of years of political struggle, active insurgency, or becomes the prelude to another conflict.

It is all very well to say that if we forget the past, we are condemned to repeat it. The problem, however, is rarely that we actually forget history. It is rather that we repeat mistakes in choosing the particular version of the past that we decide to remember. In the case of military history, we select out only part of what actually happened and often fail to examine – or learn from – the part that matters most.

Rethinking the History of Our Own Wars

Let me give you a tangible example. No war so dominates American military history as the Civil War. I suspect that more popular histories have been written about this conflict than about all of the other wars in American history combined. It takes a dedicated historian, however, to go beyond the myths and try to figure out what the major figures on each side actually believed would happen as they moved towards the nation’s bloodiest conflict.

There are many good histories of what may have been the underlying causes of the Civil War, but few address what decision makers thought – or did not think -- about their ultimate objective as they mobilized for war, beyond talking in broad terms about states’

rights and the preservation of the Union. One sometimes has the impression that their vision of grand strategy at the start of the war consisted of trying to win the first major battle and seeing what happened next, and strategic assessment consisted of a belief in quick and decisive victory.

What is particularly striking, at a time when the United States has become so involved in stability operations, armed nation building, and peace making, however, is how many histories of the Civil War end at Appomattox and the assassination of Lincoln. The final chapters of such histories of the Civil War are often an elegiac –often-mythic -- mixture of civility and tragedy. Far too often, the implication is that a true peace was achieved in 1865, the Union was preserved, “Blue” and “Grey” became brothers, and the problem of slavery was solved.

Iraq and Afghanistan, however, are only the latest reminders of the fact that peace is a relative term, and that it is the political struggle or “war after the war,” that often dictates the grand strategic outcome of a conflict. A true history of the Civil War cannot end on such a mythic note.

A real history of the Civil War would have to cover the entire period from at least 1860 to 1877, and much of it would be anything but mythic and noble in character. The fact is that Appomattox was followed by eleven years of reconstruction from 1866 to 1877. The conflict did not terminate on the terms Grant offered and Lee agreed to, or those that Lincoln would have preferred. The grand strategic impact of the Civil War was shaped by corruption and revenge, armed occupation, attempts at forced political change, and often economic oppression.

Moreover, in many ways the South reversed the outcome of both the war and the “war after the war.” Slavery may have ended, but the withdrawal of Union troops from the south, following the election of Rutherford B. Hayes in 1877, scarcely created a peace that any “Afro-American” is likely to describe as a grand strategic victory.

In fact, eleven years of stability operations and armed nation building in our own country -- and carried out on the basis of the shared values within our own culture -- did not succeed. Instead, they ended in a failure that lasted for near a century after Lee surrendered to Grant.

We are equally prone to ignore another basic aspect of our military history – although one whose course is all too clear from the work of historians who analyze the history of Native Americans. Why for example, does our military history not examine the pattern of the wars against Native Americans from Colonial times to the final defeats of the Apache and Nez Pierce as one continuing and evolving conflict?

Seen from a grand strategic perspective, a consistent pattern of military action directed towards armed nation building, and what we now call stability operations, extended for well over two centuries. It steadily and repetitively changed the face of America. We occupied our own country long before we occupied Germany, Japan, or Iraq.

There are many obvious reasons why these grand strategic aspects of the struggle against Native Americans are ones that most of us choose to romanticize or to forget. The fact is, however, that they happened. Moreover, regardless of what we sometimes said about the fairness of our motives and our desire for peace, our actual actions shaped the outcome in grand strategic terms with remarkable consistency. The cost of using force to impose our values on other cultures to those cultures is also all too clear.

Anyone who has read most popular military histories of the American Revolution, the War of 1812, World War I, and World War II will have seen somewhat similar patterns in the failure to address the ways in which each side of the conflicts we became involved in analyzed the strategic situation in going to war, planned or did not plan for conflict termination, and played out the grand strategic aftermath of the conflict.

Moreover, from roughly our failure to seize Canada in the War of 1812 to our involvement in World War I, we really did not need a grand strategy. We simply kept moving West on a target of opportunity basis. Two of our greatest advances came largely as peaceful targets of opportunity: The Louisiana Purchase and Seward's purchase of Alaska.

Even at a time of "manifest destiny," we dithered over making Texas a state for domestic political reasons and went to war with Mexico with so little direction from Washington that Winfield Scott essentially improvised the strategy for the war in the field. We advanced south, but we then grabbed West on a target of opportunity basis. No one can

credibly accuse us of having bother with grand strategy in going to war with Spain, successful as our tactics and strategy may have been.

Our grand strategy in World War I may have had the best of intentions, but the end result compounded the European blunders that led to World War II. It is a tribute to President Franklin Delano Roosevelt that our President looked beyond the bitter aftermath of World War I and isolationism, and prepared for the Axis threat. It is also a reality that he acted largely in spite of Congress and popular opinion.

I do not mean in making these points to try to create direct analogies between these very different wars and times, and our own current military challenges. We have also been remarkably successful in using our power and geographic position, in the more conventional aspects of strategy and tactics, and in improvising and adapting to events. Having an overt, well-defined grand strategy is desirable, but much of American military history shows that it is not necessary.

I do, however, suggest that we need to show a little more humility and introspection in the way we think about military history. We also need to be more careful about how we think about the complexities and uncertainties in using force, and the unpredictable nature of the ultimate outcome.

The Lessons of Living with Military History

The costs of not making the right grand strategic judgments before, during, and after the fighting are all too clear in the military history that I have lived through. The first actual war that I lived through with any serious consciousness of events was the Korean conflict more than half a century ago. America's miscalculations in grand strategy, and a failed strategic assessment, helped trigger that conflict, and then helped trigger Chinese intervention. Conflict termination had to be improvised as a ceasefire based largely on mutual exhaustion.

Today, we still see two Koreas postured for war, and one that has acquired chemical and nuclear weapons. The "war after the war" in Korea -- the strategic competition and continuing military build-up on both sides -- has now lasted close to 10 times as long as the fighting.

Our failures in grand strategy, in our strategic assessment of Vietnam, and in shaping our proposals for the termination of that conflict, have ultimately had a relatively happy ending. The only dominoes that ever fell, however, were Cambodia and Laos – two nations we dragged into the war. Both nations are still paying for the result.

The cost in American and Vietnamese lives, and the resulting divisions in our society, are still bitterly affecting the present Presidential campaign. The impact of Vietnam also, at least to some extent, helps explain why the US military was so reluctant to face the need to take on the burden of stability operations in Iraq and so unready for many aspects of the counterinsurgency it now has to fight. Denial, and a desire to avoid, are not the same as planning and preparation.

In another war, it was the same Republican “neorealists” that finally withdrew from Vietnam that almost immediately went on to badly misread the situation in Angola and the dangers and costs of fighting a proxy war in that country. The US provoked a Soviet and Cuban response it could not counter and which led to America’s proxies being defeated in 1976. Some 15 years of bitter civil war followed, and in the process, our initial “Marxist” enemy became our de facto ally.

The strange American grand strategic illusion that the world wants to converge around our culture and political objectives was at least partly responsible for our inability to understand the dynamics of Lebanon when we intervened in 1982. We had no real grand strategy, our strategic assessments were wrong, and we treated an ongoing civil war as if it were over.

We won the “tanker war” against Iran in 1987-1988, having been maneuvered into it by Kuwait. We then failed to see that Saddam Hussein was not going to become a pragmatist and moderate in our terms, and the new strategic risks that Iran’s defeat posed to Kuwait and the entire region.

Our grand strategy for the Gulf War against Iraq in 1990 and 1991 did not really look beyond the liberation of Kuwait. Our strategic assessments in going to war strongly exaggerated Iraq’s conventional capabilities and underestimated its weapons of mass destruction. In retrospect, we did not suffer militarily by exaggerating the conventional risks and the necessary size of the Coalition forces.

If we have ever learned the lesson that all battles must end, however, it did not lead us to formulate any coherent plan for conflict termination in the Gulf War. In fact, we still do not have or a good, detailed official history of our failure to create such a plan. If anything, the extent to which we romanticized the scale of our military victory in the Gulf War, and failed to examine our reasons for halting at the Iraqi border, was one reason that “neoconservatives” and many others came to feel that launching the Iraq War would have such an easy aftermath.

Even today, it is difficult to understand how we blundered from a humanitarian mission in Somalia into a war against its tribal and political culture, and did so without understanding its recent history, and without a clear grand strategy or realistic strategic assessment. Moreover, we do not have a plan for conflict termination and stability that can be described as anything other than a “triumph of hope over experience.”

Some excellent books have been written on those failures in Somalia, but we have again tended to glorify the fighting and ignore the reasons why we made mistakes at the grand strategic level.

As someone who heard briefing after briefing justifying our actions at the time, I also have to note that there is also a crowning opportunity for the first historian who can collect all of the strategic assessments the US government issued regarding Somalia up to the moment that the hunt for Mohamed Farah Aidid ended in a de facto US defeat in October 1993, and who can then contrast the version of Somalia’s history presented to US policymakers and the Congress at the time with its actual history and with the facts that had previously developed on the ground.

We have reason to be proud of our role in Bosnia and Kosovo, but not of our original grand strategies, or our strategic assessments before we became engaged in the use of force in each country. In fact, there is a good thesis to be written on which was most decoupled from reality, the liberal grand strategic goals set forth in the Dayton Accords or the “neoconservative” goals set forth for Iraq.

Our grand strategy in Kosovo essentially moved from reliance on threats to escalating with airpower until we won. Our conflict termination strategy was inchoate, and our stability operations are still in progress half a decade after our last combat sortie. It is also

interesting to speculate whether Russian action at the end of the fighting could have had a decisive disruptive impact if Russia had been strong enough to press the issue.

If we look at our intervention in Afghanistan following 9/11, we need to remember that this intervention followed three decades of failure to properly assess the growing risks posed by Islamic extremism. The often brilliant US mix of tactics and technology that drove the Taliban from power were not coupled to any clear grand strategy for conflict termination, stability operations, or for dealing with the inevitable mutation and evolution of Al Qaeda. In spite of the lessons of the Balkans, we still did not have a plan for nation building and we did not secure the entire country during the power vacuum immediately following the fall of the Taliban.

In fact, we were so isolated from the realities of nation building in Afghanistan that a whole military literature briefly flourished about how we could use airpower and Special Forces, and a token military presence on the ground, to quickly and easily defeat enemies in asymmetric wars. For those who have already forgotten, this was one of the arguments some “neoconservatives” raised in arguing that US intervention in Iraq would be a “cakewalk.” Yet, we not only are still fighting the Taliban and Al Qaeda in Afghanistan with some 18,000 American troops, we still have no clear plan to deal with Afghanistan’s economy that goes beyond a drug economy, and the recent election is no proof that our plans for creating a political system that moves beyond regional factions and warlords will establish security or create a lasting form of government.

The Case of Iraq

To turn to the present war, in Iraq, it is all too easy to blame America’s “neoconservatives” for what is happening in Iraq, and there is much to blame them for. Their grand strategy for transforming Iraq and the Middle East was at best ridiculous. Their strategic assessment of Iraq was wrong in far more important ways than their assessment of the potential threat posed by Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction.

They were fundamentally wrong about how the Iraqi people would view the US invasion. They were equally wrong about the problems of governance, and in underestimating the difficulties in creating a new government that was legitimate in Iraqi eyes. They misjudged the relevance and influence of Iraqi exiles. They misjudged the scale of Iraq’s

economic, ethnic, and demographic problems. They failed to see the need for serious stability operations and nation building; they did not see the risk of insurgency; and they assumed that we were so right that our allies and the world would soon be forced to follow our lead.

As a result, they did not foresee the impact of the war on our overall structure of alliances and world opinion. They did not foresee its impact on the Middle East and the Islamic world, or the decline in support for the war on terrorism. They fundamentally misread the linkages between the invasion of Iraq, the Arab-Israel conflict, and the fighting in Afghanistan. They saw military action by the Department of Defense as a workable substitute for effective coordination and action by all the agencies of government.

There was no real grand strategy beyond Saddam's fall, and their strategic assessments were horribly slow to improve. "Neoconservatives" wasted a year after our apparent military victory, living in a state of ideological denial. We occupied Iraq as proconsuls, rather than rushing to create a legitimate government. We delayed in creating effective Iraqi military and security forces. Our aid efforts faltered in a mix of uncoordinated, ideologically-driven plans to make the Iraqi economy "American," and bureaucratic fumbling.

What realism there is in our present approach to the "war after the war" in Iraq has been thrust upon "neoconservatives" after the fact. To the extent we may be evolving a workable approach to a grand strategy, that evolution has been shaped largely by the people that "neoconservatives" chose to ignore in going to war in the first place. The adaptation to the political and military facts in Iraq has come from military, State Department and intelligence professionals

Moreover, we have also seen that our grand strategy for force transformation was flawed and has also had to changed in ways that go far beyond the fighting in Iraq. We have shifted from a technology-driven version of a "revolution in military affairs" and "netcentric warfare," to a human factors-driven counterinsurgency campaign dominated by boots on the ground, old technologies, area expertise, and asymmetric warfare. In forgetting the full range of grand strategic lessons from recent wars, we also failed to take account of lessons we should have used in shaping many aspects of our military future.

Before we go too far in blaming those responsible for today's mistakes, however, it is important that we remember that much of our history is one of oversimplifying grand strategy and war. It is a history of failing to see the complexities and risks involved into going into combat. It is a failure to educate ourselves to honestly address the problems of conflict termination and in the need to make the proper efforts to shape a meaningful peace before, during, and after the fighting. It is also, to some extent, a failure to learn from history because historians fail to give all of military history the right perspective and priorities.

Looking Beyond Iraq

If we look beyond the immediate pressure of events in Iraq, we find ourselves struggling to use history to try to understand a broad ideological and cultural crisis that has bred a level of violent Islamic extremism that threatens our country, our Western allies, and above all, every moderate and secular regime in the Islamic world. We still talk about a narrow war on terrorism, and we are only beginning to realize the religious, cultural, political, economic, and demographic dimensions of the struggle we actually face.

Our strategic assessments often ignore the culture and history of the region and sometimes border on xenophobia. We find it difficult to face the sheer complexity of the forces at work, and history's warning that such struggles generally play out over a period of decades, and will last long after today's terrorist and extremist movements are virtually forgotten.

Our grand strategy for the global war on terrorism, to the extent we have one, seems to consist of hoping that we can use force or the threat of force to make the Greater Middle East democratic on our terms, and that all good things will follow. We focus on "democratization," which is only one political dimension of the broader struggle. Even then, we seem to have forgotten the history of *revolution*, and the need for stable political parties with meaningful secular goals, and for a rule of law and political checks and balances. We ignore the need to encourage a form of *evolution* that mixes patient political reform with economic, demographic, and cultural change.

We do not seem willing to face the fact that the history of the Arab-Israeli conflict interacts on an ongoing basis with the war on terrorism, or the extent to which our grand

strategic failures in Iraq have so far aided the broader causes of Islamic extremism and angered the Arab and Islamic worlds. Ironically, American conservatives, moderates, and liberals all seem united in making the same grand strategic mistakes.

The Military History We Should Learn From

Let me conclude by making one thing clear. The last thing I am arguing on the basis of these lessons is that military history teaches us that the United States can turn away from the world, that it should not play the role of a great power, or that Americans can live in a world where they do not have to use military force. Nothing about today's world convinces me for a moment that any form of neo-isolationism is anything other than a recipe for grand strategic disaster. Our problem in using military history is not that it teaches us to not engage, but rather how to use military history to teach us to engage more wisely.

I also want to acknowledge the fact that some historians have written immensely insightful histories of the failures of nations in going to war, and of the failures of their efforts in conflict termination and shaping the peace. My concern is rather with popular military history, and with how most Americans including most policymakers and military planners perceive it.

We need to improve the linkages that both historians and the users of history make between grand strategy; the history of battles; and the history of conflict termination, nation building, and stability operations. These linkages are simply too weak, and the end result is that politicians, policymakers, military planners, and intelligence analysts are not properly educated to deal with the broader realities of war and the use of military forces.

To be specific, I believe that we need to do a far better job of shaping military history in several areas. We need to

- Redefine the history of war to avoid separating the history of battle from the history of preparation for war.
- Accept the sheer complexity and uncertainty of history. Address the full menu of factors that shape the nature and outcome of war in grand strategic terms, the

impacts of the laws of unintended consequences, and the time and costs of both war and its aftermath.

- Describe the history of grand strategy, or the lack of it, from the first serious planning for war through conflict termination, and during the many years that often follow during the stability or nation building phases.
- Analyze the history of strategic assessment before, during, and after the fighting. Show how often nations and policymakers have failed to properly assesses the broad strategic realities shaping the outcome of a conflict.
- Look beyond battles and fighting and analyze how politics, governance, economies, and perceptions change with war.
- Look in depth at how nations did or did not plan for an effective nation building or stability efforts, and at how their plans did or did not succeed in shaping the grand strategic outcome.
- Make it clear that the planning and execution of conflict termination, or failure to manage conflict termination, are often the most critical single moments in military history.
- Examine how difficult it is to use war or its aftermath to reshape a given nation or culture. Avoid thinking of war in terms of some strange form of determinism in which peace means creating mirror images of the United States.
- Above all, avoid confusing the end of major battles or the achievement of some kind of ceasefire or treaty, with shaping a successful grand strategic outcome. A given war ends only when this outcome ceases to be the dominant factor shaping behavior, not with the end of the fighting.

As a writer and a military analyst, I understand all too well that it is far easier to research and write military history in narrow terms. This is also the kind of military history that has popular acceptance that sells, and is still taught in many military academies and war colleges.

It also, however, is the kind of military history that fails to teach us many of the lessons we need to learn. Clausewitz saw these risks all too clearly in his writing in On the Principles of War. He noted that what he called “friction” not only often dominated the course of battles, but the ability to use military means to achieve political ends. In one passage of his book, he describes the purpose of military history as follows: “Only the study of military history is capable of giving those with no experience of their own a clear picture of the friction of the whole machine.”ⁱⁱⁱ

David Hart Mahan, writing during the course of the Civil War noted that, “It is in military history that we are to look for the source of all military science. In it we shall find the exemplifications of failure and success by which alone the truth and value of the rules of strategy can be tested.”^{iv}

Far more bluntly, Major General F. C. Fuller--perhaps the most realistic thinker about modern armored warfare in the period before World War II--made the point that, “Unless history can teach us how to think about the future, the history of war is nothing but a bloody romance.”^v

This point takes on special meaning today. No one can predict the future, but some aspects of the wars to come seem all too clear. We already live in an era of asymmetric wars where the ability to use military forces to shape politics, ideology, peacemaking, stability operations, and nation building have at least as much importance as the ability to use such forces to defeat conventional armies.

We are simultaneously involved in four current struggles. We are directly involved in the Iraq War and the Afghan War. The Arab and Islamic worlds see us as a cobelligerent with Israel in the Israeli and Palestinian conflict. Finally, we are involved in a struggle with Islamic extremists and terrorists of which Al Qaeda is only one initial element.

We cannot predict the outcome or length of any of these four struggles. We have only begun to think about some form of grand strategy to tie them together into some kind of concerted approach to the use of force. We have also learned that our military strength cannot possibly be a substitute for political alliances in shaping a successful outcome in a mix of struggles this complex.

At least one struggle – the war on terrorism – is almost certain to be generational and be driven by religious, ideological, cultural, demographic, and economic pressures we have only begun to understand and address. We face deep further uncertainties in the form of proliferation, the risk that the Cold War in Korea will suddenly become a hot one, and in reaching a stable strategic relationship with China – which may well be an emerging superpower.

We need to re-examine military history in ways that help us understand a world where there is no end of history, no sudden convergence in the world around one set of values or political system, and no form of “globalism” where economics and civil society will unite the world. If anything, the emerging challenges we face are far more diverse and complex than during the Cold War with the former Soviet Union, and far less tied to the cultures and values we share with other Western nations. We need the right kind of military history. We need reminders that hubris is followed by nemesis. We need to remember the right aspects of the past and we need to learn from them to shape the right future.

ⁱ Rear Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan, Naval Administration and Warfare, 1908.

ⁱⁱ Captain Sir Basil Liddell Hart, Thoughts on War 1944.

ⁱⁱⁱ Major General Carl von Clausewitz, Principles of War, 1812.

^{iv} Dennis Hart Mahan, Advance Guard, Outpost and Detachment Service of Troops, with the Essential Principles of Tactics and Strategy, 1864

^v Major General F. C. Fuller, The Foundation of the Study of War, 1926