THE UNITED STATES HAS just fought two wars against enemies thought to be difficult to defeat and has won decisively, rapidly, and with minimal loss of life. The military performance in both cases was impressive. With virtually no American troops on the ground in Afghanistan, U.S. forces aided by local Afghan militias destroyed the Taliban government and shattered the al Qaeda bases and infrastructure that had been used to plan and prepare the September 11 attacks. In Iraq one British, one U.S. Marine, and two U.S. Army divisions, supported by advanced precision-guided munitions, sufficed to crush both the Iraqi army and Saddam Hussein’s regime in a matter of weeks.

In both cases, the U.S. has been far less successful in winning the peace than it was in winning the war. In Iraq, the widespread looting and rioting that followed the collapse of the Baathist regime and the disorder that continued for weeks to rage in many parts of the country, including Baghdad,
badly tarnished the image of the American occupying forces. It hindered U.S. efforts to establish a new, stable Iraqi regime that commands the loyalty of the Iraqi people.

The situation in Afghanistan was much worse. For more than a year after the fall of the Taliban government, the new government of Hamid Karzai did not command the respect of the majority of the Afghan people and could not make its writ run outside of Kabul. Warlords established themselves in almost all of the other key cities and regions of the country, the roads became unsafe, and violence, both directed and random, became the order of the day. It remains unclear at present whether it will be possible actually to establish a stable and legitimate government in Kabul — and at what cost.

Why has the United States been so successful in recent wars and encountered so much difficulty in securing its political aims after the shooting stopped? The obstacles in the way of establishing stable polities in Kabul and Baghdad were always considerable. It was never likely that the road to peace and stability in postwar Iraq and Afghanistan would be short or smooth. The nature of the American military operations in both countries, however, multiplied those obstacles instead of reducing them and greatly increased the chance of failing to achieve the political objectives that motivated both wars.

The reason for this fact lies partly in the vision of war that President Bush and his administration brought into office and have implemented in the past two wars. This vision focuses on destroying the enemy’s armed forces and his ability to command them and control them. It does not focus on the problem of achieving political objectives. The advocates of a “new American way of war,” Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and Bush chief among them, have attempted to simplify war into a targeting drill. They see the enemy as a target set and believe that when all or most of the targets have been hit, he will inevitably surrender and American goals will be achieved.

War is not that simple, however. From the standpoint of establishing a good peace it matters a great deal how, exactly, one defeats the enemy and what the enemy’s country looks like at the moment the bullets stop flying. The U.S. has developed and implemented a method of warfare that can produce stunning military victories but does not necessarily accomplish the political goals for which the war was fought.

If these two wars represented merely isolated cases or aberrations from the mainstream of military and political developments in the U.S., then the study of this problem would be of primarily academic interest. That is not the case. The entire thrust of the current program of military transformation
of the U.S. armed forces, on the contrary, aims at the implementation and perfection of this sort of target-set mentality. Unless the direction and nature of military transformation change dramatically, the American public should expect to see in the future many more wars in which U.S. armed forces triumph but the American political vision fails.

The Bush administration’s vision

GEORGE BUSH RAN for office with a clear understanding of what he wanted the armed forces to be and to do. In his 1999 campaign speech at the Citadel, he said that the purpose of the armed forces was to deter, fight, and win wars. He eschewed peacekeeping and nation-building entirely. He promised to withdraw rapidly from Kosovo and Bosnia, stating “we will not be permanent peacekeepers, dividing warring parties. That is not our strength or our calling.” He declared, “Sending our military on vague, aimless and endless deployments is the swift solvent of morale.” These announcements were enshrined in the motto, “superpowers don’t do windows.”

Candidate Bush’s determination to avoid “operations other than war” (OOTW) was matched by a determination to transform the military. Clearly implying that the Clinton administration had let transformation go as part of its general neglect of the armed forces, Bush proclaimed that a new era would dawn. His transformation vision depended on information technology and the long-range precision strikes it made possible: “Power is increasingly defined, not by mass or size, but by mobility and swiftness. Influence is measured in information, safety is gained in stealth, and force is projected on the long arc of precision-guided weapons.”

President Bush did not change his views on military affairs, even during and after the Afghan war. According to Bob Woodward’s account in Bush at War (Simon and Schuster, 2002), the president announced at a critical meeting of his war cabinet during the Afghan war, “I oppose using the military for nation building. Once the job is done, our forces are not peacekeepers. We ought to put in place a U.N. protection and leave.” That course of action turned out to be impossible, and thousands of American troops are still in Afghanistan today, supporting a weak and unstable government. One of the reasons for the weakness of that government is that the troops entered only after the critical damage had been done and in numbers far too small to achieve the political objective.

But Bush saw the war in Afghanistan as vindicating his vision of future war. In his December 2001 speech at the Citadel, the president declared, “Afghanistan has been a proving ground for this new approach. These past two months have shown that an innovative doctrine and high-tech weaponry can shape and then dominate an unconventional conflict. . . . The conflict in Afghanistan has taught us more about the future of our military than a
decade of blue ribbon panels and think-tank symposiums." He concluded, "When all of our military can continuously locate and track moving targets — with surveillance from air and space — warfare will be truly revolutionized."

"Network-Centric Warfare"

Rumsfeld set out to implement Bush's transformation vision with enthusiasm. He established the Office of Force Transformation in October 2001 and gave it the mission of synchronizing all of the transformation efforts of the services. The vision that the new office would embody was made clear by the selection of its first director, retired Admiral Arthur K. Cebrowski. Cebrowski had served in the Navy for more than 37 years. He had commanded a carrier air wing, the aircraft carrier USS Midway, and the USS America carrier battle group. He saw combat in both Vietnam and Operation Desert Storm. He retired from the position of president of the Naval War College. The new vision resonated with his experience as a naval officer, since naval warfare is characterized by operations in a fluid medium against limited arrays of targets on sea or on land.

Cebrowski was the perfect man to head an office charged with implementing the administration's transformation vision. Not only had he served as Director, Command, Control, Communications, and Computers of the Joint Staff (the body under the Joint Chiefs of Staff), but he helped to develop and to publicize a distinct vision of future warfare called Network-Centric Warfare (NCW). As the new head of the Defense Department's transformation effort, Cebrowski enshrined NCW as the goal of that effort and has repeatedly declared that transformation programs in the services will be judged by the extent to which they approach the NCW ideal.

It is difficult to define what, exactly, Network-Centric Warfare is. The clearest and most detailed exposition of the idea is given by David S. Alberts, John J. Gartska, and Frederick P. Stein in a book called Network Centric Warfare: Developing and Leveraging Information Superiority (CCRP Publications, second edition, 1999). Two of the authors were serving on the Joint Staff at the time the book was published, and the other was a retired U.S. Army colonel. Admiral Cebrowski figures prominently in the acknowledgments.

Alberts, Gartska, and Stein explain NCW in these terms:

We define NCW as an information superiority-enabled concept of operations that generates increased combat power by networking sensors, decision makers, and shooters to achieve shared awareness, increased speed of command, higher tempo of operations, greater lethality, increased survivability, and a degree of self-synchronization. In essence,
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NCW translates information superiority into combat power by effectively linking knowledgeable entities in the battlespace.

NCW thus aims to use the "near-perfect" intelligence that American satellites, aircraft, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), and other "sensors" are supposed to provide to permit commanders to identify the right targets and destroy them with precision-guided munitions.

NCW reflects an effort to translate a business concept of the 1990s into military practice. It is drawn explicitly from the examples of companies like Cisco Systems, Charles Schwab, Amazon.com, American Airlines, and Dell Computers, among others. According to Network Centric Warfare, all of these companies attained dramatic "competitive advantages" in their fields by creating vast and complex information networks. These companies can predict the level and types of product inventory they will need by tracking the orders of all of their customers. They can keep those inventories low by informing suppliers the moment products leave the shelves. They remain maximally adaptable by building products to the exact specifications of each customer and only when the customer wants them. In every case, information technology permitted enormous efficiencies by allowing corporations to make accurate predictions, minimize risk, and adapt rapidly to changing circumstances.

NCW applies this concept to the military. The key is achieving information superiority over the enemy: in lay terms, knowing more about ourselves, the battlefield, and the enemy than the enemy does and preventing him from knowing about us. Information superiority promises new capabilities in warfare: "Achieving information superiority increases the speed of command preempting adversary options, creates new options, and improves the effectiveness of selected options. This promises to bring operations to a successful conclusion more rapidly at a lower cost." The key to attaining and using information superiority lies in the network. All of the sensors available to the armed forces must be linked together electronically, from satellites to individual soldiers. They must be linked seamlessly with the commanders and the "shooters" to provide them with a "common operational picture," a shared vision of what is going on throughout the battlespace, the area in which operations are being conducted. This common operational picture allows commanders to make decisions more rapidly and bring precision fires to bear on the enemy more quickly and with greater effect.

The effect of NCW will be revolutionary and transformative, it is claimed. Many of the age-old precepts of how to organize armed forces and fight wars will have to be abandoned.

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wars will have to be abandoned. The creation of a complete network and the application of the various other concepts associated with NCW will "for the first time . . . provide us with the possibility of moving beyond a strategy based upon attrition, to one based upon shock and awe."

Shock and awe

"Shock and awe" is a complicated concept. It was developed in the mid-1990s by a team of former military officers and expounded in a book entitled Shock and Awe: Achieving Rapid Dominance in 1996 by Harlan K. Ullman and James P. Wade, two officers retired from the Navy and the Army respectively. Since the goal of NCW is achieving "shock and awe," it is worthwhile to examine the meaning and implications of that concept, especially in light of its explicit invocation during the most recent war against Iraq.

"Shock and awe" relies upon having unprecedented information superiority over the enemy. The key will be "dominant battlespace awareness," through which "the United States should be able to obtain perfect or near-perfect information on virtually all technical aspects of the battlefield and therefore be able to defeat or destroy an adversary more effectively, with fewer losses to ourselves and with a range of capabilities from long-range precision strike to more effective close-in weapons." This aspect of the concept raises significant technical concerns, since "dominant battlespace awareness" means not merely knowing what is going on perfectly, but having "the means to anticipate and to counter all opposing moves." The Air Force has adopted this concept to such an extent that a press release identifies as a critical "enabler" of its Global Strike Task Force a concept known as "predictive battlespace awareness . . . which provides decision-makers the ability to predict what actions the enemy is most likely to make."

"Shock and awe" will use this remarkable intelligence ability to neutralize the enemy's "ability to command; to provide logistics; to organize society." In a comparison that horrified some international observers when the Bush administration promised to apply "shock and awe" to Iraq, Ullman and Wade explain that "Shutting the [enemy] country down would entail both the physical destruction of appropriate infrastructure and the shutdown and control of the flow of all vital information and associated commerce so rapidly as to achieve a level of national shock akin to the effect that dropping nuclear weapons on Hiroshima and Nagasaki had on the Japanese."

Significant ground forces, in this picture, are to be used only if the enemy does not come quickly enough to heel in the aftermath of the "shock and awe" attack. The attack on the enemy's critical infrastructure and armed forces by long-range precision weapons must be protracted in order to "demonstrate to the adversary our endurance and staying power, that is, the
capability to dominate over as much time as is necessary less [sic] an enemy mistakenly try to wait it out and use time between attacks to recover sufficiently. If the enemy still resisted, then conventional forms of attack would follow resulting in the physical occupation of territory. Control is thus best gained by the demonstrated ability to sustain the stun effects of the initial rapid series of blows long enough to affect the enemy’s will and his means to continue.”

“Shock and awe,” Network-Centric Warfare, dominant (or predictive) battlespace awareness — these are the critical concepts that define the current visions of U.S. military transformation as they are being planned, programmed, and executed today. They rely unequivocally on having essentially perfect intelligence about the enemy such that American commanders will be able to predict what he will do in time to take action to prevent it. They also rely on the ability, both technical and political, to destroy whatever targets this perfect intelligence tells the commanders are critical to shocking and awing the enemy.

The politics of regime change

There is a great deal of merit to the concepts of NCW and “shock and awe.” The idea of networking all of the sensors, commanders, and shooters in the armed forces and creating common operational pictures is a good one and should be pursued aggressively. NCW’s goals of making the armed forces more adaptive, responsive, and versatile are also laudable. The “shock and awe” goal of defeating the enemy rapidly and decisively has been the aim of every major military from the dawn of time and should remain the goal of our military today. The dubiety of the concepts of perfect intelligence and “predictive battlespace awareness” are more troublesome, but they cannot be explored further in this article.

The most important problem with these visions of war is not anything within them, but the fact that they leave out the most important component of war — that which distinguishes it from organized but senseless violence. Neither NCW nor “shock and awe” provides a reliable recipe for translating the destruction of the enemy’s ability to continue to fight into the accomplishment of the political objectives of the conflict.

Both NCW and “shock and awe” focus on the rapidity with which the U.S. will begin, conduct, and end hostilities. They also insist that the American armed forces must retain a much lighter “footprint” in the theater. Because the information age has dramatically increased our ability to move information without increasing our ability to move tangible objects, it has made (in the words of Network Centric Warfare) “the movement of information far less costly than the movement of physical things. Thus, the economic dynamics of the information age will drive solutions that leave people and machines where they are (a smaller in-theater footprint), and use
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information to make those in theater more effective — that is, to find ways to put them in the right place more often, and mass effects rather than forces. Only the pointy end of the spear will move on the battlefield of the future.” The question at once emerges: What happens behind the pointy end of the spear? That is a critical question in war, because what happens behind the pointy end of the spear may well determine the political outcome of the campaign.

President Bush has transformed American security policy by declaring a doctrine not only of preemptive (or preventive) action, but of regime change. The U.S. has fought two such wars already since 9-11, and Bush has made it clear repeatedly that he is willing to contemplate others. Regime change is a complicated business. As historians of revolutionary wars know well, it is much easier to destroy a sitting regime than to establish a legitimate and stable new one. Cycles of violence in Latin America and Africa, the Soviet failure in Afghanistan, Napoleon’s defeat in Spain all show how readily even a relatively stable and secure government can be overthrown from within or without — and how difficult it can be to bring an end to the chaos and violence that normally follow. The true center of gravity in a war of regime change lies not in the destruction of the old system, but in the creation of the new one. NCW and “shock and awe” are silent on that most important task.

Both theories rely predominantly on long-range precision-guided munitions fired from aircraft, from naval ships, and, in some cases, from limited numbers of ground vehicles. The primary mechanism for influencing the situation in both concepts is destroying things and killing people. It is easy to ask flippantly whether that is not what war is all about. The answer is no. Combat is characterized by breaking things and killing people; war is about much more than that.

If the most difficult task facing a state that desires to change the regime in another state is securing the support of the defeated populace for the new government, then the armed forces of that state must do more than break things and kill people. They must secure critical population centers and state infrastructure. They have to maintain order and prevent the development of humanitarian catastrophes likely to undermine American efforts to establish a stable new regime. The notion articulated by the advocates of “shock and awe” that the U.S. should destroy the infrastructure that keeps the enemy’s country functioning reflects the degree to which they ignore this problem.

To be fair, this problem is a new one in the history of war. Never has it been possible to destroy the enemy’s armed forces and command and con-
trol centers without also physically occupying his territory. The only previous attempt was the strategic bombing of World War II, which substituted destruction for occupation. The advent of precision-guided munitions and expert targeting systems has made it possible to destroy the enemy’s ability to wage war without killing his civilians and even, if given enough time, skill, and luck, without occupation. The current generation of transformation enthusiasts has largely seized upon that fact as a liberation from the need to use ground forces, but they have not, for the most part, recognized its liabilities.

Imagine the following scenario. The U.S. has decided to change the regime in country x, which is currently ruled by an oppressive dictatorship actively hostile to America. U.S. armed forces launch a campaign of “shock and awe” using NCW concepts and systems. They shatter the command and control of the armed forces and the paramilitary police. They destroy all of the communications systems in the country. They take down significant parts of the electrical power grid in order to get at systems hidden in civilian areas that they prefer not to bomb directly for fear of collateral casualties. They destroy a significant number of enemy military systems. Let us imagine that, faced with this destruction, the enemy government breaks and flees (although recent events in Iraq, Afghanistan, Kosovo, and elsewhere highlight the dangers of lightly accepting this critical assumption of both NCW and “shock and awe”). Let us suppose, finally, that the entire campaign was conducted with no significant American presence in the country. What is the situation in x?

The destruction of the army and a paramilitary police have deprived the society of all law and order. Jubilant crowds liberated from an oppressive tyranny sack and loot government offices — and, carried away in their enthusiasm, begin the process of “wealth redistribution” on a large scale. Collaborators and suspected collaborators of the regime are summarily killed when they can be found, and such activities serve also as a cover for the settling of many a private score. Local individuals rise to power in various regions based on their abilities to get their neighbors to work together to restore order and essential services. When American (or U.N.) forces finally roll in to try to install a government of the variety desired, the locals frequently view them with mistrust and hostility. Some even become nostalgic for the old, brutal regime because they enjoyed a greater degree of security.

They may resent the fact that American bombs shattered their society and created a humanitarian crisis despite the fact that those bombs were carefully aimed to avoid harming them directly. They may equally resent U.S.
efforts to install leaders suitable to American interests despite the pragmatic choices of the local populace. At a minimum, the normal functioning of the society in x has been crushed under the weight of “shock and awe,” and the absence of American ground forces has created a vacuum calling forth all of the baser and most violent instincts of the locals — in addition, no doubt, to some of the nobler ones. This scenario is the likely result of the application of “shock and awe” and NCW as they are embodied in U.S. military transformation plans.

This description is not so much of Iraq but of Afghanistan. In Iraq the presence of the equivalent of four divisions provided the coalition with the ability to control Baghdad and Basra and, subsequently (and with some difficulty), Mosul, Tikrit, and other important population centers. There were not enough ground forces to do the job adequately, and they were not sufficiently trained to transition immediately from warfighting to peacekeeping. The deliberate destruction of the Iraqi communication system and parts of its power grid during the war compromised that transition even more. The violence and looting were among the results, and they tarnished America’s image in Iraq and in the world as well, hindering the development of a new regime in Iraq in accord with U.S. wishes. With more ground forces immediately available and a better thought-out plan for using them as the war ended, much of this difficulty could have been avoided. It is unlikely that those failures will have denied us the achievement of our political goal in Iraq, but they have certainly made it harder.

But Afghanistan, not Iraq, is the model for America’s future wars according to our transformation programs. And the outcome of that way of war resembles the grim scenario pictured above much more closely. Throughout the conduct of active operations against the Taliban, the U.S. had only a handful of Special Forces (SF) soldiers on the ground and no forces from the regular Army or Marines at all. The SF troops worked with local Afghan militias to help them communicate with each other and, most important, with American aircraft and ships that could rain down precision-guided munitions on appropriate Taliban targets. Many of those militias were bribed to fight with CIA money, which was much easier to get into Afghanistan than American ground forces.

When the Taliban broke and fled, however, no one was in control of the country. The Northern Alliance occupied Kabul, but everyone knew that they could not simply form a government, since they represented only minority ethnicities within Afghanistan. Friendly Pashtun tribes occupied Kandahar and its surroundings, but they proved remarkably reluctant to purge their ranks of Taliban and al Qaeda sympathizers. Elsewhere, regional
warlords used their CIA money to set up their own independent palatinates. Violence broke out across the country. It became impossible for individuals to travel safely from one city to another without encountering roadblocks belonging to warlords and independent bandits. Fighting broke out among rival groups.

With great difficulty, the U.S. managed to broker the formation of a government it found suitable — one that awarded de facto control of the country to its Northern Alliance friends with the fig leaf of Pashtun control in the form of President Hamid Karzai. That government was unable to establish its legitimacy beyond Kabul for more than a year, and even now the painstaking process continues only because it is supported by thousands of American and international troops. It is hard to imagine that those troops will be able to withdraw anytime soon without completely undermining the stability of the new regime. Regime change via precision weapons in Afghanistan has created a mess for which the U.S. is responsible.

What would the scenario look like if American ground forces were present in sufficient numbers with adequate training and planning for the transition from war to peace? First, there would be no doubt about who was in control and no power vacuum. The armed forces that had defeated the old government, and that thereby held the respect of the population, would be visibly in charge of the new situation. The likelihood is that the locals would mostly simply adapt to the change of leadership rather than attempting to take advantage of the situation for their own benefit. It would not be necessary to put down individuals claiming to wield local authority before installing a government that suited U.S. political goals. It would be much easier, therefore, for that new government to gain legitimacy in the eyes of the people, since it would not seem to be usurping the authority of a nascent "native" government.

In addition, despite Bush’s hostility to the concept, American soldiers have extensive experience with peacekeeping. They know how to separate hostile groups, how to restore police authority and keep order, how to dispense food and medical supplies. They even know how to set up emergency hospitals, generators, and water purification and treatment plants and how to get sewage systems working again. In short, American soldiers and Marines can provide all of the essential services necessary to keep a defeated society functioning, to stave off humanitarian disasters, and to prevent the population from becoming resentful at the destruction of their lives and society and the collapse of order. They can establish the critical preconditions for a relatively smooth transfer of power from the defeated regime to the desired
Transformation programs

The Bush Administration has been allocating defense resources in accord with the priorities and vision of future war defined by NCW and "shock and awe." All of the major transformation efforts in the military services and the major military systems under research, development, and construction focus on improving the armed forces' ability to destroy enemy targets precisely, rapidly, and from hundreds (or thousands) of miles away. One Air Force officer went so far as to claim that it is possible "that in our lifetime we will be able to run a conflict without ever leaving the United States."

The systems highlighted in the Department of Defense's press release describing the FY 2004 budget request demonstrate this trend. Apart from national missile defense and upgrades to the Patriot air defense system, the main programs described as being transformational were: the Navy's CVN-21 aircraft carrier, the DD(X) land-attack destroyer, the CG(X) air defense cruiser, the conversion of four Trident ballistic missile submarines to carry land-attack Tomahawk cruise missiles and Special Forces teams, new satellite systems, new digital communications systems, space-based radar, unmanned aerial vehicles, the Army's Future Combat System, Stryker Interim Brigade Combat Teams, and the Comanche helicopter. The budget also includes support for the Joint Strike Fighter (JSF) and the F-22.

In general terms, the Navy is working hard to get its ships closer to the coastlines of enemy states so that they can participate more effectively in the precision-strike operations that are rapidly becoming their primary reason for existence. Considerable doubts have arisen about the utility of the JSF and the F-22, but the Air Force has been able to save those programs by arguing that they, too, support transformation by augmenting U.S. precision-strike capabilities. All of the services are working hard to implement the technical concepts of Network-Centric Warfare in their systems, and even to retrofit older systems with the new technology.

The Army's programs are also taking that service firmly in the direction of NCW and focusing on the ability to attack the enemy from stand-off ranges. The technological core of the Objective Force — the Army of the future — is the Future Combat System (FCS). The FCS is a "family of systems" including the equivalents of tanks and infantry carriers as well as unmanned aerial vehicles and robots. In a white paper, the Army describes the role of the Objective Force on the battlefield as follows:

Objective Force Units will see first, understand first, act first and finish decisively as the means to tactical success. Operations will be character-
ized by developing situations out of contact; maneuvering to positions of advantage; engaging enemy forces beyond the range of their weapons; destroying them with precision fires; and, as required, by tactical assault at times and places of our choosing. Commanders will accomplish this by maneuvering dispersed tactical formations of Future Combat Systems units linked by web-centric C4ISR capabilities for common situational dominance.

The emphasis throughout this vision is on stand-off capabilities. The situation will be developed “out of contact,” that is, by satellite and airborne sensors rather than by the armed reconnaissance of ground elements. Yet one of the advantages of using ground forces to conduct reconnaissance is that the very presence of such forces compels the enemy to react. In this way it is possible to gain an understanding not only of where the enemy is, but also of how he is likely to behave when the attack begins. Long-range sensors cannot discern these characteristics of an enemy force because frequently the enemy does not know how he will react until he is actually confronted with a particular situation. It is clear that “developing the situation” has come to mean, even for the Army, simply identifying targets.

Once the target set has been developed, Objective Force units will fire their own long-range precision munitions and destroy the enemy before they come into range of his own weapons. In this way, they will largely duplicate capabilities that the other services have already perfected. It matters not at all where a precision weapon is launched from as long as it can reach and destroy its target. Having ground forces that can deliver such weapons does not, by itself, present any advantage over having air and sea forces that can do so if the objective is simply target destruction.

The Army has adopted this approach for two major reasons. The first is casualty aversion. The safest way to fight is never to be within range of the enemy’s guns. Army leaders, laudably trying to minimize American casualties, have seen in the superior range and destructiveness of stand-off weapons a way to achieve that goal. The other reason, however, is that it seems highly likely that individual FCS vehicles will be unable to survive in close combat with enemy systems.

**Deployability vs. survivability**

The Army has identified “deployability” as the most critical characteristic of its future forces. They must be able to move from the U.S. to anywhere overseas in a matter of hours. The Army leadership has concluded, therefore, that weapons systems must be lighter. That conclusion means that, at least for the foreseeable future, those systems will not be able to withstand direct enemy attack as well as current systems do.

The Objective Force gets around this problem by redefining the concept
of “survivability.” In the past, a vehicle was survivable if its armor plating was thick enough to withstand the impact of enemy weapons. The problem is that such armor protection today is extremely heavy: The M1 tank weighs 70 tons. It is not at all clear that materials permitting a much lighter vehicle to have the same degree of protection will be developed by 2008, the target date for fielding the first elements of the FCS.

So now the Objective Force relies not on being able to survive enemy attacks, but on being able to destroy the enemy before he can attack. Survivability has become an offensive function: “Objective Force survivability will be linked to its inherently offensive orientation, as well as its speed and lethality. By seizing the initiative and seeing, understanding, and acting first, the Objective Force will enhance its own survivability through action and its retention of the initiative.” This issue was put even more clearly in a recent evaluation of the progress of the development of the FCS family of vehicles: “Survivability is uniquely dependent on the effectiveness of network integration to ensure that the FCS [Unit of Action — equivalent to a brigade] can see first, understand first, and act first, [sic] finish decisively. The objective is to engage and destroy the enemy before the enemy can close with the FCS [Unit of Action].” Because information superiority will permit the Army to avoid close combat, lightness is regarded as a virtue in itself.

Although Army transformation papers always make a point of adding that the FCS vehicles must be able to survive on their own, their own concepts for employing the system belie that claim. If the systems can survive on their own, then their survivability is not “uniquely dependent” on being able to “see first, understand first, and act first.” The repeated statements of that dependence bring into question the Army’s own belief about the ability of its systems to survive enemy attacks on their own.

This problem is central to Army transformation, although it is generally relegated to the last few slides and covered very quickly in Army briefings. If the systems cannot survive on their own in the presence of enemy forces, if they can survive only by killing everything that might harm them, then they cannot play their necessary role in operations other than war, including those supporting the transition from war to peace.

Shock, awe, and peacekeeping

The advocates of NCW and “shock and awe” do not ignore peacekeeping, nation-building, and other operations other than war. In 1995, the Institute for National Strategic Studies Center for Advanced Command Concepts and Technology at the National Defense University held a workshop to consider approaches to the development of technologies applicable to such situations. It discussed non-lethal weapons, the use of advanced technological training systems to prepare troops for OOTW, the development of body armor and improved language translation.
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capabilities, and intelligence systems. The latter consisted of sensors, displays, and dissemination methods/devices. According to OOTW: The Technological Dimension (National Defense University Press, 1995), sensors included “humans with enhanced capability (night vision, etc.) to micro-sensors that monitor and report on the operational and tactical situations. Unmanned or remote sensors can substitute for humans and thereby limit troop exposure in dangerous areas.”

The application of such technological developments to OOTW environments holds a certain amount of promise, but the key will be in the approach to the problem those technologies are applied to. Here the situation is more worrisome. The authors of Shock and Awe (one of whom participated in the study on technologies in OOTW) believe that their approach to war is also an approach to operations other than war:

In OOTW, the Rapid Dominance J[oint] T[ask] F[orce] might function as follows. First, the ability to deploy dominant force rapidly to attack or threaten to attack appropriate targets could be brought to bear without involving manpower-intensive or manned sensors and weapons. Second, once deployed, since self-defense is likely to be required against small arms, mines, and shoulder carried or mortar weapons, certainly some form of “armor” or protective vehicles and shelters would be necessary. However, through the UAVs, C4I, and virtual reality systems, as well as through signature management and other Shock and Awe weapons including High Powered Microwave (HPM) and “stun-like” systems, this force would have more than dominant battlefield awareness.

The continued emphasis on reducing the number of American troops deployed in the theater (it is odd to call the area in which operations other than war take place a “battlefield”) by relying on robots and UAVs and on finding and attacking targets highlights an incomprehension of the basic problems entailed in OOTW. The throwaway line that armor will continue to be important in OOTW is not persuasive in the context of theories that argue that armor has no validity in future combat. Will the U.S. stand up “peacekeeping” or “OOTW” units that are armored while removing the armor from the rest of the force? It seems unlikely. American forces in OOTW missions are likely to have the same systems that rely on “seeing first” and “shooting first” as the rest of the Army.

But peacekeepers cannot shoot everyone who might harm them. There are many situations, even in war, in which it will not be desirable to destroy every enemy tank and military vehicle that might come within range of our systems. Success in such operations relies on taking risks mitigated by the fact that American soldiers have a sporting chance of survival even if the enemy opens fire. In many circumstances it is highly desirable to allow the enemy to take the first shot. Otherwise, the peacekeeping force risks generating a crisis that might otherwise have been avoided and compromising the
success of its own mission.

But forces in lightly armored vehicles that rely on their ability to kill things to survive cannot afford to let the enemy shoot first. The best they could hope for would be intelligence systems that would warn them every time someone was about to shoot at them — so they could kill first. But how will that look on CNN? The world, and the locals, will see only a succession of “unprovoked” American attacks on “innocent villagers.” This entire doctrine is inappropriate to any concept of OOTW that stands a chance of achieving political success.

In sum, Army transformation has taken the same path as the rest of defense transformation, focusing on the rapid identification and destruction of targets from great distances at the expense of the capabilities needed to mingle with the local population and enemy military forces safely and effectively in a complex peacekeeping or transitional environment. The rest of the transformation program is developing in such a way as to value stand-off weapons over the employment of any ground forces at all. The flaws in Army transformation may thus become irrelevant because of the larger flaws inherent in defense transformation overall.

Operation Iraqi Freedom

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peration Iraqi Freedom has done nothing to slow these trends. As the war ended, a chorus began to sing the praises of military transformation as demonstrated in that war. One reporter declared, “Iraq, in fact, may be remembered as the first true war of the information age, when command-and-control technology took over the battlefield.” Vice President Cheney claimed that the war provided “proof positive of the success of our efforts to transform our military.” Cebrowski himself gleaned lessons from the conflict that reinforce the direction in which transformation was already headed. As Aerospace Daily reported (April 23, 2003), a “fertile area” to research for lessons learned, he said, is the level of network-centric warfare practiced by small units or isolated systems — the ‘last mile of connectivity.’ . . . A key focus will be studying ‘differences in performance and tactics by people who were well-connected at the tactical level and who were not.’” Asked about the role the M1 tanks played in the war, Cebrowski concluded that “the Army’s tanks should be at most half the weight they are now, but equipped with better sensors to improve situational awareness. ‘I come down more on the speed and information side,’ he said.”

Although some observers, most of them attached to the Army, have attempted to argue that this war demonstrated the continued centrality of ground forces, the trend is very much in the other direction. More and more, Operation Iraqi Freedom is used to emphasize the importance and value of long-range stand-off weapons systems and their superiority to “traditional” methods of war that include the use of ground forces. Once again, the
mantra is that we have entered a “new era” and are developing a “new American way of war.” It is natural that, in such a context, the focus of attention should be on the things that are new, such as the concepts of NCW and our weapons that are described as not merely smart, now, but “brilliant.”

But is this lesson the right one? Did Iraqi Freedom really prove that NCW is opening the path to a bright new dawn in which ground forces — indeed, manned weapons systems of any variety — will be unnecessary? Such conclusions are overdrawn and proceed more from seeing what some would like to see than from carefully examining the events themselves. In many respects, even the questions are wrong. If one starts by asking whether or not the war has “proven” the validity of NCW concepts, there is a great danger of focusing so closely on that question as to miss the bigger picture.

How did we actually win the war? One problem that bedevils this question is that the Iraqi armed forces were in poor shape to confront us. The U.S. and its allies smashed the Iraqi military thoroughly in 1991. They destroyed enormous quantities of the most significant Iraqi equipment, including a large percentage of Iraq’s modern tank and artillery systems. Saddam had to remove entire units from his order of battle. The Tawakalna Republican Guards division destroyed at the Battle of 73 Easting, for instance, was disbanded completely and had not even a namesake in the most recent conflict.

The sanctions the U.N. imposed on Iraq following its invasion of Kuwait eviscerated Saddam’s attempts to restore his military. He was unable to replace destroyed hardware and unable to train his army properly even to 1991 levels, let alone to the level that would have been necessary to pose a serious challenge to U.S. forces today. Because of U.N.-imposed “no-fly” zones, he was not in control of large portions of his own territory. U.S. and British warplanes had been bombing his antiaircraft sites and radar installations for a decade.

Saddam’s plan to seed the rear of the coalition forces with Fedayeen was inventive but inadequate. Those troops did not have the weapons necessary to conduct the guerrilla warfare Saddam had wished, which would have been challenging in any case given Iraq’s terrain. Saddam also intended, wisely, to blow up the bridges that led over the Euphrates and, perhaps, the Tigris. For unknown reasons his troops failed to execute that plan, which might well have delayed the coalition offensive significantly.

Above all, Saddam seems to have relied on an overly optimistic notion of what would happen at the level of international politics. He seeded Basra,
Najaf, Baghdad, and other critical cities with troops specifically intended to prevent the populations from “going over” to the coalition. He eschewed the use of chemical and biological weapons, although he did lob some banned (but conventionally armed) missiles at coalition forces and Kuwait. He seems to have been determined to prevent U.S. forces from entering Baghdad for as long as possible. Rather than deploying his troops within the city, as many in the West had feared he would, he deployed the bulk of his Republican Guard troops to the south of his capital and attempted to fight coalition forces as they advanced. When allied air and ground attacks had seriously depleted the ranks of those defenders, he even reinforced them with troops drawn from further north.

The likeliest explanation is that Saddam hoped that, as the war dragged on, outrage against the coalition attack would mount. The French, Germans, Russians, Belgians, and Chinese had all manifested hostility to the invasion. Saddam may well have hoped that if the U.S. did not win speedily, those countries would press America and Britain to accept a compromise. He may also have hoped that the sight of American forces in Iraq and the deaths of Arabs, played up graphically and dramatically on al-Jazeera, would provoke an explosion in the “Arab street” that would at least distract the coalition and, possibly, force it to negotiate a settlement that left him, or perhaps a relative, in power in Iraq.

As a result of this strategy, whatever precisely had motivated it, Saddam did not make things as hard for the coalition as he might have. A large proportion of his military equipment remained in compact, concentrated formations in the open — presenting excellent and easy targets for our firepower. It is worth noting that the presence of American ground troops in significant numbers was the primary reason for this deployment. Having decided, for whatever reason, to oppose the advance of the coalition ground forces, Saddam had to concentrate his own troops to do so. If there had been no coalition ground offensive, it is almost certain that Saddam would have dispersed his own ground troops to positions of better cover and thereby made their destruction from the air more arduous and time-consuming.

Rather than concentrating the zealots who made up the Saddam Fedayeen for a climactic battle in the streets of Baghdad, moreover, Saddam dispersed them in small pockets throughout the country, where they were unable to achieve anything of operational significance. He did little to try to impede the rapid forward movement of coalition forces. The bottom line is that the coalition forces could probably have “demonstrated” the “validity” of just about any concept of war against such a foe.
War and Aftermath

It is possible, nevertheless, to discern some lessons from this war as long as we are careful to consider not merely what Saddam did, but what a more skillful and better prepared enemy might have done in his place. And there were a number of events that are quite revealing about the limitations of the NCW and "shock and awe" approaches, and about the continued significance of heavy ground forces.

Coalition airpower and precision capabilities played a critical role in this victory, to be sure. Using a high proportion of "smart" munitions, including new satellite-guided bombs and bombs specifically designed to destroy bunkers, the air attack severely degraded Saddam’s ability to command and control his forces, as well as destroying a significant (if yet to be determined) percentage of those forces directly. Apparently Saddam was reduced to using runners to send messages to his scattered units at times to try to keep them in the loop. By accomplishing these tasks, the air campaign made the ground campaign possible. Coalition forces could not have advanced as rapidly with as little concern for their flanks and rear without the successful air campaign.

But the air campaign by itself could not have won this war as rapidly or as decisively as the joint air-land attack did. The "shock and awe" campaign failed to accomplish its hoped-for goal of convincing Saddam or his lieutenants to surrender. The reason for this failure has been disputed. Harlan Ullman, one of the authors of Shock and Awe, deprecated the air campaign the Pentagon had claimed would induce "shock and awe": "What they announced at the beginning of the war as shock and awe seems to me was largely PR," he told the Washington Times (March 31, 2003). "It did not bring the great shock and awe that we had envisaged." He argued that "this air campaign appears to come out of a book by strategic-air-power advocates, who have argued that you start at the center and work your way out to disrupt and destroy whatever." In his view, the coalition should have worked at once to "take away [Saddam’s] ability to run the country and the ability to fight.... The argument is that may cause a sufficient amount of ‘shock and awe’ it [sic] will force them to surrender.... As we theoretically envisaged it, we would have gone straight after the Republican Guard and its leadership and not just with precision-guided weapons." Ullman ignores the fact that the destruction of more targets in order to achieve shock and awe would have killed thousands more civilians and thereby further undermined America’s political objectives. Nor is it at all clear that such further destruction would have made any difference to the Iraqi regime.

One would have thought that part of the problem was that the "shock and awe" campaign itself did not live up to its promised level of intensity, but defenders of "shock and awe" dismiss that notion. Fox News military analyst Lieutenant General Thomas McInerney (USAF, Ret.) claimed that although the attack fell short of the 3,000 precision-guided bombs dropped in the first 24 hours that the administration had promised, that exaggeration had been good: "We wanted that [3,000-PGM number] out there....
Frederick W. Kagan

That number has an intimidating effect. There was a little tactical [sic] deception.” This line of argument is fully consistent with the principles outlined in Shock and Awe itself:

Psychological dominance means the ability to destroy, defeat, and neutralize the will of an adversary to resist; or convince the adversary to accept our terms and aims short of using force. The target is the adversary’s will, perception, and understanding. Clearly, deception, confusion, misinformation, and disinformation, perhaps in massive amounts, must be employed.

In the case of Iraq, this approach clearly failed. Saddam Hussein was not cowed by the threat of war with the U.S., despite his knowledge that his armed forces could not stand up to those of the coalition. The threat of the “shock and awe” campaign, even thus exaggerated, also failed to bring him to his knees. The implementation of that campaign, finally, did not convince him to abandon his increasingly tenuous hold on power. He never surrendered. At the time of this writing, months after the end of active resistance, Saddam’s location remains unknown. Whatever the abilities of shock and awe in the future, Iraqi Freedom clearly demonstrated not its triumph but its current limitations.

The reasons given for the restriction of the target lists and the limitations on the intensity of the air attack are equally instructive. Senior Air Force officials noted that, on the one hand, some targets were too politically sensitive to hit, at least in the first round: “They defend the decision to put some dual-use targets off-limits. They say this is a war about liberation and the lives of average Iraqi citizens, and that the task of postwar reconstruction must be considered,” the Washington Times article reported. These points are valid and important, and they also vitiate some of the critical assumptions of “shock and awe.” It was not the goal of the U.S. to destroy Iraq’s ability to continue to function as a country or a society — only to drive Saddam from power. In that context, the “shock and awe” goal of “shutting down the country” was completely inappropriate, and the Air Force, wisely, did not try to accomplish it. Since that goal has also been accepted as the goal of NCW, this consideration brings the contradiction between the methods proposed and the ends desired into sharp relief.

On the other hand, Air Force officials say that they did not destroy Saddam’s communications and even television broadcasting capabilities completely for an entirely different reason — doing so would have deprived them of the ability to obtain the critical intelligence necessary to continue the campaign: “Military sources say there are valid reasons for leaving some structures alone, but acknowledge that doing so reduces the shock effect,” according to the Washington Times article. “For example, Baghdad's state-run TV gives the Bush administration an idea of who is in charge and who might be dead. Leaving the telecommunications network up allows the National Security Agency to eavesdrop on leadership conversations.” It is an
inherent problem with an approach based on near-perfect intelligence derived from electronic measures that the more one destroys the enemy’s ability to communicate, the less one can know “nearly perfectly” about his intentions and actions. So much for “predictive battlespace awareness.”

The failure of “shock and awe” to bring Saddam to heel is not surprising, at least to those skeptical of the assumptions that underlie the concept. It was more surprising that our firepower was not even able to prevent the Iraqi ground forces from maneuvering on occasion into the immediate vicinity of our own ground forces. On March 26, elements of the Republican Guard mounted a daring armored raid south from Baghdad under cover of a sandstorm. Although our firepower severely damaged the raiding forces and significantly reduced their combat power, the raiders nevertheless made contact with the lead elements of the Third Infantry Division — which promptly destroyed them. Given all of the promises involved in near-perfect intelligence and the ability to hit any target anywhere any time, it is hard to understand how the supposedly helpless Iraqis managed to move a large armored force close enough to make contact with our advanced guard.

Above all, however, the air campaign did not succeed in removing the regime. Saddam’s agents throughout the country kept order and prevented pro-coalition demonstrations even in territory, like Basra, which the coalition nominally controlled. When coalition forces had effectively surrounded Baghdad while the air campaign against the city continued mercilessly, the regime did not crumble. It fell only when our tanks drove into Saddam’s capital, thus visibly demonstrating to the world that Saddam no longer controlled his country.

As a result of this fact, a considerable number of observers have asked whether that war did not emphasize the importance of the defensive survivability characteristics of the M1 tank. Cebrowski does not think so: “Despite the strong showing of the M1 tank in Operation ‘Iraqi Freedom’,,” reported *Jane’s Defense Weekly* in May, Cebrowski said that “he tends to ‘come down more on the speed and information side’ over the value of armour in protecting a force in combat.” He explained, “I look at these marvellous navy and air force munitions and what they do to armour. I look at what one of our own tank rounds does to everyone else’s armour in the world. The notion that steel protects just does not seem to be there because it does not protect in the absolute.”

It is worth briefly considering the record of the M1’s performance in Iraq and the role the heavy armored forces played in that victory. The Iraqis, like most of the other enemies the U.S. can expect to face in the near and even
not-so-near future, did not try to launch any air- or sea-based munitions against American forces. That was because they could not get any aircraft into the skies, nor could any of their ships have survived against our naval superiority long enough to get off rounds at land targets. If the Iraqis had been able to contest American control over the air and sea, moreover, critical assumptions that underlie both NCW and “shock and awe” would have collapsed and the fate of U.S. armored forces would have been, in many respects, only a small part of an enormous crisis. The notion that the potential power of enemy naval and air munitions makes defending U.S. vehicles with armor impossible is highly questionable.

Several M1s were lost, nevertheless, to enemy fire. None were killed by Iraqi tank main guns. At least two were disabled when the Iraqis used large-caliber, rapid-firing anti-aircraft guns to shoot through the “grill doors” of the engine compartments and damage the engines. One of those tanks was subsequently hit with a mortar round that set off its own ammunition in a massive explosion. The tank was, of course, destroyed. The crew, however, survived unharmed — including the driver, who was in the vehicle when its ammunition exploded. It is possible to kill an M1, but it is extremely difficult, and the tank’s ability to protect its crew even when totally destroyed is astonishing. This is a weapons system whose crew does not need to fear having less than perfect intelligence about the enemy.

The effective invulnerability of the M1 against the Iraqis played a critical role in the rapid, decisive victory that was Iraqi Freedom. On April 5, 2003, tanks, Bradleys, and other vehicles of the Third Infantry Division drove into the heart of Baghdad and back out again. On April 7, they raced into the center of the city and stayed. The Third did not have to wait either until it had perfect intelligence about what was going on in the city or until most of the enemy weapon’s systems had been identified by UAVs and robots and destroyed with precision weapons. Relying on its superior armor protection, it raced into the city before the “situation” had been fully “developed.” The Iraqi regime collapsed suddenly and spectacularly. The attacks on Mosul, Tikrit, and elsewhere encountered much less resistance than had been expected.

This method of “urban warfare” flew in the face of all of the received wisdom about how to fight in cities. For more than a decade the U.S. armed forces have been telling themselves and the world that urban warfare is hard, manpower intensive, slow, and likely to cause high casualties. Many have argued that urban warfare is a light infantry fight for which there is little room for armor. No one believed that taking Baghdad would be rapid or easy.
It is inappropriate to generalize about urban warfare from this one experience. The Iraqi Army was weak to begin with and severely degraded at the time of the strike, as was the senior civilian and military leadership of the country. It is quite possible that another enemy would have made the sort of “thunder run” that the Third Infantry Division conducted impossibly costly. The fact remains, however, that the effective invulnerability of the M1 tank made possible a rapid and decisive conclusion to the war. In the days preceding that armored raid, analysts were still discussing a siege of Baghdad or its methodical reduction.

There can be no doubt that the war would have dragged on for days, possibly weeks longer if the U.S. had not had forces with the survival characteristics of the M1 (consider how long Milosevic stood up under the bombings of Operation Allied Force). The fastest and most bloodless approach to ending a conflict rapidly and decisively combines firepower capabilities of the sort NCW advocates with an effective and invulnerable ground force.

Transformation proponents are correct when they warn that the M1 will not continue to be survivable forever. There are already systems available in the leading militaries of the world that can kill it directly — and the Saudis and Egyptians both have large fleets of M1s themselves. It is equally clear, however, that the U.S. cannot afford to do away with the capabilities the M1 provides without sacrificing the ability to finish the enemy quickly and then transition rapidly to effective peacekeeping and nation-building. The logical conclusion is that the transformation agenda must be redirected. Instead of relying on “predictive battlespace awareness” and devoting all of the available resources to stand-off weapons systems, the military should prioritize efforts to develop vehicles and systems that can reliably protect themselves and their crews passively without destroying the enemy. The ability simply to sit on some spot and hold it without killing anyone is one of the most important aspects of the Army’s contribution to war, and it is critical to peacekeeping. The preservation of that capability must be a central part of any rational transformation program. Such a change in the program seems unlikely, however, as long as the current trends within the Pentagon remain strong.

Long-distance grand strategy

The notion that the U.S. should “be able to run a conflict without ever leaving the United States” is deeply embedded in the plans and programs of the Bush administration. Rumsfeld has been trying for more than a year to reduce the size of the active-duty Army and the reserves by 20 percent in order to pay for his vision of transformation. He has also supported a series of proposals that would pull American forces out of their European bases and Korea. The basic justification for these proposals is that our long-range precision weapons make such forward basing
unnecessary. Defense Department officials recently argued, in fact, that simply letting the North Koreans know that we have the capability to target their leadership in the first strike of a conflict might be enough to deter them — and might make a significant American presence in South Korea superfluous.

Just as the ideas about war that current transformation programs embrace neglect the problem of moving from military victory to the attainment of political objectives, so these proposals to slash overseas presence neglect the political aspects of those deployments. American forces, especially ground forces, deployed overseas represent a strong statement of U.S. commitment to a region. They give the United States a powerful voice in regional developments and help America to set the terms of political discussions in regions of vital interest. They also, of course, facilitate the rapid deployment of force to potential theaters of war — Europe is, as the Army likes to say, “an ocean closer” to the Middle East than the U.S. is. The United States must consider carefully the political consequences of being seen to pull back from visible commitments it has sustained, in many cases, for more than half a century.

Everyone knows that the U.S. can, in principle, defend any of its allies from attack. The presence of American forces overseas has nothing to do with that. The question is: Will the U.S. honor its agreements? The presence of American forces in the theater of operations has made it much easier for American leaders to persuade fearful allies that they would be defended. The withdrawal of those forces could send the opposite message just as clearly.

The proposed cuts in the size of the Army may send the same message even more powerfully. The U.S. Army now has 10 active divisions, two armored cavalry regiments (the equivalent of a brigade, one-third of a division), and one separate airborne brigade. Keeping one unit in a peacekeeping or nation-building operation for a long period of time (more than six months or so) requires the commitment of three units: one actually conducting the mission, one recovering from it, and one training for it. The U.S. currently has more than four divisions (approximately 15 brigades) in Iraq restoring order. At its current strength, the Army cannot maintain a force of this size in Iraq for more than a year. In addition, the Army now maintains more than a brigade in Afghanistan and another in the Balkans. In order simply to sustain the current peacekeeping and nation-building requirements the Bush administration has undertaken — in other words, with no ability to conduct any sort of operations elsewhere at all — the Army would need to have more than 14 active divisions instead of the current 10.
War and Aftermath

The Defense Department projected in June that it would be possible in a matter of a few months to begin reducing the commitment to Iraq down to two divisions or even one. This prediction seems highly optimistic given the current state of the country. Yet keeping only one division in Iraq for a substantial period of time and maintaining current operations in Afghanistan and the Balkans would require the permanent commitment of five divisions — half the active-duty Army. If the Army’s strength falls to eight divisions, remaining forces will be insufficient to deal with any but the smallest unexpected contingencies. We will be unable again to fight a war as politically successful even as Iraqi Freedom.

Back to Clausewitz

If the U.S. is to undertake wars that aim at regime change and maintain its current critical role in controlling and directing world affairs, then it must fundamentally change its views of war. It is not enough to consider simply how to pound the enemy into submission with stand-off forces. War plans must also consider how to make the transition from that defeated government to a new one. A doctrine based on the notion that superpowers don’t do windows will fail in this task. Regime change is inextricably intertwined with nation-building and peacekeeping. Those elements must be factored into any such plan from the outset.

It is a fundamental mistake to see the enemy as a set of targets. The enemy in war is a group of people. Some of them will have to be killed. Others will have to be captured or driven into hiding. The overwhelming majority, however, have to be persuaded. They must be persuaded not merely of the shocking awfulness of American power, but of the desirability of pursuing the policies the U.S. wishes them to pursue. And they must not be driven away from the pursuit of those policies by the horrors and opportunities presented by a chaotic, lawless vacuum created by our precision weapons. To effect regime change, U.S. forces must be positively in control of the enemy’s territory and population as rapidly and continuously as possible. That control cannot be achieved by machines, still less by bombs. Only human beings interacting with other human beings can achieve it. The only hope for future success in the extension of politics that is war is to restore the human element to the transformation equation.