

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

**WINNING BATTLES — LOSING WARS:  
A DISTURBING TREND IN AMERICAN WARFARE**

by

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## ABSTRACT

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Since winning World War II, and despite decades of U.S. hegemony, we must acknowledge an ironic and disturbing trend: America is winning battles, but losing wars. While these strategic losses may be the collective fault of many, our oath as U.S. military officers requires us to act boldly to reverse this trend. If we do not act, America may lose again or forfeit her power to influence global affairs and deter potential enemies. This strategic research paper analyzes the disturbing trend in our conduct of warfare since 1945, explores its causes, and endeavors to answer two critical questions: Why are we losing wars? And, how can we reverse this trend? Both the reasons for our losses and potential solutions should emerge during the course of this analysis. Finally, to enable these solutions, we must require America's strategic leaders to renew their oaths and courageously reclaim their proper place in shaping America's strategic discourse. Thus, we can return victory as America's standard and constant in war.



## WINNING BATTLES — LOSING WARS: A DISTURBING TREND IN AMERICAN WARFARE

War is a matter of vital importance to the State; the province of life or death; the road to survival or ruin. It is mandatory that it be thoroughly studied.<sup>1</sup>

—Sun Tzu

Since winning World War II, and despite decades of U.S. hegemony, we must acknowledge an ironic and disturbing trend: America is winning battles, but losing wars. While these strategic losses may be the collective fault of many, our oath as U.S. military officers requires us to act boldly to reverse this trend. If we do not act, America may lose again or forfeit her power to influence global affairs and deter potential enemies. This strategic research paper analyzes the disturbing trend in our conduct of warfare since 1945, explores its causes, and endeavors to answer two critical questions: Why are we losing wars? And, how can we reverse this trend? Both the reasons for our losses and potential solutions should emerge during the course of this analysis. Finally, to enable these solutions we must require America's strategic leaders to renew their oaths and courageously reclaim their proper place in shaping America's strategic discourse. Thus, we can return victory as America's standard and constant in war.

Reflecting on our recent wars from the strategic perspective offered during instruction at the U.S. Army War College, one can identify several reasons for our losses. And, as we will identify in the conclusion, a consistent theme developed as research progressed on this project. For decades, our nation's leaders have not specified victory through a well-defined end state as our supreme objective in every conflict; this was especially true in Korea and Vietnam. We have also failed to communicate the intent of our military operations (purpose, method, and end state) to our own nation. This has weakened public support and has made it difficult to engage and coordinate the elements of power within our government. We can also place significant blame directly on the American Congress. Far from being the noble and patriotic body our forefathers envisioned, they have avoided declaring war and have instead engaged in partisan politics and infighting, thereby reducing the legitimacy of our efforts and strengthening the ideology and determination of our enemies. Our most senior military officers, including the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), are not without fault. Perhaps in response to pressure from politicians and political appointees, they have increasingly focused on budgetary concerns and publishing enormous libraries of doctrine and vision statements rather than acting as our senior warriors.

As our generals have become more political, those who have reigned as Secretary of Defense (SecDEF) have become increasingly operational. Thus, we have allowed an

inappropriate shift of primary responsibilities within the Department of Defense (DoD), while ignoring the successful historical precedent of professional warriors leading war efforts. Understanding this particular problem is crucial to understanding our losses and America's general strategic meandering. Along with this erroneous shift of responsibilities born after WWII came equally flawed strategies, such as limited war and incremental force build-ups. Furthermore, our SecDEFs have grown independent of the rest of the President's Cabinet, leaving huge gaps in interagency coordination and disregarding the Diplomatic-Informational-Military-Economic (DIME)<sup>2</sup> construct of applying elements of national power in combination. Tragically, this politically correct approach to war has cost us nearly four hundred thousand casualties since WWII and we have little to show for the noble efforts of so many heroes. The bottom line: America's so-called strategic leaders, both civilian and military, are failing to lead our nation with courage, vision, and resolve worthy of our nation and our warriors. And we are headed for international impotence if we do not change course.

To be fair, we have enjoyed limited successes in recent history, such as the small-scale conflicts in Panama, Grenada, and Libya. Colonel Steven Shapiro, a professional U.S. Army logistician, noted, "It can even be argued that every time we have fought, regardless of end-state, America has achieved a certain level of deterrence and at least a limited long-term, positive effect on humanity, financial strength, and governance. Our willingness to fight in Korea and Vietnam apparently deterred China and the former USSR from further aggression for decades."<sup>3</sup> We must also acknowledge that President Ronald Reagan<sup>4</sup> led us to a hard-earned victory over the former Soviet Union in the Cold War. However, most would agree that our major kinetic wars since WWII, especially Korea and Vietnam, have ended miserably. Furthermore, a careful analysis of conflicts that most would categorize as 'successful' such as the European Theater of WWII and Desert Storm, had end states that were rather ominous. Certainly, we can all agree that strategic victory in the Global War on Terror (GWOT), Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), despite resounding tactical triumphs, is not assured. Therefore, it is vital to perform a critical analysis to determine the causes for our past failures. Then, we must implore our strategic leaders to apply these lessons to achieve victory in the GWOT and beyond.

#### World War II—A Closer Look at Pacific and European Theater End States

Sun Tzu declared, "Victory is the main object in war. If this is long delayed, weapons are blunted and morale depressed."<sup>5</sup> Though many of our senior leaders have read the acknowledged strategic genius Sun Tzu, they may have overlooked one of his most salient

assertions.<sup>6</sup> Americans seem to disregard even our own hard-earned lessons from successes and failures in war. While we have had limited successes in small-scale conflicts, in recent years we have ignominiously lost major wars. The following discussions of the Pacific and European campaigns of WWII and their associated end states give us a reference for comparing strategic outcomes since WWII.

Let us first consider the WWII Pacific Theater and the defeat of Japan. In this case, we irrefutably won a classic victory, albeit at a tremendous cost. Why did we win? We were attacked and we were angry (similar to the immediate response after 9/11). But immediately following the attack on Pearl Harbor, the President asked for a formal declaration of war against Japan. A patriotic and dutiful Congress delivered. We then engaged in a determined strategy and used all of our military might, as well as other elements of national power, to achieve victory. Essentially, we were determined to achieve victory. This primary objective was not questioned by U.S. citizens, elected officials, or appointed officials. Total victory, including a formal unconditional surrender, was the only end state our citizens would accept and we acted as a nation to achieve it. Our unlimited use of national power, which necessitated garnering the public will, served to ultimately defeat Japan. And we should remember that although Japan was physically a much smaller country than the United States, it was a world-leading industrial and military power in 1941. We also had to extend our military forces over great distances in our fight to reclaim the Pacific. The positive effects of waging total war against Japan continue to this day; this absolute victory should remain as the strategic example of how to wage war. Indeed, a study of conflicts, including WWII, show that the Pacific Campaign and the resulting total victory over Japan marks the high tide of U.S. strategy and courageous U.S. leadership. But we did not achieve the same strategically sound end state in Europe, so we still suffer for mistakes made at or near the end of the European Campaign.<sup>7</sup>

Though many casually proclaim that we gained a victory in Europe versus Germany and Italy, it was not complete, as in the case of the Pacific War versus Japan. Despite a string of heroic and successful battles across Africa, Italy, and France, and in the skies over Europe, the end state we accepted to terminate the European Campaign was not strategically sound. What appears at a historical glance to have been total victory against the Nazis was dampened by a failure of our negotiators at the end of the war. We rightly tout such operational successes as the Normandy Invasion, the African Campaign, and the German Industrial Bombing Campaign, but it is critical to note that the closing chapter of WWII in Europe was an insult to Americans who fought and sacrificed on the way to Berlin. Hidden in the results of the conferences at Tehran, Yalta, and Potsdam, was the first intimations of the Cold War.<sup>8</sup> Even before the

surrender and treaties were signed, America returned to an isolationist stance. Perhaps due to the continuing fight in the Pacific and eagerness to end the war, we capitulated to the Soviet Union and allowed the Iron Curtain to be hung. The Soviets sensed our weakness and this was confirmed during the Berlin Crisis. Thus, began the Cold War and a nuclear arms race that may forever cloud the world.<sup>9</sup>

While lessons from WWII or any other war cannot provide a complete template for strategic solutions, national leaders and senior military officers have the responsibility of understanding and applying both positive and negative lessons paid for in blood. Today, our current operations in Iraq seem to be begging for the direct application of lessons from our wars with Japan, Germany, and others. We have been taught at all levels of leadership that solutions should include in part, the simple but vitally important steps of acquiring and applying historical knowledge, especially as it pertains to occupying and governing a former enemy nation. Unfortunately, we committed even more heinous strategic errors soon after WWII. These occurred in Korea, Vietnam, and in the Middle East, with grievous consequences to America.

#### Korea—Limited War = Limited Failure

During the Korean War, we suffered 36,934 dead and 103,284 wounded Americans.<sup>10</sup> The results included no change in borders and a more hardened communist regime. North Korea, known since 1948 as The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), eventually built and proliferated nuclear weapons, long-range missiles, and related technology. This end state did not spell success. The situation that exists along the border of the Koreas has continuously degraded for over fifty years, as the adversaries stare idiotically at each other across the fences at P'anmunjŏm. To add international illegitimacy to this situation, the Korean 'cease-fire' is a United Nations sanctioned and supported activity, leaving the U.S., South Korea, and other U.N. member nations stymied by one of the weakest nations on Earth.

The stalemate accepted in Korea was supposedly accepted because of a perennial fear of China. However, this reasoning does not seem to be valid when studied in historical context. In the 1950's China was still a limited power with several reasons to avoid full-scale confrontation with the U.S. Also, Japan proved that China could be defeated militarily with less power (and greater resolve?) than the U.S. possessed. In Korea, the U.S. limited strategic bombing even after Chinese intervention and capitalized only on the tactical capability of our air-to-air fighter pilots. On the ground, we made some of the boldest moves in history including maneuvers such as the Inchon Landing, proposed and planned by General Douglas MacArthur.<sup>11</sup> But it seemed that only MacArthur, who had led the defeat of a tenacious Japan, was not afraid of China. To



MacArthur, limited war leading to an emboldened China would be detrimental to America's future.

General MacArthur was adamant in demanding total victory in Korea while U.S. political leadership and the JCS were intent on only restoring Korea's pre-war borders. He thus became the main subject in a lesson-rich episode involving both civil-military relations and national strategy. In early 1951, MacArthur made it clear that he did not agree with the U.S. administration's policy of using limited war. In fact, MacArthur suggested that we push the Chinese back across the Yalu and beyond. After a series of successful offensive battles in early 1951, he believed that we could achieve total victory over the Chinese.<sup>12</sup> MacArthur wanted to unify Korea while ending Chinese aggression. But we will never know what end state MacArthur's strategy would have produced since President Truman fired MacArthur in April of 1951.<sup>13</sup> President Truman felt he was obligated by the constitution to fire MacArthur; however, this situation might also be used to support that indeed, our generals should run our wars. If he had been allowed to continue and had all of America behind him assuring success, there would be a united Korea today and we might not be facing China as a competing world power. Nor would we have spent the last sixty years and billions of dollars preparing to repeat war with North Korea. The American people of the 1950s obviously agreed as they welcomed MacArthur home as a hero and Truman's popularity plummeted. MacArthur was also invited to address Congress twice, where he stated that, "...limited war is immoral...war's very objective is victory, not prolonged indecision..."<sup>14</sup> Based on his hard earned victory over Japan only a few years before, if anyone in the world was qualified to discuss the value of strategic victory, it was General Douglas MacArthur. In the end, the Korean War showed us that a limited war strategy produces worse than limited results. But this ill-fated strategy would haunt us again in Vietnam and continues to haunt us today, especially in the Middle East.

#### Vietnam—How Not to Fight a War

Again, we draw from the words of Sun Tzu: "There has never been a protracted war from which a country has benefited."<sup>15</sup> The results of Vietnam were even more disheartening than those of Korea. Vietnam losses included more than 58,000 dead, 300,000 wounded, and 2000 missing in action. Also, an estimated 20,000 have committed suicide since coming home to America.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, our departure was immediately followed by a communist takeover of our former ally. The only lessons we can gain from looking at Vietnam are those that dictate how not to wage war. Vietnam qualifies as a catastrophic loss by any standard. So whose fault was this? Our complete failure in Vietnam can be credited to our country's elite at that time:

Our presidents and their administrations, our Secretaries of Defense, the U.S. Congress, and most unforgivably, our generals.

Though the Johnson administration inherited the situation in Vietnam, they were neither determined to stay out of Vietnam, nor determined to fight, as depicted in the 2002 documentary, "Path to War."<sup>17</sup> We were certainly not determined to win. Congress failed to declare war and then assumed their standard dove-and-hawk partisan positions. Worse, some members of Congress promoted anti-war sentiment without offering solutions. This weakness of political leadership led to an incremental commitment of troops, a terrible idea born of America's recently adopted limited war strategy. Proportionality also came to be misused and misunderstood. 'Proportionality' is a component of the Law of Armed Conflict; it is not at all synonymous with the term 'Economy of Force,' which is a principle of war. Proportionality has never been militarily sound according to Clausewitz<sup>18</sup> and Sun Tzu.<sup>19</sup> Some apparently believe that if we soften our approach to war, war itself will somehow appear softer to the American public. It didn't work then, and it will never work. Our national wish to stop the spread of communism and our hope that Ho Chi Minh would capitulate did not constitute a method or an operational strategy. Instead, our wishing and hoping provided Ho Chi Min both time and political ammunition. Again in Vietnam, bold diplomacy was nearly nonexistent. It seems that post-WWII administrations dismiss diplomacy as an option when at war, and disregard war as an option in diplomacy.

A key lesson emerges yet again: The powers of military force and diplomacy are exponential when used together. But they are ineffective or even counterproductive when not coordinated. Sun Tzu's strategic wisdom has relevance here also: On the subject of national unity and combining elements of power, he observed, "He whose ranks are united in purpose will be victorious."<sup>20</sup> As an example of the effectiveness of combining powers, we can recall the early 1990s Haiti Crisis<sup>21</sup> as one of the best examples of using military and diplomatic power in concert. Former President Jimmy Carter and General Colin Powell<sup>22</sup> approached the Haitian coup leader Raoul Cédras<sup>23</sup> and presented him with a final opportunity to capitulate after three bloody years of rule. As they met, General Powell informed Cédras that American forces were literally enroute to Haiti, awaiting only the word to begin the invasion. Cédras immediately capitulated. We thus avoided war with Haiti.<sup>24</sup>

In Vietnam, as in Korea, we proved that if you don't target the enemy's strategic centers of gravity, you will not deny their ability to make war nor destroy their will to fight. Vietnam was also a miserable example of fighting symmetrically and proportionally. We fought their war using their methods, such as jungle warfare and small unit forays. But we should have

demanded that the North Vietnamese go home. When they failed to do so, we should have considered bombing Hanoi into submission, driving tanks downtown, eliminating their logistical support, and placing a U.S. general officer in control of their government until it could be legitimized. This would have been strategically and operationally sound and would have been more humane for both South and North Vietnamese people by eliminating years of death and suffering. Instead, we allowed Ho Chi Minh to use Hanoi as a safe haven for logistics, industry, and cruel prisons. America's national leaders were criminally irresponsible in their approach to Vietnam. And our senior military officers acted cowardly by forcing our warriors to fight with such horrendous constraints, to say nothing of allowing our POWs to suffer for years in the horrid conditions of the Hanoi prisons.

The warriors who fought in Vietnam paid a terrible price for our symmetric method of fighting (using the enemy's method/tactics). And as in Korea, we again failed to use airpower to its greatest potential and avoided attacking the enemy's Center of Gravity. Also several principles of war were violated, especially those of Mass, Surprise, and Objective. Unfortunately, these errors paled in comparison to the lack of military leadership. The theater commander should have demanded that he control the operational strategy, selected his own targets (vice Washington's daily influence and operational control), and pursued total victory. Our generals' lack of courage and operational vision, and their failure to 'stand on their swords' to protect our warriors in Vietnam, remains the American military's low point of institutional honor and professional courage. It seems incredible that individuals could rise to the rank of general without having the operational savvy to develop a winning strategy, the courage to demand that the strategy be implemented, and the compassion to oppose those who would waste the lives of our heroic warriors.

Vietnam also marked a decline in the honor and respect once afforded the President and the Congress. The American public, even if not properly motivated, understood that there was a problem in Vietnam. Though they did not fully understand the reason for our failures such as limited objectives and incremental troop increases, they saw that we were losing tens of thousands of warriors and not winning the war. President Johnson, after woefully underestimating Ho Chi Minh and failing to understand the scope of the conflict, chose not to call up the National Guard or Reserves. This decision was one of Johnson's greatest blunders.<sup>25</sup> To add to the problem, the U.S. Congress failed to declare war and then failed to support the effort. Nor did Congress demand a winning strategy from the President. Finally, our generals failed to demand operational control and lost sight of the value of each warrior's life. Consider General Matthew B. Ridgway's remarks as the conflict in Vietnam escalated:

It has long seemed to me that the hard decisions are not the ones you make in the heat of battle. Far harder to make are those involved in speaking your mind about some hair-brained scheme which proposes to commit troops to action under conditions where failure seems almost certain, and the only results will be the needless sacrifice of priceless lives. When all is said and done, the most precious asset any nation has is its youth, and for a battle commander ever to condone the unnecessary sacrifice of his men is inexcusable. In any plan you must balance the inevitable cost in lives against the objectives you seek to attain. Unless the results to be expected can reasonably justify the estimated loss of life the action involves, then for my part I want none of it.<sup>26</sup>

Public trust in the American political and military leadership was thus eroded for decades to come. The controversial defeat in Vietnam contributed to a painful national catharsis in American society, which represented a sea change in American cultural history. "Before Vietnam, the United States was a good nation, led by well-meaning people."<sup>27</sup> The lessons from Vietnam are poignant, teaching us how not to fight a war.

#### Desert Storm—Limited War = Wars to be Fought Again

Desert Storm, sometimes called 'Gulf War I,' was a short war which took less time than many past battles. It initially showed promise in turning America's trend of losing wars around as we blended the elements of military genius and national resolve. President George H.W. Bush<sup>28</sup> acted rapidly and decisively, freeing Kuwait within thirty-nine days of commencing the air campaign.<sup>29</sup> Central Command (CENTCOM) Commander General Norman Schwarzkoph synchronized forces like never before. However, politically and strategically, the outcome of the first Gulf War is more contentious.<sup>30</sup> We limited our actions in Desert Storm to removing Iraqi forces from Kuwait due to U.N. constraints. Then we reduced our effort to enforcing the ludicrous no-fly zone over the southern and northern sections of Iraq while for twelve years Saddam murdered people, developed Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD)<sup>31</sup> and strengthened his military forces below. Not surprisingly, this came back to haunt us. Unfortunately, Saddam Hussein's forces learned some valuable lessons by observing U.S. conduct prior to, during, and after Desert Storm. These lessons included the following: 1) Don't engage with the U.S. using traditional air-land warfare; 2) learn from the experience of the North Koreans/Chinese, the Vietcong, and the Taliban (i.e., be patient, unconventional, and fight asymmetrically or criminally); and 3) use the U.N. for cover and negotiate while you prepare for war. From their experience and a brief review of recent American history, they believed the U.S. would follow suit, get tired, make noise, and leave... if they only had enough patience. So we should learn another critical lesson: America must find the determination to use overwhelming force and develop a strategy to achieve total victory. Then, as we depart the

area, we must deliver a meaningful pledge to rain hell upon an enemy if America or her allies are threatened again.

Although Saddam Hussein later also miscalculated the resolve of President George W. Bush,<sup>32</sup> the operational and tactical lessons from Desert Storm and other American wars were not lost on Hussein's Baathists or the insurgents from within and around Iraq. Nor was this lesson lost on the followers of Osama Bin Laden in Afghanistan. Was the end state of Desert Storm merely a return to the status quo?<sup>33</sup> The answer to the latter question is obvious: Had we sought and achieved total victory, we would not have had to return to Iraq only twelve years later and face a more prepared and subversive enemy.

### The Global War on Terror—Bounded by the Beltway

Including all sources of combat-related casualties in Iraq, Afghanistan, and various battles in the Global War on Terror (GWOT), we have lost 3,532 lives and wounded 24,048 joint<sup>34</sup> warriors as of 21 January 2007.<sup>35</sup> This war is arguably the most justified of all American wars in the last sixty years and victory has never been more imperative. But despite the devastating wake-up call to our nation on 11 September 2001, America quickly lost her national resolve. Though many should share the blame, the lack of resolve is mostly the fault of a cowardly and self-serving Congress, whose members put their partisan fingers in the wind to determine what their latest position on the war should be. Congress hasn't sent a strong message to the enemy for many years. Worse, congressional members now publicly show weakness to our present and potential enemies, encouraging their actions and inviting their wrath.

The public has never had a deep understanding of WHY we were at war, especially concerning Iraq. President Bush should be commended for developing the well-founded strategy of eliminating a dangerous dictator and a safe-haven for terrorists, driving a geopolitical wedge between Iran and Syria, and promoting democracy and freedom in the Middle East. However, the general lack of understanding among the American public is chiefly the fault of our administration. Americans need to understand the ends, ways, and means of war strategy before they will fully support it. Although we have enjoyed many great successes and have made prodigious strategic moves, GWOT suffers from a historic lack of nationalism, a recent lack of resolve, and poor strategic communication. Unfortunately, GWOT also suffers from the trend of convoluted civil-military relationships, which have pervaded the DoD since WWII.

Adding to the difficulty of winning against a seemingly bottomless insurgency, decades of pompous reign by defense secretaries has effectively shackled our military leaders. Most SecDEFs since Robert McNamara<sup>36</sup> have acted like five-star generals, rather than managers of

policy and gatherers of resources. Perhaps they are emboldened by the Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986,<sup>37</sup> which placed the SecDEF in the chain-of-command, between the combatant commanders and the President. In this most critical aspect of civil-military relations, the immortal Sun Tzu wrote the following:

He whose generals are able and not interfered with by the sovereign will be victorious. A sovereign of high character and intelligence must be able to know the right man, should place the responsibility on him, and expect results.<sup>38</sup>

Subjects such as budgets, policy, and manpower should be the purview of our Secretaries of Defense, rather than operational strategy. However, since WWII, they have pushed our Joint Chiefs aside and have overridden and manipulated combatant commanders. Case in point: OIF.

In Cobra II<sup>39</sup>, authors Michael Gordon and General Bernard Trainor report that senior planners for OIF were very concerned about troop numbers, especially for Phase IV (post-invasion security and stability operations), but their plans were annulled by SecDEF Donald Rumsfeld.<sup>40</sup> Lieutenant General David McKiernan, OIF Combined Forces Land Component Commander, and many others on the Central Command (CENTCOM) staff, advised CENTCOM commander General Tommy Franks that we would need up to 380,000 troops to provide continuity, control, and security for Iraq after the invasion. Franks originally agreed and forwarded this number, but over time he was brow-beaten by Rumsfeld into accepting only 125,000 troops in what was called a 'running start' invasion.<sup>41</sup> Here again, 'limited war' raised its ugly head, this time with devastating effects on OIF stability operations.

Our senior military officers must think and act as our senior warriors, rather than front-men for the SecDEF or perennial 'defendants' of congressional hearings. We have allowed ourselves to be abused under the guise of 'civilian control of the military.' This term was never meant to indicate that a civilian should run the war, nor was it meant to make place generals in a subordinate position to an individual congressman or DoD civilian. Officers swear an oath to give their allegiance to America and to the Constitution of the United States of America, but not to Congress, not to the President, nor to any other official. The officers' Oath of Office clearly indicates this intent:

I ... do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign or domestic, that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same... So help me God ...<sup>42</sup>

It is important that lawful orders are followed once issued, but the constitution makes it clear as to where an officer's loyalty lies. Though WWII demonstrated the positive outcomes of allowing generals to plan and run our wars, executive and congressional leaders since 1945 have done

everything except allowing our generals to do their job. Our country has suffered greatly for it and our generals must demand better than the reactive environment they are currently forced to endure.

America's political environment, in combination with idealistic and isolationist tendencies, have also helped lead us down the path of failure at the strategic level of war. Congressional members and media pundits talk exhaustively about globalism, global markets, and global connectivity. Yet we attempt to wish global problems away in some unrealistic fantasy that evil forces will somehow forget about us. This is the case despite the attacks on Pearl Harbor in 1941, despite decades of terrorist attacks on American people and assets worldwide, and despite the attack on New York City and the Pentagon in 2001. Furthermore, while we possess overwhelming power, we fail to gain an understanding (not sympathy) of our enemy's culture, objectives, fortitude, or patience. But our enemies get it—they study our pattern of warfare and politics while we impress ourselves with our tremendous array of capabilities. Then, repeatedly disregarding historical lessons, we challenge ourselves to adapt to the enemy's form of warfare. Vietnam may have been a worse example of fighting symmetrically, but operations in Iraq and Afghanistan share certain similar strategic and operational issues: we are not 'sealing the problem' by cutting off logistics and securing the borders and we are not effectively communicating our cause at home and abroad. President George W. Bush has had great difficulty recently pushing for even a modest increase in the number of soldiers for OIF. We should be able to communicate that these additional soldiers will enable faster training for Iraqi units while also providing greater mutual support for our own troops, thus saving American and Iraqi lives. America can and must win in Iraq, Afghanistan, and in the wider GWOT. Our security and our way of life have never been more threatened. In fact, we may have upon us the greatest strategic and military challenge since our nation's founding.

We must also look beyond GWOT to other potential challenges. A growing China, an increasingly desperate Russia, or a coalition of equally desperate and adventurous South American dictators could present a serious challenge to American values and interests. Yet strangely, our service chiefs speak of draw-downs of personnel and 'transformation' to a predominately expeditionary<sup>43</sup> force. Relying too heavily on expeditionary forces looms as an enormous strategic error. To avoid failure on a truly global scale, we must develop a meaningful strategy which acknowledges global challenges. This should include retaining and expanding permanent bases in key regions/countries throughout the world to shape and influence allies as well as potential enemies. In today's globally connected environment,

forward presence, cultural understanding, and ready forces, led by informed and courageous leaders, are essential.

### Achieving Strategic Victory—Leadership, Common Sense, and Courage

It is important to define ‘victory’ so that we can more easily determine solutions which will achieve it. It will suffice to define victory as: the attainment of the desired end state. Victory does not mean we have to destroy or completely subdue an enemy nation. In fact, a good example of a victorious and well-defined end state is President Bush’s declared objective for OIF: “An Iraq that can govern itself, defend itself, and sustain itself.”<sup>44</sup> Achieving victory must be enabled by first demanding and expecting victory. We can invoke Sun Tzu again to substantiate this: “A victorious army wins its victories before seeking battle; an army destined to defeat fights in the hope of winning.”<sup>45</sup>

Reversing America’s trend of losing wars, even if the reasons for this trend are rather obvious, requires leadership, common sense, and courage, vice the complex and lengthy proposals which abound today. We must, of course, start with leadership—with courageous, far-sighted, compassionate, and sensible leadership. We must also reset our most basic national leadership responsibilities to times past when political leadership determined whether we should fight and military leadership determined how we should fight. If we can begin with this premise a victorious plan will naturally follow. This plan must include: applying historical lessons, knowing the enemy, planning for victory, and using all elements of power in combination. These are concepts we teach our military officers, but they are not taught to those who are appointed to run our cabinets or those who are elected to Congress.

Common sense is difficult to teach, but sensible strategic concepts can be taught. All senior officials, especially new cabinet and congressional members, should accept a course in strategic leadership and military history. This course would include a brief on strategic warfare concepts, selected historical campaigns, examples of great strategic leadership, the cost of past wars in lives and dollars, and the cost of not acting or acting too late (e.g. allowing events which led to WWI, WWII, etc.). A conceptual strategic checklist for entering war should also be part of this training and should include the following considerations:

- CAUSE—worth dying for
- SITUATION—profoundly affects U.S. values and interests such as security, humanity, stability, resources
- ENDS/OBJECTIVES—includes a well defined end state which includes victory
- WAYS (our generals’ responsibility to provide)—acceptable



- MEANS (forces, equipment, capital)—available
- NATION—informed, support garnered, updated regularly on strategy and status
- CONGRESS—war declared and vote recorded, published and supported
- ELEMENTS OF NATIONAL POWER—all elements considered and enabled, then coordinated
- STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION—initiated and continuous

Both civilian and senior military leaders could also benefit by reviewing the salient issues forwarded in Joint Publication 3-0<sup>46</sup> and Joint Publication 5-0.<sup>47</sup> Much useful information is included in these publications, but a concerned strategic leader should add the following considerations:

- Historical Precedence/Lessons—observed and applied
- Intelligence, including analysis of enemy culture and capability—gathered and applied
- Initial Plan—vetted with operational experience and intelligence in an open and honest round-table environment; employs staff, interagency, and independent groups; encourages critical and creative thinking; considers all phases of the conflict
- Risks—identified and mitigated or accepted
- Final Plan—achieves victory with both strategic and operational end states
- Concept or Method—simple, flexible; considers all elements of U.S./allied power; maximizes friendly power and minimizes friendly losses; uses but does not violate principles of war; not limited (in means necessary), proportional or symmetric
- Guidance—useful and simple; defines purpose, method and a well-defined end state; appropriately specific; well distributed
- Operational Strategy—supportive of national strategy and reviewed/revisited often, especially since the enemy and our citizens also get a vote

The above warfare considerations may seem simplistic, but strategic leaders must internalize these concepts because when it comes to war, their application will mean the difference between victory and defeat. Perhaps during war, posters with these strategic considerations should stand prominently in the chambers of Congress and in the offices of our country's top decision-makers.

### A Challenge to America's Senior Military Leaders

Though the U.S. military possesses awesome warriors and equipment, we face intellectual challenges as do all agencies and elements of U.S. leadership. There are confident leaders who encourage intellectual honesty from peers and subordinates, but this freedom of

expression has never been prevalent within the services. History shows that when aggressive visionaries have written or spoke concerning significant military or strategic changes, it has been in spite of and not because of official encouragement. Colonel Lloyd Matthews addresses this issue in detail in his series entitled, "The Uniformed Intellectual and His Place in American Arms."<sup>48</sup> Human nature inclines us to agree, but our military mission demands absolute integrity. We must enforce discipline, but we must also embrace professional divergence, especially when we are considering strategic decisions that affect our nation's future and our warriors' lives. If we fail to create an environment of integrity and service, we will encourage sheep herding rather than harnessing stallions to produce leaders. The bottom line: our senior military leaders must change the subdued intellectual environment that pervades our profession, respect professional divergence, and promote stallions instead of sheep.

Where is America's contemporary George Marshall, Matthew Ridgway, Billy Mitchell, or Sun Tzu? We must encourage... demand... critical and creative thought and we must respect the time it takes to develop a successful strategy. We must facilitate the repair of our inappropriate relationships and skewed responsibilities within DoD and between DoD and Congress. And we must lead the way in acting as a nation. Though our historical strategic losses may be the collective fault of many, we must understand and accept the challenges to our nation, renew our constitutional oaths, and boldly reclaim our proper place in shaping America's strategic discourse. Accepting and overcoming these challenges will lead to strategic victory for the United States of America.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Tzu, Sun. *The Art of War*. Translated by Samuel B. Griffith. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963.

<sup>2</sup> The 'DIME' construct is to consider and use all elements of national power synergistically to gain maximum strategic effect. The DIME acronym means: Diplomatic, Informational, Military, and Economic elements of national power.

<sup>3</sup> COL Steven Shapiro, U.S. Army War College Student, comment during U.S. Army War College seminar discussions, 20 February 2007.

<sup>4</sup> Ronald Wilson Reagan was U.S. President from 1981-1989. Reagan was dubbed, 'The Great Communicator' and was known for his strong stand on defense and his tremendously successful diplomacy in helping to dissolve and reform the former Soviet Union.

<sup>5</sup> Tzu, 73.

<sup>6</sup> Sun Tzu is quoted often in this paper. His words seem to be the source of the most salient concepts of national war strategy. According to most who study the art of war, Sun Tzu, who wrote in 500 B.C., is acknowledged as a philosophical and practical genius, whose strategic concepts are timeless. B.H. Liddell Hart, himself a brilliant military theorist and author of *Strategy*, wrote that “Sun Tzu’s essays on military strategy and the relationships of generals and the ‘state’ form the earliest of known treatises on the subject, but they have never been surpassed in comprehensiveness and depth of understanding.” They might well be termed the concentrated essence of wisdom on the conduct of war. It is strongly suggested that all readers interested in strategic and military operational art, start with a study of Sun Tzu’s *The Art of War*.

<sup>7</sup> Hastings, Sir Max. *The Second World War: A World in Flames*. Essential Histories Series. Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2004.

<sup>8</sup> Boyne, Walter. *The Influence of Air Power upon History*. Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing Co., 2003.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 289.

<sup>10</sup> Lee, R. “The History Guy: Casualties from America’s Wars.” Available from [http://www.historyguy.com/american\\_war\\_casualties.html](http://www.historyguy.com/american_war_casualties.html); Internet; accessed 23 February 2007.

<sup>11</sup> General Douglas MacArthur was the commander of Far East Forces during the Korean War.

<sup>12</sup> Malkasian, Carter. *The Korean War 1950-1953*. Essential Histories Series. Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2001.

<sup>13</sup> General Douglas MacArthur was fired by President Harry Truman due to Truman’s perception that MacArthur had defied civil authority and had disregarded the administration’s policy of limited war. This event remains a relevant study for civil-military relations today.

<sup>14</sup> Malkasian, 71.

<sup>15</sup> Tzu, 73.

<sup>16</sup> Lee.

<sup>17</sup> HBO Films, prod. *Path to War*. Time Warner Entertainment Company, 2002. DVD.

<sup>18</sup> Carl Von Clausewitz is acknowledged as a great military strategist, who wrote the classic “On War” in the early 1800’s.

<sup>19</sup> Sun Tzu is acknowledged as the earliest known military strategist, who wrote the classic “The Art of War” apx. 500BC.

<sup>20</sup> Tzu, 83.

<sup>21</sup> Wikipedia Internet Encyclopedia. “Haiti.” Available from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Haiti>; Internet; accessed 21 December 2007.

<sup>22</sup> General Colin Powell was the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS) during the first Clinton administration.

<sup>23</sup> Wikipedia Internet Encyclopedia. "Raoul Cédras." Available from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Raoul\\_Cedras](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Raoul_Cedras); Internet; accessed 21 December 2007.

<sup>24</sup> Raoul Cédras was a Lieutenant General in the Haitian Army before ruling Haiti from 1991-1994 after a coup d'état, which ousted elected President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. Dozens of human rights groups criticized Cédras' rule alleging that thousands of innocent people were massacred by the FAdH military and FRAPH paramilitary units under Cédras' control.

<sup>25</sup> Wiest, Andrew. *The Vietnam War 1956-1975*. Essential Histories Series. Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2002.

<sup>26</sup> Ridgway, Matthew, GEN. *The Korean War*. New York: Da Capo Press, 1967. (This quote was also delivered during a speech following his retirement. General Ridgway served as Allied Commander Korea from 1951 to 1953. Known by both peers and subordinates as a brilliant leader with great integrity, Ridgway was dismissed from his position as Chief of Staff of the Army in 1955, after telling President Eisenhower that entering Vietnam was wrong... and impossible to win).

<sup>27</sup> Wiest, 88.

<sup>28</sup> President George H. W. Bush ('Bush Senior') was U.S. President from 1990-1994.

<sup>29</sup> Finlan, Alastair. *The Gulf War 1991*. Essential Histories Series. Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2003.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 85.

<sup>31</sup> Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) are considered to be nuclear, biological, or chemical weapons and their associated delivery mechanisms.

<sup>32</sup> President George W. Bush ('Bush Junior'--son of President George H.W. Bush), became U.S. President in 2001 and serves now in his second term.

<sup>33</sup> Finlan, 86.

<sup>34</sup> 'Joint' is a term meaning the application of two or more service components; e.g., the Army and Air Force operating together, would be called a joint operation.

<sup>35</sup> Lee.

<sup>36</sup> Robert McNamara was Secretary of Defense during the Vietnam War, from 1961 to 1968.

<sup>37</sup> The Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act. U.S. Code, Title 10, Subtitle A, Part I, Chapter 5 (1986).

<sup>38</sup> Tzu, 83.

<sup>39</sup> Gordon, Michael, and General Bernard Trainor. *Cobra II*. New York: Pantheon Books, 2006.

<sup>40</sup> Donald Rumsfeld served as the 21<sup>st</sup> U.S. Secretary of Defense, under President George W. Bush, from 2001 to 2006.

<sup>41</sup> Gordon, 103.

<sup>42</sup> *The United States Constitution, Article II, Section 1*, (1787). Officers' oath as modified by the U.S. Congress, 1 August 1959.

<sup>43</sup> Expeditionary forces are those based in our home territory, then deployed to war in various theaters, as opposed to being based in that theater continuously.

<sup>44</sup> U.S. President George W. Bush, statements during White House News Conferences, January 2007, Washington, D.C.

<sup>45</sup> Tzu, 87.

<sup>46</sup> U.S. Department of Defense. *Joint Publication 3-0, Joint Operations*. Washington D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense, 2006.

<sup>47</sup> U.S. Department of Defense. *Joint Publication 5-0, Joint Operation Planning*, Signature Draft. Washington D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense, 24 August 2006.

<sup>48</sup> Matthews, Lloyd. "The Uniformed Intellectual and His Place in American Arms." *ARMY Magazine*, July 1992, 17-40.

