

BEYOND VOM KRIEGE

The Character and Conduct of
Modern War

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Beyond Vom Kriege: The Character and Conduct of Modern War

By R. D. Hooker, Jr.

Foreword by LTG H. R. McMaster

The technology of warfare has changed since Carl von Clausewitz's *Vom Kriege* was first published, but the fundamental nature of modern warfare is still the same. *Beyond Vom Kriege* furthers Clausewitz's theory of war by offering a first-hand account of global conflicts and strategies that influenced American national security strategy across six presidential administrations. Intelligence officers and policy makers will appreciate this honest and clear-cut essay collection, which includes reflections on Grenada, Somalia, Iraq, and Afghanistan. A foreword by LTG H. R. McMaster begins this valuable collection of military strategy.

“This is a book of great value to military professionals, civilian policymakers, and all those interested in issues of national and international security. The essays will help deepen understanding of and provide perspective for contemporary issues. And they also serve as an example of what it means to be a true military professional. Admiral James Stavridis, the former Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR), enjoined officers to “live well, write about it, and write it well.” R. D. Hooker has done just that.

—LTG H. R. McMaster

Beyond Vom Kriege: The Character and Conduct of Modern War



R. D. Hooker, Jr., author

R. D. Hooker, Jr., is a University Professor and the Theodore Roosevelt Chair in National Security Affairs at the National Defense University. He served three tours as a director and senior director with the National Security Council; as director for the Institute for National Strategic Studies at NDU; and as dean of the NATO Defense College in Rome. He served for 30 years in the United States Army as an infantry officer and participated in combat operations in Grenada, Somalia, Kosovo, Iraq, and Afghanistan, including command of a parachute brigade in Baghdad.

★ “A thoughtful, comprehensive, and incisive look at modern warfare in its many dimensions. R. D. Hooker combines deep practical experience as a warfighter and policymaker with an extensive academic background to produce a rich and varied assessment of how and why we fight in the 21st century. A must-read for students and practitioners of national security alike.”

—**Admiral James Stavridis**, U.S. Navy (Retired), former Commander, U.S. European Command, and Supreme Allied Commander Europe

★ “If you want to explore the character of modern warfare and critical issues of national security and strategy, read this book! *Beyond Vom Kriege* is a masterful and engaging read that illustrates R. D. Hooker’s decades of study of the art of war and his many years of service as a Soldier-Leader with experience in many of our nation’s recent conflicts.

—**General Curtis M. Scaparrotti**, U.S. Army (Retired), former Commander, U.S. European Command, and Supreme Allied Commander Europe

★ “A wonderfully stimulating, thoughtful, and engrossing survey of recent wars, the context in which they were fought, and the leadership exercised by those who conducted them.”

—**General David Petraeus**, U.S. Army (Ret.), former Director of the CIA, and former Commander of Coalition Forces in Iraq and Afghanistan and U.S. Central Command

R. D. Hooker, Jr., Former White House Fellow, Offers First-Hand Reflections about National Security Strategy in New Book

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- Former White House Fellow offers a first-hand account of global conflicts and strategies across six presidential administrations.
- *Beyond Vom Kriege* is the first publication in the UNG Press's role as an official publishing partner of the Association of the U.S. Army.

Dahlonega, GA—The University of North Georgia (UNG) Press is pleased to announce our newest release: *Beyond Vom Kriege: The Character and Conduct of Modern War* by R. D. Hooker, Jr. *Beyond Vom Kriege* is the first book published from the UNG Press in our role as an official publishing partner of the Association of the U.S. Army (AUSA). *Beyond Vom Kriege* releases July 21, 2020 and includes a forward by former National Security Advisor Lieutenant General H. R. McMaster (retired).

The technology of warfare has changed since Carl von Clausewitz's *Vom Kriege* was first published, but the fundamental nature of warfare is still the same. *Beyond Vom Kriege* furthers Clausewitz's theory of war by offering a first-hand account of global conflicts and strategies that influence American national security strategy across six presidential administrations.

R. D. Hooker, Jr., is a University Professor and the Theodore Roosevelt Chair in National Security Affairs at the National Defense University (NDU). He served three tours as a director and senior director with the National Security Council; as director for the Institute for National Strategic Studies at NDU; and as dean of the NATO Defense College in Rome. Hooker served for 30 years in the U.S. Army as an infantry officer and received the Defense Superior Service Medal in his role as White House Fellow.

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Contributor Biographies

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BEYOND
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The Character and Conduct of
Modern War

R. D. Hooker, Jr.

Foreword by Lieutenant General H. R. McMaster, USA

To Beverly
My shield and strength

*War is the father and king of all: some he has made gods,
and some men; some slaves and some free . . .*

—Heraclitus

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Foreword

America's military has made the development of leaders its top priority. That is because the complex environments in which U.S. forces must operate and the broad range of potential contingencies for which they must prepare demand courageous, adaptive, and innovative leadership. While the issues that R. D. Hooker, Jr., explores in this volume are intrinsically important, equally important is his example of scholarship and professionalism across four decades of service. The U.S. Army emphasizes "the development of expert knowledge and the ability to use it with the right moral character that sustains excellence in every endeavor, at home and abroad." If young leaders are looking for an example of how a true professional develops expertise over time through self-education—thinking, reading, discussing, and writing about the issues that bear on their responsibilities—R. D. Hooker provides that example in this collection.

The essays in this volume provide a window into an officer's career during a period in which the Cold War ended, U.S. forces operated in context of a broad range of missions during the strategically ambiguous "post-Cold War decade of the 1990s, and mass murder attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001, initiated America's longest war." He writes with unique authority because he served in many of the conflicts to which U.S. forces were deployed in that period and because he combines that experience with academic training and an ability to write clearly about them.

Consistent with Sir Michael Howard's guidance on how military professionals should develop their own theory or understanding of war, Hooker's essays approach the subject from perspectives that consider the subject of war and warfare in width, depth, and context. Howard enjoined military leaders to study war first in width to observe how warfare developed over history. Next, leaders should study armed conflict in depth through the examination of campaigns to reveal the complex causality of events as the "tidy outline dissolves," and we "catch a glimpse of the confusion and horror of real experience." And lastly to study in context because wars cannot be understood without consideration of their social, cultural, economic, human, moral, political, and psychological dimensions and because "the roots of victory and defeat often have to be sought far from the battlefield."

This is a book of great value to military professionals, civilian policymakers, and all those interested in issues of national and international security. The essays will help deepen understanding of and provide perspective for contemporary issues. And they also serve as an example of what it means to be a true military professional. Admiral James Stavridis, the former Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR), enjoined officers to "live well, write about it, and write it well." R. D. Hooker has done just that.

H. R. McMaster
Lieutenant General, U.S. Army (Retired)

Acknowledgments

This volume represents an intellectual journey that began at West Point and continued throughout a long military career and beyond. Though a career soldier, the desire to think and write, first awakened at West Point, remained with me through four decades of service. Graduate school at the University of Virginia provided me the intellectual equipment to begin to think seriously about strategy and the use of force in international relations. There, I studied under Kenneth Thompson, S. Neil MacFarlane, Henry Abraham, and many others who helped me build not only a theoretical foundation, but also a practical understanding of international politics and of the juridical and ethical framework which shapes and guides our society and the military's place within it. I followed this experience with a tour in the department of social sciences at West Point, a national treasure whose alumnae include Generals David Petraeus, Brent Scowcroft, John Abizaid, Pete Chiarelli, and many others. On the West Point faculty, I was surrounded by brilliant young officers who would later play pivotal roles in Iraq and Afghanistan.

I wish to acknowledge the mentorship and friendship over many years of the following people, whose advice and support helped shape my thinking, and who directly or indirectly supported this project: Professor Joseph Collins, Professor S. Neil MacFarlane, Brigadier General Mitchell Zais, Lieutenant General H. R. McMaster, Major General Rick Waddell, Major General Skip Davis, Colonel David Gray, Professor Sir

Hew Strachan, Professor Meghan O’Sullivan, General Mike Scaparrotti, Lieutenant General Doug Lute, Admiral Harry Harris, General David Petraeus, General John Allen, Mr. Robert Bell, Admiral James Stavridis, Brigadier General Mike Meese, Admiral Stansfield Turner, and Professor Harvey Rishikof. I extend grateful appreciation to the editors who have offered kind permission to reprint my work in this forum, to Dr. Jeff Smotherman and the exceptional staff of the National Defense University Press, and to my colleagues at the Institute for National Strategic Studies. I wish also to thank Ms. Brittany Porro, who provided valuable editorial assistance.

These reflections, then, are offered respectfully for those who must fight, and even more for those who must contend with the awful questions of peace and war. For any errors of omission or commission, I am of course entirely responsible.

R. D. Hooker, Jr.
National Defense University
Washington, D.C.

Introduction

America's performance in war since 1945 has been mixed, at best, and this volume attempts to explore both the virtues and the flaws that attend American national security and strategy making. America's advantages are many: the world's leading economy; a strong and innovative technology base and skilled workforce; an unmatched military, particularly in the air and on the ground; an invulnerable nuclear deterrent; a public that is both confident in and supportive of its military institutions; a large pool of qualified young people; a dense network of allies and partners that together account for much of the military capacity on the planet; and a favorable geostrategic position. These attributes propelled the U.S. to dominance in the twentieth century, enabling successful outcomes in both world wars and the Cold War. Yet since 1945, America has often faltered in conflict, its strategic performance falling well short of its promise. Why is this so, and what can be done about it?

I joined the national security enterprise in a period marked by a struggling economy, internal divisions, an under resourced, ill-disciplined, and poorly-managed military and a loss of national confidence that took a decade to overcome. By the early 1990s, much had changed. A rejuvenated U.S. military had recovered its swagger, scoring successes in Grenada, Panama, and the Gulf War, and presiding over the end of the

Cold War. Scholars wrote of a new era of “unipolarity”¹ while politicians heralded a “New World Order.”²

The warm afterglow of victory in the Cold War soon faded. After a good start in the waning days of the Bush ’41 presidency, the U.S. intervention in Somalia experienced epic failure in the early days of the Clinton administration, recalling Wellington’s admonition that “for a great power there are no small wars.” Swinging from overconfidence to extreme caution, Clinton pursued a hands off policy towards the Balkan Wars and to the Rwandan genocide. In the midst of a dramatic downsizing of the U.S. military, the U.S. found itself engaged in large scale and enduring “stabilization” deployments in Bosnia and later Kosovo, placing surprising stress on a much reduced U.S. Army. In Bosnia, stabilization efforts were successful in enforcing the Dayton Accords and preventing open conflict, but the resulting political settlement has proven unstable and untenable. In Kosovo, Serbian military forces were evicted after a short, intense air campaign—but more Kosovar civilians were killed after the start of military operations than before, while western-supported Kosovo independence has resulted in a weak and fragile Kosovo and an intransigent Serbia, backed by its traditional “big brother,” a resentful Russian Federation.

Far from ushering in an era of calm, the post-Cold War period and the breakdown of bi-polarity brought with it an explosion of new, weak states and non-state actors. While the cataclysmic great power clashes of the twentieth century receded, brushfire wars and terrorism exploded. I was working in the Pentagon on 9/11, which shattered an American sense of security in the homeland, ushering in a generation of counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency in Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Africa, and the Philippines that dangerously over-stretched the U.S. military and imposed huge financial and human costs.³ Neither Iraq nor Afghanistan led to clear

1 “Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States enjoys unparalleled military power. The international system is therefore unipolar.” See Nuno P. Monteiro, *Theory of unipolar politics*, Cambridge Studies in International Relations, Yale University, 2014.

2 See President George H. W. Bush, *Address before a joint session of the Congress*, September 11, 1990.

3 R. D. Hooker, Jr. and Joseph Collins, 2016, *Lessons encountered: Learning from the Long War*,

gains—while Saddam Hussein was eliminated and the terrorist safe haven in Afghanistan removed, Iraq is today dangerously unstable and subject to Iranian influence, while the Taliban remains resilient in the face of weak Afghan governance. Once again stepping back from more than a decade of wrenching combat operations, the U.S. watched from the sidelines as the promise of the Arab spring degenerated into the chaos of the Syrian civil war (with a half million civilian dead and more than thirteen million refugees and displaced persons). Today, despite American economic and military dominance, the U.S. finds itself challenged by revanchist powers China and Russia as well as rogue states like North Korea and Iran. Importantly, we face pressing challenges in the cyber and information domains and, more generally, in the “gray zone” that put important U.S. interests at risk.⁴ Despite far greater economic resources, we face real threats from these states as well as from transnational criminal organizations and proliferating terrorist groups. Our global dominance and many allies have not created a stable and ordered international system.

How is it that our economic and military power so often fails to translate into success in war? We can begin with how America approaches strategy. In broad terms, there is great continuity in American “grand” strategy. Great military strength, the largest economy in the world, strong alliances and partnerships, forward basing, a powerful and innovative industrial and technology base, and an invulnerable strategic nuclear deterrent underlay the great success of the Cold War and ensured America’s global preponderance. But in many specific cases—Korea, Vietnam, Somalia, Iraq, and Afghanistan—“victory” proved elusive. Why?

The American military’s ability to attack and destroy targets—to “kill people and break things”—is clearly not the problem. In almost every example on record in recent decades, the U.S. has prevailed in battles

pp. 421–440, Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press.

4 Gray zone challenges have been described as “attempts to achieve one’s security objectives without resort to direct and sizable use of force.” See John Schaus et al., July 2018, “What works: Countering gray zone coercion,” *Center for Strategic and International Studies*.

and engagements, even when outnumbered and outgunned. Rather, our ability to see, understand and define the strategic challenge is all too often flawed. For example, in the Korean conflict, U.S. political and military leaders failed to discern—despite many warning signs—that China would not permit North Korea to be defeated and occupied, or that our massive air and sea power might not translate into success on land. The means we were prepared to bring to bear to cope with China’s intervention were manifestly inadequate to achieve the desired end. In Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan, we failed to discern that the problems of sanctuary in adjoining countries and incapable and corrupt host nation governments—themselves drivers of the conflict—could not be solved with the means we were prepared to bring to bear. Too often, our “ends” proved aspirational and unrealistic, our “means” well below the level required. If there is a lesson to be found in these three conflicts, it is that America is poorly suited to large scale counter-insurgency campaigns, which almost by definition rarely engage truly vital U.S. interests.

In this regard, there is clear evidence in our post-war history of a recurring political dynamic which has hindered American success in war. In each of our major military interventions since 1945, a singular event sparked (or was thought to have sparked) an urgent need for military action.⁵ With the single exception of the Gulf War, resulting military operations did not lead to clear success. Instead, mounting costs and inconclusive results (as well as other competing strategic priorities) led successive administrations to make decisions that staved off defeat without enabling victory. An apparent inability to comprehend the strategic challenge accurately, and to link means to desired ends in concrete ways, prevented ultimate success that crippled and even destroyed presidencies. While intensely polarized politics is partly to blame, this tendency towards “no

5 In Korea, the North Korean invasion in June 1950; in Vietnam, the collapse of the U.S.-led advisory effort following the Diem coup; in the Gulf War, Saddam’s invasion of Kuwait; in Afghanistan, the 9/11 attacks. The Bush ’43 administration attempted to link the invasion of Iraq in 2003 with 9/11, an assertion that failed to gain traction and was subsequently replaced with Saddam’s supposed possession of weapons of mass destruction.

win, no lose” approaches represents a clear trend in American strategic performance since World War II (WWII). The consequences for the United States have been doleful.

While it is unfair to hold the U.S. military accountable for poor political decisions, it must share responsibility for outcomes. Since the passage of the Goldwater-Nichols reforms in the late 1980s, we have seen much triumphalism about improved “jointness.” Yet the reality is quite different. In peacetime, the military services rarely train with each other. Service approaches to warfighting and roles and missions remain grounded in the definitive experiences of WWII, updated with new technology. Even on the battlefield, the services fight hard to preserve their freedom of action relative to each other. Joint doctrine at best papers over sharp disagreements between services, above all with respect to the use of airpower. Lacking Title 10 legal authorities, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS) can cajole and suggest but cannot demand material changes in service culture, while strong congressional influence and typically short tenures and high turnover limit the ability of the secretary of defense to address the problem.⁶

A few examples are illustrative. A close look at the department of the Navy reveals by far the largest and strongest fleet in the world but also (in the form of the Marine Corps) a land force larger and more capable than all but a handful of the armies on the planet.^{7,8} The Navy’s air arm is again larger and more capable than most of the world’s air forces—while Marine aviation by itself can make the same claim. The possession of powerful air, land and sea forces within a single military department translates into a

6 When interviewed by the author for a study of the Iraq and Afghanistan campaigns, then-CJCS General Martin Dempsey noted that during his four-year term he served three different Secretaries of Defense (Leon Panetta, Chuck Hagel and Ashton Carter). See

7 The U.S. Marine Corps alone, with 184,000 troops, is larger than the entire armed forces of Germany (178,000), France (161,000) or the U.K. (150,000). Its aviation component boasts twice as many combat aircraft as found in the air forces of any of these three. *The military balance 2018*, International Institute of Strategic Studies.

8 President Truman famously called the Marine Corps “the navy’s little army that talks navy.” In fact, it is one of the most versatile and powerful military institutions in the world.

high degree of autonomy which the Navy jealousy guards. Soaked in the tradition of Mahan, the sea services hold to a vision of victory through seapower that remains very much alive and well.

Similarly, the U.S. Air Force, bathed in the theories of Douhet and Mitchell, sees itself as fully capable of achieving decisive “strategic” outcomes independently from the other services. Aided by procurement budgets far greater than the Army, and free to operate with great autonomy, the Air Force—like the Navy—can deploy and conduct operations in a theater of war largely independently. In both Iraq and Afghanistan, air force and marine units were not tasked organized under the theater commander, but instead reported to the combatant commander in Tampa.⁹ The same was true of special operations forces for most of both conflicts. As a result, theater joint force commanders in both Iraq and Afghanistan found themselves in the unenviable position of not “owning” the air force, marine, and special operations forces operating in their battlespace. In such circumstances, unity of effort proved difficult to achieve, while unity of command was altogether absent.

Such behavior aligns comfortably with organizational theory, which holds that organizations strive for freedom of action and for the greatest possible share of resources. There is no mystery here. But the drive towards autonomy must collide with the requirements of effective strategy, which seeks the most efficient and effective use of available resources to accomplish demanding and complex tasks. This strategic disability recurs in all American conflicts. The national interest must trump service parochialism. Too often, it doesn't.

Alone among America's military services, the U.S. Army can be exempted from this general critique. Unlike the Navy and Air Force, the Army is uniquely dependent on its sister services. It cannot move itself to the theater of war. It cannot defend against strong enemy air forces. It requires secure sea lanes of communication to survive. Even the most

9 *Lessons encountered*, p. 10.

junior army officer exists in a milieu where external help in the form of artillery, aviation, logistics, intelligence and much else—all found outside the basic infantry or tank unit—may literally spell life and death. From birth, the army officer is bred to be anything but autonomous, and this fact defines the Army’s culture.¹⁰ To insist on service autonomy in the theater of war does not occur to Army commanders, who have no professional experience of it.¹¹

Perhaps as a result, the Army finds itself a consistent loser in the budget and acquisition battles that largely define success “inside the beltway.” By any measure, America is strongly preponderant in the air and at sea. On land, the picture is rather different. While well-equipped and well trained, the U.S. Army fields legacy systems that are now some four decades old. Its armor and artillery communities suffered deep cuts as the Army reorganized following 9/11; today the Army is predominantly light infantry, with far less striking power than formerly. In size, the Army has similar liabilities. Manned at almost 800,000 soldiers and 18 divisions in the 1980s (half of which were armored or mechanized), the Army today fields less than 500,000. Though tasked with global responsibilities, it cannot realistically fight more than a single “major regional contingency” at a time. And despite claims to the contrary, air and sea power cannot supply this deficiency in large scale campaigns fought on land, as seen in Korea, Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan. In several essays, this volume emphasizes this theme. America’s military is out of balance, and we have paid a price accordingly.

10 These aspects of service culture are described at length in Carl Builder’s *The masks of war: American military styles in strategy and analysis* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989).

11 In the Gulf War, Army and Marine Forces fought separately and not under Land Component Command, with the 1st (UK) Armored Division interposed between them. See P. Mason Carpenter, *Joint Operations in the Gulf War: An Allison Analysis*, Air University School of Advanced Airpower Studies, June 1994. In the invasion of Iraq in 2003, the Army fought west of the Euphrates river, the Marines east of the river. In both Iraq and Afghanistan, Air Force units were task organized under U.S. Central Command’s Air Component Commander, a 3-star based in Qatar and reporting to Tampa, not the theater commanders in Baghdad and Kabul. These examples illustrate how service rivalries are finessed in wartime at the expense of unity of command.

In the post-war period, there is one striking example of strategic success in major theater war: Operation Desert Storm in 1991. The Gulf War was marked by clear, limited political objectives (“eject Saddam from Kuwait”); overwhelming force; strong support from the Congress, the public and allies; sound and intelligent planning from the national to the tactical level; and extraordinarily competent execution. Casualties were extremely low, while the campaign was won in a matter of weeks—the ground phase in only four days. What was different here?

In a word, the answer must be “leadership.” President George H. W. Bush came to office as arguably the most experienced and qualified commander-in-chief in modern American history. Brent Scowcroft, his national security adviser, has been described as “the gold standard” in this critical position. General Colin Powell, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs—himself a former national security adviser—is generally considered the most outstanding chairman ever. General Norman Schwarzkopf, the commander of U.S. Central Command, provided driving and intelligent command and control, suppressing service rivalries and proving himself a master of joint and coalition warfare. In many ways, Desert Storm represents a blueprint for success. Regrettably, its lessons have been largely ignored by later administrations.

A strategic education and experience in managing wars are not normally found on presidential resumes, a phenomenon compounded by the American custom of salting government departments and agencies three- and four-levels deep with political appointees with varying degrees of expertise. This political reality has consequences. In surveying the history of America at war, one is struck by a strange sense that we must learn and relearn the same lessons over and over again. As Sir Hew Strachan and others have pointed out, “strategy is a profoundly pragmatic business.”¹² In its essence, it need not be diabolically difficult. Yet war severely punishes fundamental mistakes—the inability to identify

12 Sir Hew Strachan, 2014, *The Direction of War: Contemporary Strategy in Historical Perspective*, p. 12, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

the problem, poor assumptions, failure to link means with ends, failure to learn and adapt. Our often ahistorical approach is abetted by an apparent inability to see the problem from the adversary's point of view. This problem of "filters"—the tendency to assume that one's opponent and one's allies see the world as we do—is a besetting sin in American strategy making.

In addition to the major campaigns mentioned above, the U.S. has engaged in many smaller ones in the post-WWII era, again with varying degrees of success. Military interventions in Lebanon in 1958 and the Dominican Republic in 1965 were judged to be generally successful. The Mayaguez incident in 1975, the Iran rescue mission in 1980, and the Marine intervention in Lebanon in 1983 must be classed as failures. The invasion of Grenada in late 1983 accomplished its objectives but revealed serious problems with joint operations and a high number of friendly fire casualties. The invasion of Panama in 1989 showed the U.S. military and the Bush-Scowcroft team at its best, as a challenging and complex operational plan was carried out in short order and with minimal casualties. A later intervention in Somalia in 1993 ended in disaster, despite an auspicious beginning, while "peace enforcement" operations in Bosnia in 1995 and the Kosovo air campaign (and subsequent stability operations) in 1999 accomplished their objectives at low cost. Below the threshold of major combat operations, the U.S. record since 1945 is therefore mixed, and understanding these outcomes requires a more detailed understanding of the particulars. In general, however, overwhelming force can be seen to have a quality all its own, "smothering" friction, intimidating opponents and enabling successful outcomes much more often than not. Epic failures like Desert One and Mogadishu illustrate the dangers inherent in complex operations involving multiple services, far from the homeland and involving only small, light forces.

After a generation of counterterrorism and counterinsurgency, the United States is once again focused on deterring state-on-state conflict

and major theater war.¹³ China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea are the focus of these efforts, as explicitly laid out in current National Security and National Defense Strategies. Big military budgets are back, and the U.S. is investing in some of the most advanced, and most expensive, technologies available. Yet troubling concerns remain.

First, the U.S. national security enterprise shows limited enthusiasm for recognizing and solving service rivalries, whose deep roots and persistence continue to hinder effective strategy and warfighting. Next, the costs of acquiring new systems and technologies have exploded, along with personnel costs and a massive expansion of headquarters and defense agencies since 1945 that sap the fighting strength of the U.S. military.¹⁴ Our inability to deal decisively with low tech opponents like the North Vietnamese, al-Qaeda, and the Taliban suggest that smaller, more exquisite and more expensive forces combined with more and more command and control may not be the answer. A related but critical worry is that domestic entitlement spending, which dwarfs defense spending, will begin to crowd out all other government spending within a generation unless checked—and there are no signs so far that either political party is willing to take this on.¹⁵

As for better strategy making, let us begin with a better understanding of war. In America, we resort to war too often, win too infrequently, and comprehend war too poorly. The first lesson is that war is a poor vehicle for solving inherently political problems. War done right can serve the ends of policy, by helping to set conditions for successful political outcomes. But it cannot substitute for political solutions like better governance, rule of law, or fair elections. Too often, we have tied our military and political fortunes to corrupt and failing regimes. A better approach, perhaps, is to

13 See *The National Security Strategy*, 2017, Washington, D.C.: The White House, and *The National Defense Strategy*, 2018, Washington, D.C.: Department of Defense.

14 For a detailed assessment of these issues, see the author's *Charting a course: Strategic choices for a new administration*, pp. 61-82, 2016, Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press.

15 See Michael Meese, *Strategy and Force Planning in a Time of Austerity*, May 2014, Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press.

fight less often, for clearer objectives, with stronger forces and stronger support from our voters and allies. Presidents will always be tempted to reach for the sword or the button as an immediate answer to an urgent problem, in recent decades unencumbered by congressional or judicial checks. Yet war has its own nature and will get out of hand if permitted. For the soldier and the president alike, war is about survival—and the struggle for survival is impatient of limits. Here Churchill’s admonitory description of war as a “strange voyage” should be heeded.

Successful strategy, therefore, begins by understanding the nature of the conflict.¹⁶ At the outset, we must carefully define the problem, consulting the important national interests that may be engaged, and resisting the impulse to set aspirational, vague goals or to resort to force when other approaches may suffice. Before we rush to generating courses of action, we must gather the facts, and, where facts are missing, make sound assumptions about capabilities, intentions, and risks. We must strive to view the case from the perspective of our adversaries if we are to have any hope of understanding their actions and reactions. We must link means to ends, and where the available means fall short, we must adjust our ends or increase our means. We must devise metrics—measures of effectiveness—so we can judge our progress and adjust if necessary. At all times, we must weigh the support of our voting publics, of our legislatures, of our friends and allies, and of international public opinion. Finally, if we decide on war, we must wage it with a determination to win and, if at all possible, to win quickly and decisively. Fail at any one of these steps and overall failure is probable.

These, then, are the key points of the essays collected in this volume. They are offered not with certainty but with a measure of humility, as

16 “The first, the supreme, the most far reaching act of judgment that the statesman and commander have to make is to establish . . . the kind of war on which they are embarking, neither mistaking it for, nor trying to turn it into, something that is alien to its nature.” “No one starts a war—or rather, no one in his senses ought to do so—without first being clear in his own mind what he intends to achieve by that war and how he intends to conduct it.” Carl von Clausewitz, (1976). *On War*, pp. 88, 579. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Eds.). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

painful lessons painfully learned. “War,” Heraclitus reminds us, “is the father and king of all.” Would that it were not so. Yet as Lincoln advised

Human nature will not change. In any future great national trial, compared with the men of this, we shall have as weak and as strong, as silly and as wise, as bad and as good. Let us therefore study the incidents of [war] as philosophy to learn from and none of them as wrongs to be revenged.¹⁷