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Mastering the Endgame of War

Dominic Tierney

In 1941, Japan weighed the merits of attacking the most powerful country in the world: the United States. It was a war of choice and Tokyo had time to carefully consider the decision. Japanese leaders debated the best date to strike Pearl Harbor. And they also thought through the potential short-term effects. But Tokyo barely considered the military endgame, or the final stages of a campaign where an armistice is agreed, hostilities cease, and a new post-war order emerges.

Japan knew that the long-term prognosis for a war against the United States was doubtful at best, given America's vast advantage in resources. Still, Japanese officials believed that early battlefield victories, the nation's superior fighting spirit, and a protracted war of attrition, could wear down the will of Americans and produce a favorable peace. "We cannot exclude the possibility that the war may end because of a great change in American public opinion...At any rate we should be able to establish an invincible position...Meanwhile, we may hope that we will be able to influence the trend of affairs and bring the war to an end."¹

The Kiyomizu Temple in Kyoto is a Buddhist shrine that juts out over a steep cliff edge. Japanese Prime Minister Tojo Hideki concluded: "There are times when we must

have the courage to do extraordinary things—like jumping, with eyes closed, off the veranda of the Kiyomizu Temple.”ⁱⁱⁱ But without a clear plan for concluding the conflict, Tokyo was leaping into the dark, and initiating a war that would end with its major cities reduced to ashes.

Throughout history, statesmen have plunged countries into war without thinking through the military endgame. When fighting looms, leaders often focus on the initial rounds rather than the achievement of ultimate strategic success.ⁱⁱⁱ The United States may be particularly prone to neglect the conflict endgame. In recent years, U.S. officials have failed to plan effectively for post-combat stabilization (or what is termed Phase IV of war, following Phase I, deterrence and engagement; Phase II, initial operations to seize the initiative; and Phase III, major combat operations).^{iv} In 2001-2003, the United States invaded Afghanistan and Iraq with little heed to the long-term consequences.

Preparing for the conclusion of war is a critical part of any sound strategy that connects ends and means. Carl von Clausewitz advised against taking the first step in war, “without considering the last.”^v B.H. Liddell Hart wrote: “it is essential to conduct war with constant regard to the peace you desire.”^{vi} According to Henry Kissinger: “The test of policy is how it ends, not how it begins.”^{vii} The failure to prepare for post-conflict stabilization in Iraq led to the deaths of thousands of American soldiers and tens of thousands of Iraqi civilians, and the expenditure of hundreds of billions of dollars.

Why does Washington struggle to master the endgame of war? And can this record be improved? Despite its importance, there is relatively little written about the conclusion of war. Far more scholarship is devoted to how wars begin than how they end.^{viii} This paper argues that ineffective U.S. planning for military endgames results

from the interaction between two variables: the psychological bias of overconfidence and the American cultural bias against nation-building. The first variable is a positivity bias where leaders exaggerate the odds of success in wartime. The second is a negativity bias where Americans are averse to using the military for stabilization operations. The synergy between these dynamics encourages the belief that extensive nation-building operations will be both unnecessary and unwise.

One solution for these challenges is to reverse engineer victory. Instead of planning ahead from Phase I through Phase IV, Washington should start at the end, by identifying a final state that represents strategic success, and then work backward from the conclusion. Reverse engineering victory may mitigate the effects of overconfidence and skepticism toward nation-building, encourage creative thinking, and reveal unexpected opportunities and challenges.

The American Way of Battle

Washington has repeatedly failed to prepare effectively for the endgame of war. Bradford Lee examined U.S. war termination from World War I through the first Gulf War and found that Washington: “had considerable difficulty in bringing political rationality and military creativity to bear upon the strategic logic of war termination.”^{ix}

Part of the problem is that U.S. military planning tends to neglect ultimate political goals. According to Russell Weigley, the American way of war is more a way of *battle*, which focuses on winning engagements, rather than turning military success into strategic success.^x Frederick Kagan described the American vision of war as a “target set”

that ignores, “how, exactly, one defeats the enemy and what the enemy’s country looks like at the moment the bullets stop flying.”^{xi}

The United States also fails to plan adequately for scenarios of failure. When conflict looms, American officials avoid being distracted by painful “what if” scenarios. *What if an insurgency emerges?* Instead, Washington adopts a tunnel vision focus on implementing the first moves in its chosen strategy for victory.

These problems are evident with U.S. war games. Following American airstrikes against Iraq in 1998, the prospect of an ultimate showdown with Saddam Hussein loomed closer. But General Anthony Zinni, the head of U.S. Central Command, saw a problem. “It struck me then that we had a plan to defeat Saddam’s army, but we didn’t have a plan to rebuild Iraq.” In 1999, Zinni organized a war game called “Desert Crossing” to examine the contours of a post-Saddam Iraq. The exercise predicted a host of problems in stabilizing the country, including “rival forces bidding for power,” fragmentation “along religious and/or ethnic lines,” and an upsurge in “Iran’s anti-Americanism.”^{xii}

Zinni asked different parts of the U.S. government, including the State Department and the Department of Commerce, to help prepare for the stabilization of Iraq. As Zinni recalled, the answer was: “Not interested. Would not look at it.”^{xiii} A few years later, when war loomed with Iraq, Zinni, who was now retired, called U.S. Central Command. “You need to dust off Desert Crossing.” The reply was: “What’s that? Never heard of it.” In just a few years the corporate memory “was gone.”^{xiv}

Instead, war games during the Bush administration tended to neglect the endgame. In 2002, the U.S. military carried out simulated regime change missions against

a fictional country called Nair (which combined features of Iran and Iraq). Comfortingly, the games ended in a decisive U.S. victory.

But according to one of the participants, Huba Wass de Czege, a retired brigadier general, the simulations were based on a flawed conception of victory. They ended after the United States achieved initial battlefield success rather than when Washington attained its political goals. The exercises: “tend to devote more attention to successful campaign-beginnings than to successful conclusions.” They finish when American control of strategic locations looks like “a matter of time,” or in other words, when “victory seems inevitable to us (not necessarily to the enemy).” The result is a “blind spot at the back-end of campaigns.”^{xv}

American war games also tend to neglect scenarios of military failure. A review of education in the U.S. Army in 1971, for example, found that war games and other exercises were: “generally euphoric in nature—the U.S. Army always wins with relative ease.”^{xvi} More recently, Wass de Czege wrote that in war games, “we greatly underestimate the difficulty of concluding such campaigns promptly.” In reality, “coalitions tend to fray as optimistic expectations fade and the achievement of strategic aims is delayed...the enemy’s definition of winning promptly becomes not losing, or delaying defeat until the coalition tires of pursuing its original strategic ends.”^{xvii}

In the summer of 2002, the U.S. military played out a simulation called Millennium Challenge. This was one of the largest war games in history: a massive \$250 million exercise involving over 13,000 personnel, designed to test America’s capacity to defeat a major country in the Middle East.

Retired Marine Corps Lieutenant General Paul K. Van Riper commanded the enemy forces—and promptly employed asymmetric tactics to defeat the United States. Van Riper sidestepped American electronic surveillance by delivering orders via motorcycle messenger. When a U.S. fleet gathered for the invasion, Van Riper struck first with cruise missiles and a swarm of suicide bombers in speedboats that destroyed 16 U.S. warships.

At this point, the Pentagon had an opportunity to explore the consequences of military failure by letting the simulation run its course. Instead, the game was suspended, the American fleet “came back to life,” and new rules were introduced to ensure victory for the United States. Van Riper was told to reveal the location of some of his units, and turn off his air defenses so that American troops could land safely. Rather than continue with this sham, Van Riper quit in protest. “It was in actuality an exercise that was almost entirely scripted to ensure [an American] ‘win.’”^{xviii}

The failure to plan effectively for endgames soon became evident in practice as well as in theory. An Army review criticized the U.S. campaign in Afghanistan: “The lack of a war plan or theater campaign plan has hindered operations and led to a tactical focus that ignores long-term objectives.”^{xix} Thomas Pickering, the former undersecretary of state for political affairs, told me that in Afghanistan: “We had a failure to define with precision and clarity what our objectives are. The danger is not knowing where we want to go, and seeking to achieve much more than we can possibly achieve.”^{xx} Isaiah Wilson described a “battle victory” in Afghanistan followed by “strategic stalemate.”^{xxi}

The negative consequences of poor planning were even greater in Iraq. Preparations for the Iraq War prioritized the regime change phase and neglected the

subsequent effort to stabilize the country. The official U.S. Army history of the campaign concluded: “it is questionable whether...[U.S. officials]...conducted a thorough, coordinated, and realistic evaluation of the probable force levels required for Phase IV based on the realities of the new Iraq that were emerging in front of them.”^{xxii}

During 2002-2003, there was considerable interagency debate in Washington about the government structure of post-war Iraq, involving the State Department, the Defense Department, and U.S. Central Command—particularly at the level of the deputy secretaries. The United States also prepared carefully for the early rounds of the Iraq War, and even readied for negative scenarios that never actually happened, such as a massive humanitarian crisis.^{xxiii}

But a series of connected problems emerged in planning for post-Saddam Iraq that proved highly damaging to U.S. interests. First, the final plan for Phase IV in Iraq was decided very late in the process. Bush’s initial major briefing on post-conflict issues was in January 2003, just weeks before the U.S. invasion in March.^{xxiv} During the same month of January 2003, retired Army Lieutenant General Jay Garner was approached to head the Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance (ORHA), or the post-war Iraqi administration. Garner described his organization as being “glued together over about four or five weeks time. [We] really didn’t have enough time to plan.”^{xxv}

In early March, the policy for post-war government in Iraq was finally agreed. Washington rejected the idea of creating a provisional government of Iraqi exiles, fearing this would hand over too much power to untested individuals. Instead, U.S. officials endorsed an “Iraqi Interim Authority,” which would relinquish a degree of sovereignty to

Iraqis immediately, and then steadily transfer additional authority. By this point, however, the war had almost begun.^{xxvi}

Second, the civilian and military principals gave far less priority to the post-war phase than more immediate concerns, such as pre-war diplomacy at the United Nations, and the opening military rounds. According to Isaiah Wilson, the plan was “resourced and directed toward the attainment of a limited military object (toppling of Saddam) instead of a more comprehensive political object. We essentially planned our way into a fight with Saddam instead of planning a way toward a better state of peace with the Iraqi people.”^{xxvii}

Tommy Franks, the head of U.S. Central Command, told the deputy secretary of defense where his priorities lay: “You pay attention to the day *after*, I’ll pay attention to the day *of*.”^{xxviii} But civilian leaders also neglected the day after. Nine days before the war began, Garner gave his only high-level briefing on post-war issues. Bush and senior National Security Council officials seemed uninterested and asked no questions.^{xxix}

On March 14, Rumsfeld told Garner: “I haven’t given you the time I should have given you. Quite frankly, I just have been so engulfed in the war that I just didn’t have time to focus on everything that you’re doing.”^{xxx} Rumsfeld evidently saw Phase IV stabilization operations as being quite distinct from “the war,” rather than something that should be integrated into every stage of the military plan. Anthony Cordesman has referred to this as the “rebuilding effort begins after the war ends syndrome.”^{xxxi}

Third, the war plan was based on unrealistic assumptions and there was a lack of contingency planning for scenarios of failure. Officials believed that security could be quickly turned over to Iraqi police and army units, Iraqi oil revenues would cover most of

the post-war costs, and U.S. force levels could draw down to around 30,000 by September 2003—just four months after major combat operations ended.^{xxxii}

The Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction concluded there was “no established plans to manage the increasing chaos” in Iraq. As a result, “when Iraq’s withering post-invasion reality superseded [official] expectations, there was no well-defined ‘Plan B’ as a fallback and no existing government structures or resources to support a quick response.”^{xxxiii} John Abizaid, the head of U.S. Central Command from 2003-2007, told me: “In Iraq we saw a lack of clarity on war ending conditions. There was a heroic assumption that it would be quick and easy. The time horizon was not extended far enough to cover the possibility of an insurgency.”^{xxxiv}

Fourth, the plan was changed dramatically before it could even be implemented. On May 6, 2003, Garner’s replacement, L. Paul Bremer, had a personal lunch with Bush, where the president gave his envoy broad discretion about how to stabilize Iraq. Bremer promptly abandoned the Iraqi Interim Authority, and turned the Coalition Provisional Authority (successor to the ORHA) into a direct occupying power that would rule by decree. The sudden abandonment of U.S. policy over lunch is testament to the lack of forethought and coordination that went into preparation for the post-Saddam era.^{xxxv}

The Iraq War was a well-orchestrated regime change mission followed by an improvised stabilization operation. American troops were not trained to set up police and judicial capabilities in Iraq or handle the wave of looting and violence that emerged. Garner’s ORHA was under-resourced and quickly overwhelmed by mounting instability. Bremer’s CPA was also hobbled by a lack of trained personnel and had limited reach

outside Baghdad. As the country unraveled, Washington achieved tactical success and strategic defeat.^{xxxvi}

The Fog of War

Why does the United States struggle at the endgame of war? Perhaps inattention to the final stages of a campaign is simply a rational response to the fog of war. After all, conflict is not a precise science like physics with fixed laws. It is more like an art, or a social science based on probabilities. Military campaigns are inherently complex and unpredictable, and there is usually doubt about the opponent's capabilities and intentions. Indeed, Leo Tolstoy saw history as "a succession of 'accidents' whose origins and consequences are, by and large, untraceable and unpredictable."^{xxxvii}

Given this uncertainty, planning for the endgame of war could be an illusion. History is littered with blueprints for victory that did not survive contact with the enemy. Therefore, it may be reasonable to focus finite resources on the initial and relatively predictable stages of war, and keep the nation's options open for the "untraceable and unpredictable" events to come. If decision-makers are not tied to a fixed plan, they can see how the chips fall and adapt more easily to unexpected circumstances and the actions of the other side. One military staff member that planned the invasion of Iraq concluded: "both the planners and the commander had been schooled to see fighting as the realm of war and thus attached lesser importance to post-war issues...Only a fool would propose hurting the war fighting effort to address post-war conditions that might or might not occur."^{xxxviii}

But there is no convincing rational explanation for the U.S. failure to plan for endgames. America's experience in Afghanistan and Iraq—or indeed Japan's experience in World War II—suggest that inattention to the endgame starkly undermines state interests. It is extremely difficult to improvise the final stages of war. National militaries are large and unwieldy organizations that do not change course efficiently. The U.S. military, for example, took years to adapt to the Iraqi insurgency.

Furthermore, post-war stabilization can be the most difficult phase of war and is therefore worthy of *additional* attention, rather than neglect. Building a new political order in Iraq was always likely to be more challenging than toppling Saddam's sclerotic regime. U.S. officials received—and largely ignored—many warnings about the probable difficulties involved in owning Iraq, from organizations including the Central Intelligence Agency, the Defense Intelligence Agency, the U.S. Army War College, the RAND Corporation, and the United States Institute of Peace. One intelligence assessment in January 2003, for example, claimed that Baathists: “could forge an alliance with existing terrorist organizations or act independently to wage guerilla warfare against [Iraq's] new government or coalition forces.”^{xxxix}

The fog of war hugely complicates planning for the endgame of conflict. But countries do have some capacity to predict war outcomes and prepare ahead of time. If they did not, the use of force would be fundamentally irrational. In recent years, Washington has not employed its available planning resources efficiently or effectively.

It is true that in certain campaigns, Washington has little time to plan ahead for Phase IV. On September 10, 2001, few U.S. officials were focusing on Afghanistan. Three months later, the United States owned the country. But there is no such excuse in

the case of Iraq. The overthrow of Saddam Hussein was a war of choice, and Washington had plenty of time to prepare for Phase IV.

If we cannot understand Washington's neglect of the endgame as a rational response to the fog of war, what is the explanation? A variety of dynamics may play a role in encouraging America's short-term mindset. For example, debates over post-war Iraq became bogged down in interagency divisions between the Department of State and the Department of Defense.^{xl} Furthermore, the Department of Defense ended up taking the lead in planning for Phase IV but lacked the expertise and capabilities in many areas of civilian reconstruction.^{xli} Individual personalities may also have impeded long-term strategic thinking. Tommy Franks, the head of Central Command, was largely uninterested in the wider political goals of the war, and retired almost as soon as major combat operations ended. According to one U.S. officer, Franks "really was comfortable at the tactical level."^{xlii}

But these dynamics cannot explain a systemic failure to plan for endgames, or account for why Washington prepared effectively for the initial steps in the Iraq War but neglected the finale. A more fundamental answer lies with the interaction between two variables: a psychological bias toward overconfidence, and a cultural and institutional aversion to nation-building.

Overconfidence

The psychological bias of overconfidence can powerfully impede planning for the endgame of war. Psychologists have found that mentally healthy people tend to

exaggerate their perceived capabilities, overestimate their control over events, and exhibit over-optimism about the future—features that are collectively labeled as positive illusions or overconfidence. A survey of one million high school students, for example, found that 70 percent rated themselves as above average in leadership ability. Similarly, around 80 percent of people claim to be above average at driving. There is an extensive literature on overconfidence, which covers a wide variety of subjects, issues, and methodologies, and includes rating against objective benchmarks.^{xliii}

Positive illusions can significantly heighten the risk of war. If leaders exaggerate the odds of military success, they may be more enthusiastic about seizing the sword. Geoffrey Blainey argued that overconfidence is “a potent and pervasive cause of war,” while Stephen Van Evera found it “crucial to an understanding of war.”^{xliv}

Overconfidence can also encourage poor planning for the military endgame. If leaders assume the final stages of war will be easy, they may not pay as much attention to the conclusion. Before the invasion of Iraq, for example, U.S. officials exhibited overconfidence about the post-war phase, including the ease of establishing security, the degree of Iraqi popular support for the intervention, and the capacity of Iraq’s government, police, and army to administer the country and provide law and order. Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz’s comments in February 2003 symbolized the administration’s mindset: “we’re not talking about the occupation of Iraq. We’re talking about the liberation of Iraq...Therefore, when that regime is removed we will find [the Iraqi people]...basically welcoming us as liberators.”^{xlv} A RAND study in 2005 found that in pre-war planning: “post conflict stabilization and reconstruction were

addressed only very generally, largely because of the prevailing view that the task would not be difficult.”^{xlvi}

Positive illusions are a general trait in human psychology, and are often evident on the eve of war. As cultural historian Wolfgang Schivelbusch put it: “nations are as incapable of imagining their own defeat as individuals are of conceiving their own death.”^{xlvii} But three sources of variation may heighten the odds that the United States will be overconfident about the endgame of war.

First, overconfidence varies between cultures, and Americans may be particularly prone to positive illusions about their abilities. Scholars suggest that self-enhancement of individual capabilities is more acceptable and beneficial in the United States relative to East Asia. Psychologists David Armor and Shelley Taylor wrote that: “Americans are widely regarded as the most optimistic people on earth.”^{xlviii} James Stavridis, the former Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, told me: “U.S. military culture is not particularly compatible with failure planning.” One reason is, “the culture of ‘can-do,’ ‘we will succeed,’ or as Colin Powell put it, ‘perpetual optimism is a force multiplier.’”^{xlix}

Second, people may be more prone to overconfidence about the final stages of war relative to the initial rounds. Construal level theory in psychology predicts that actors judge immediate tasks based on their feasibility, whereas they judge distant endeavors based on whether the goals are desirable. Future scenarios are more divorced from known reality, and so people often rely on vague, abstract, or simplistic mental constructs—and thereby fall prey to overconfidence. People ask fewer tough questions about distant events and often see what they want to see. According to Aaron Rapport, “temporal

distance encourages people to downplay or even ignore the feasibility of their long-term objectives.”^l

Applied to war planning, officials are predicted to consider near-term events in a relatively cool-headed manner and the final stages of the campaign with a relatively overconfident mindset. As expected, U.S. planning for the Iraq War was fairly cautious about the regime change phase. Indeed, Washington prepared for a number of problems that never transpired, such as a humanitarian crisis. But this wariness largely disappeared when it came to thinking about post-war Iraq. According to the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction: “The U.S. government planned for the worst-case humanitarian scenario while it simultaneously planned for the best-case reconstruction one.”^{li}

Third, overconfidence is prone to spike at a particularly inopportune moment for effective planning: when war is perceived as imminent. The Rubicon Model of Action Phases in psychology suggests that decision-making follows a series of distinct stages, each of which activates a particular mind-set, or cognitive orientation. A “deliberative” mind-set dominates the predecisional phase, when different policy options are weighed and compared. Here, actors judge issues fairly objectively in a bid to make the best selection. An “implemental” mind-set dominates the postdecisional phase, when the focus shifts to enacting the selected option. Actors in an implemental mind-set become committed to the chosen course of action and exhibit heightened levels of overconfidence. In the words of psychologists Heinz Heckhausen and Peter M. Gollwitzer, people become “narrow-minded partisans of their plans of action.”^{lii}

Decision-making about war is therefore expected to follow the same sequence. When leaders believe a war is possible but not certain, they will weigh the potential

outcomes in a relatively wary manner. At this stage, planners may pay attention to worst-case scenarios, and vigorously debate the merits of different military options. But when war is seen as imminent, decision-makers will switch to an “implemental” mindset that triggers a range of psychological biases, especially overconfidence. They will worry less about the feasibility of the proposed strategy, and avoid making contingency plans for possible failure. Instead, planners will become partisans of the chosen course of action, and adopt a “tunnel vision” focus on taking the initial steps in the plan for victory. Leaders may also be reluctant to prepare for a long struggle by stockpiling supplies or restructuring the country economically. Given their implemental mind-set, there seems less need to do so.^{liii}

The switch to implemental mindsets may have influenced U.S. war plans. In 1999, when the prospects for an invasion of Iraq were uncertain, Zinni’s war game examined the challenges of post-war stabilization in a cautious manner. Washington’s 1998 plan for the invasion of Iraq, OPLAN 1003-98, called for the use of 400,000 troops. But in 2002, when conflict loomed much closer, U.S. war games exhibited overconfidence about the campaign, and planners dramatically scaled down the size of the invasion force.^{liv}

Aversion to Nation-Building

A second dynamic inhibiting effective U.S. planning for the endgame of war is a cultural aversion to nation-building. Wider American public opinion, political leaders, and the

U.S. military, are all skeptical about using force for stabilization operations, including counter-insurgency and peacekeeping.

Public approval for nation-building missions is consistently lower than for interventions aimed at restraining the foreign policies of other states.^{lv} Whereas Americans tend to view conventional interstate wars like the world wars or the Gulf War as righteous crusades, they see nation-building operations like Vietnam, Somalia, or Iraq as grim quagmires.^{lvi}

In part, public skepticism reflects Washington's very real struggles at nation-building, for example, in Vietnam. But the public often disapproves of nation-building even when the mission succeeds, like peacekeeping in Bosnia and Kosovo in the 1990s.^{lvii} Nation-building missions lack the "good versus evil" moral clarity of interstate war. They dredge up painful memories of Vietnam. Americans on the left sometimes see nation-building as a dangerous form of imperialism. Meanwhile, Americans on the right often view nation-building as a nefarious kind of big government social engineering.^{lviii}

The U.S. military also traditionally favors conventional interstate war over nation-building. Russell Weigley wrote that Washington has repeatedly engaged in counter-insurgency campaigns but each time it "had to relearn appropriate tactics at exorbitant costs," and viewed the experience "as an aberration that need not be repeated."^{lix} Following Vietnam, the U.S. Army decided it would never fight guerrillas again, and actually destroyed its notes on counter-insurgency. Instead, officials planned incessantly for an interstate showdown against the Soviet Union in Europe. After the Cold War ended, the U.S. military continued to neglect nation-building and counter-insurgency. Stabilization missions were dismissed as "military operations other than war," or

Mootwa. The chairman of the joint chiefs reportedly said: “Real men don’t do Mootwa.”^{lx}

In 2007, Robert Gates, the secretary of defense, said that after Vietnam, “the Army relegated unconventional war to the margins of training, doctrine, and budget priorities.” As a result, “it left the services unprepared to deal with the operations that followed: Somalia, Haiti, the Balkans, and more recently Afghanistan and Iraq—the consequences and costs of which we are still struggling with today.”^{lxi}

This aversion to nation-building can impede effective planning for the endgame of war. The desire to avoid stabilization operations may promote the vision of war as a target-set designed to eliminate enemy forces, rather than create the conditions for ultimate political success. And having neglected training at post-conflict operations, and failed to learn the lessons of past counter-insurgency missions, the U.S. military is less able to prepare for the consequences of regime change.

The George W. Bush administration, for example, came into office belittling nation-building as armed social work and Clinton-style do-goodery. “Let me tell you what else I’m worried about,” said Bush the day before the 2000 election. “I’m worried about an opponent who uses ‘nation-building’ and ‘the military’ in the same sentence.”^{lxii} Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld claimed that U.S. nation-building missions, like in the Balkans, created a culture of foreign dependence. Instead, he advocated a model of U.S. military “transformation” based on agile high-technology warfare and “small footprint” regime change operations.

In both Afghanistan and Iraq, the Bush administration’s aversion to nation-building undermined planning for the endgame by encouraging the belief that extensive

stabilization operations would be imprudent and unnecessary. After overthrowing the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, the United States resisted anything that resembled nation-building. In 2002, there were only 10,000 U.S. soldiers in Afghanistan, along with 5,000 international troops, in a country of 30 million people. As a result, Washington failed to create an effective government in Kabul and allowed the Taliban to recover.^{lxiii}

Similarly, American skepticism about nation-building in Iraq was a major barrier to achieving long-term political goals. Bush sought to remove Saddam without getting bogged down in a drawn-out stabilization operation. Rumsfeld consistently pressed for reducing U.S. troop levels and handing responsibility over to the Iraqis. “If you’re not willing to take your hand off the bicycle seat, the person will never learn to ride.”^{lxiv}

The U.S. military’s aversion to nation-building may also have eroded effective planning in Iraq. According to Conrad Crane, “the U.S. military would rather not deal with [stabilization operations] or would like to quickly hand them off to other U.S. Government agencies or international organizations.”^{lxv} Tommy Franks, the head of U.S. Central Command, was scornful about the task of post-war stabilization in Iraq. In April 2003, the military needed a name for the new “combined joint task force” that would oversee the stabilization of the country. Franks suggested: “CJTF-1369, unlucky cocksuckers.”^{lxvi}

Optimism and Skepticism

The interaction between a positivity bias (overconfidence) and a negativity bias (the aversion to nation-building) may play a crucial role in explaining America’s inadequate

planning for endgames. An exaggerated belief in success combined with an allergy to stabilization operations encourages the vision of war as *liberation*, where Phase IV operations will be relatively straightforward, the target population yearns to be free, and any prolonged U.S. presence is detrimental. In effect, skepticism about nation-building channels overconfidence by promoting the belief that post-war stabilization can somehow be circumvented. Officials therefore decline to ask tough questions, explore the requirements of nation-building in detail, or consider how to handle negative scenarios including sectarian tensions or a potential insurgency.

If either of these two dynamics were missing, the same pattern of ineffective planning for the endgame might not be evident. If overconfidence were present but there was no aversion to nation-building, positive illusions might have manifested themselves in different ways, for example, by encouraging the belief that a large footprint nation-building mission would succeed. Alternatively, if skepticism about stabilization operations were present but there was no overconfidence, Washington might have been deterred from invading Iraq for fear of getting bogged down in a protracted nation-building operation.

The synergy between overconfidence and skepticism about stabilization operations led U.S. officials to conclude they could achieve the best of all worlds: regime change and the democratization of Iraq, without tying down American troops in prolonged nation-building. As Thomas Pickering told me, the White House believed that: “military victory would produce its own rewards magically out of the clouds.”^{lxvii}

Reverse Engineering Victory

There is no simple solution for a problem caused by deep-rooted psychological and cultural factors. Instead, a number of complementary approaches can be tried. Washington, for example, could set up institutional structures that encourage critical debate about the endgame of war such as creating a formal devil’s advocate, or a senior official tasked with criticizing the proposed strategy, and ensuring a wider range of perspectives reach the president’s ear.^{lxviii} In addition, Washington could also try to plan for conflict ahead of time, before entering the danger zone of implemental mind-sets where overconfident biases are likely to contaminate decisionmaking.

Furthermore, James Stavridis told me: “we should do more deliberate planning for potential failure,” by systematically studying past debacles.^{lxix} This advice echoes the review of Army education in 1971: “A strong element of every curriculum should be historical studies which frankly analyze unsuccessful American military efforts...[including]...an objective discussion of what we did, what went wrong, and why. This single action would do more to establish credibility for our instruction than any other known to me.”^{lxx}

Washington also needs to think more creatively about the endgame. The traditional way to plan for endgames is to *engineer victory* by identifying national goals and then creating a roadmap that works toward this end state. In a regime change mission, for example, officials can move progressively from Phase I through Phase IV.

An alternative approach is to *reverse engineer victory*, by working backward from the Phase IV stabilization phase. The chess grandmaster José Raúl Capablanca once said: “In order to improve your game, you must study the endgame before everything else. For

whereas the endings can be studied and mastered by themselves, the middle game and the opening must be studied in relation to the endgame.”^{lxxi} Capablanca’s strategy was to work backward from success, and then secure a small positional edge early on—say, three pawns to two on one side of the board—which ultimately proved decisive.

Working backward from success is an established idea in other domains as well. For example, one of the principles of game theory is “backward induction” or starting out with the final move, then looking at the next-to-last decision, and so on, before finally discovering what you should do at the beginning. Knowing how the final round will play out determines the optimal initial choice. Similarly, before building a house, people create a blueprint. They start at the end by imagining the completed structure, and then work backward from the final stage.

War, of course, is a very different domain than chess, simple game theoretic models, or construction. But the same core advice holds true: the opening and the middle stages of a military campaign should be studied in relation to the endgame. Several scholars have briefly noted the potential of working backward in wartime planning. A RAND analysis of the Iraq War suggested, in passing: “Planners must start with strategic guidance from the civilian leadership on where they want to be, strategically, when the war ends. They can then work backward to points of major conflict, shaping plans for those in ways that contribute to the larger and longer-term strategic goal.”^{lxxii} Gideon Rose also noted in passing that instead of thinking forward from Phase I through Phase IV, we should “reverse the direction of the sequence.” According to Rose: “This easy fix would focus attention on the desired end result as the starting point for all war planning,

with the earlier stages understood as having significance only as building blocks of or preparatory stages for the final outcome.”^{lxxiii}

Although not quite an “easy fix,” reverse engineering victory holds considerable promise as a tool of military planning. What would this process look like? Planners should first visualize the desired end state in as much detail as possible. What is America’s geographic area of control? What does the target country’s political system and economy look like? What is the timeframe for achieving these goals? Before invading Iraq, for example, Washington might have outlined a plausible conception of the country as a reasonably democratic and stable ally by, say, 2006.

Planner can then work backward from this future vision. What is the final step before reaching the end state? What is the second to last step? What will be required one month before the target date? How about six months or one year? This path can be broken down into short-term actions and milestones. Washington, for example, could have worked backward from a stable Iraq in 2006 through the intermediate stages, such as overseeing elections, creating effective security forces, and so on—always specifying which American assets must be in place at each point in time and how they should be used.

Reverse engineering victory requires asking many of the same questions as a traditional forward-looking plan. What are the respective strengths of the combatants? What is each side’s potential for mobilizing resources? What role will external actors play?

The vision of a path back from the end state is a creative thought exercise rather than a precise route to be followed. Washington cannot script the entire campaign, or

follow the proposed course precisely. Intelligence about the target country may be limited. The fog of war, unexpected events, and the enemy's response all create added uncertainty. And each side's objectives often change during the fighting according to the fortunes of war.

But the exercise of reverse engineering victory offers several valuable benefits. First, it encourages planners to focus on the ultimate political objective. Strategy is about efficiently working toward clear goals, or in other words, knowing the destination before starting the journey. With traditional attempts to engineer victory, today's world is cast in bright lights whereas the end state is usually murky. Planners are therefore tempted to prioritize the initial steps we can clearly identify and hope everything works out in the end. By contrast, starting at the end encourages officials to illuminate the finale by imagining this outcome in detail. Reverse engineering victory is therefore an antidote to short-termism. It habituates planners to think about ultimate strategic success and not just about prevailing in individual battles.

For example, in both Iraq and Afghanistan, the central goal from the start should have been the broader aim of creating reasonably stable and representative regimes. If this had been the focus from day one, the Bush administration might have provided additional resources for post-war stabilization or even avoided the war in Iraq altogether.

Second, reverse engineering victory can mitigate the effects of overconfidence. The exercise provides a reality check by encouraging planners to think more critically about the feasibility of their objectives and the concrete steps necessary to get there. As we saw in Iraq and Afghanistan, post-war stabilization may be the most difficult phase of

a campaign. Placing the greatest barriers to success center stage could reduce the odds of positive illusions.

Furthermore, construal level theory predicts that people create a mental construct of the future based on wishful thinking rather than realistic prospects for success. Reverse engineering victory may reduce this effect by encouraging actors to map out this mental construct in greater detail, thereby contextualizing the endgame, and making it less vague and abstract. The exercise may also help guard against the negative effects of implemental mindsets by preventing actors from simply ignoring questions of how ultimate success will be achieved.

Third, reverse engineering victory can alleviate problems caused by an aversion to nation-building. The exercise encourages planners to think carefully about what is truly required for post-war stabilization. For example, working backward might have produced more detailed and precise thinking about the nature of the post-Saddam government.

The whole notion of “Phase IV” promotes the idea that stabilization efforts are a distinct and secondary endeavor that occurs after the main fight is complete. Efforts to create order and governance, however, should begin as soon as the first shot is fired. Douglas Feith, who was undersecretary of defense for policy at the time of the Iraq invasion, recognized a “major error” in that “across the board, administration officials thought that postwar reconstruction would take place *post*—that is, after—the war.”^{lxxiv}

Reverse engineering victory can limit this problem by promoting the perception of war fighting and stabilization as intertwined activities. By working backwards, planners may recognize that major combat operations are a building block to achieve ultimate political goals. Phase III (major combat operations) is viewed, not as a successor

to Phase II (initial operations to seize the initiative), but in terms of how it facilitates Phase IV (post-combat stabilization).

Fourth, the exercise may reveal unexpected obstacles, challenges, or opportunities. Working backward may show that certain steps in the plan are fairly straightforward to map out, for example, a plausible timetable for elections during the stabilization phase. *If a representative regime is in place in Baghdad in 2006, we need national elections in 2005.* But other aspects of the plan may be extremely hard to project with any confidence, such as building regional political support for the new government. These uncertainties should then be factored into the decision whether or not to wage war.

Reverse engineering victory may also indicate that a seemingly inconsequential move early in the campaign could turn out to be critical later on. For example, by working backward from a representative regime in Iraq, we may find that allying with a minor local leader in the immediate aftermath of regime change will ultimately reap a dividend as the political arena opens up.

How speculative is this exercise? The proposed path backward will be more or less tentative depending on the length, complexity, and difficulty of the military campaign. In a fairly straightforward operation, officials may be able to follow the broad contours of the proposed roadmap with some confidence. The United States typically outmatches its opponents in military power and can often expect the opening rounds of conflict to go relatively smoothly. When fighting more powerful opponents, or in conflicts involving extensive post-war stabilization, the steps will be more problematic to map out precisely. But here the exercise remains extremely important—indeed it may be *more* important—in terms of identifying potential challenges and uncertainties.

Engineering victory and reverse engineering victory are complimentary tools. We can end up with two paths: from the origin to the destination, and from the destination to the origin. Comparing and integrating the two routes may reveal the optimum course. Washington may even use the “red team, blue team” approach by setting up independent groups to think forward to victory, and backward from victory. Once the two paths are created they can then be integrated into the final war plan.

Conclusion

Despite its vast intelligence and military resources, the United States has struggled to master the endgame of war. The psychological bias of overconfidence and an aversion to nation-building have combined to promote a short-term mentality that downplays preparations for the finale of conflict. This combination of beliefs is likely to shape future military campaigns. Positive illusions are an integral part of human psychology, and may be particularly prominent among Americans. The aversion to nation-building is also deeply embedded in broader American culture, and is evident today with the Barack Obama administration. In 2012, the Pentagon announced: “U.S. forces will no longer be sized to conduct large-scale, prolonged stability operations.”^{lxxv} Obama’s famous “pivot” from the Middle East to the Pacific is really a turn from nation-building in places like Iraq, toward interstate rivalry against opponents like China and North Korea.

One solution is to reverse engineer victory, by identifying the conditions for ultimate political success and then working backward from the end state. This exercise forces planners to look at the military campaign from a new angle. It encourages officials

to ask difficult questions, and spurs imaginative thinking. It also provides a test of the proposed use of force. If the process of creating a plausible path from the end state is too difficult we may need to rethink the whole endeavor.

Of course, reverse engineering victory could itself succumb to the biases of overconfidence and an aversion to nation-building. But the exercise may be less prone to these problems than alternative planning tools. Starting at the end places the stabilization phase front and center, and encourages greater consideration of what is truly required in terms of nation-building.

The answer is not to embrace rigid long-term thinking. Attempting to follow a fixed path to victory regardless of the changing environment will invite disaster. War is a collision between opposing forces not an engineering project. The military policy will need to be adapted as conditions change. The path backward will not *be* the war plan, but it can *inform* the war plan. By balancing long-term planning with short-term flexibility, the United States can avoid leaping in the dark.

ⁱ Fred Charles Iklé, *Every War Must End*, revised edition (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), p. 4.

ⁱⁱ Ian Kershaw, *Fateful Choices: Ten Decisions that Changed the World, 1940-1941* (New York: Penguin, 2007), pp. 352-353. This paper develops several sections in Dominic Tierney, *The Right Way to Lose a War: America in An Age of Unwinnable Conflicts* (New York: Little, Brown, 2015).

ⁱⁱⁱ Iklé, *Every War Must End*.

^{iv} Conrad Crane, "Phase IV Operations: Where Wars are Really Won," *Military Review*, Vol. 85, No. 3 (May/June 2005), p. 11.

^v Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, edited and translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 584; Gideon Rose, *How Wars End: Why We Always Fight the Last*

Battle; A History of American Intervention from World War I to Afghanistan (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 2010).

^{vi} B. H. Liddell Hart, *Strategy*, second edition (New York, NY: Meridian, 1991), p. 353.

^{vii} Henry Kissinger, "How the Ukraine Crisis Ends," *Washington Post*, March 5, 2014.

^{viii} On exit strategies see Iklé, *Every War Must End*; Rose, *How Wars End*; Richard Caplan, ed., *Exit Strategies and State Building* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); David M. Edelstein, "Exit Lessons," *The Wilson Quarterly*, Vol. 33, No. 4 (Autumn 2009), pp. 34-39. On war termination, see Elizabeth A. Stanley, *Paths to Peace: Domestic Coalition Shifts, War Termination and the Korean War* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009); H. E. Goemans, *War and Punishment: The Causes of War Termination and the First World War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000).

^{ix} Bradford A. Lee, "Winning the War but Losing the Peace? The United States and the Strategic Issues of War Termination," in *Strategic Logic and Political Rationality*, edited by Bradford A. Lee and Karl F. Walling (Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 2003), p. 265.

^x Russell F. Weigley, *The American Way of War: A History of United States Military Strategy and Policy* (New York: Macmillan, 1973). See also Crane, "Phase IV Operations."

^{xi} Frederick W. Kagan, "War and Aftermath," *Policy Review*, No. 120 (August 1, 2003), available at: <https://www.hoover.org/publications/policy-review/article/6774>. See also Simpson, *War from the Ground Up*.

^{xii} "Desert Crossing Seminar: After Action Report," June 28-30 1999, available at: http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB207/Desert%20Crossing%20After%20Action%20Report_1999-06-28.pdf

^{xiii} "Straight Talk from General Anthony Zinni," available at: <http://www.international.ucla.edu/article.asp?parentid=11162>

^{xiv} "Straight Talk from General Anthony Zinni." See also, Roger Strother, "Post-Saddam Iraq: The War Game," November 4, 2006, available at: <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB207/index.htm>

^{xv} Huba Wass de Czege, "Wargaming Insights," *Army* (March 2003), pp. 36-44; Fred Kaplan, *Daydream Believers: How a Few Grand Ideas Wrecked American Power* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2008), pp. 47-48;

Fred Kaplan, *The Insurgents: David Petraeus and the Plot to Change the American Way of War* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 2013), pp. 59-60.

^{xvi} Eliot A. Cohen and John Gooch, *Military Misfortunes: The Anatomy of Failure in War* (New York, NY: Free Press, 2006), p. 38.

^{xvii} Wass de Czege, "Wargaming Insights."

^{xviii} Sean D. Naylor, "War Game Rigged?" *Army Times*, August 16, 2002; Fred Kaplan, "War-Gamed," March 28, 2003, available at:

http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/war_stories/2003/03/wargamed.html

^{xix} Thomas E. Ricks, *The Generals: American Military Command from World War II to Today* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2012), pp. 400-401.

^{xx} Interview with Thomas Pickering, January 3, 2014.

^{xxi} Isaiah Wilson, "America's Anabasis," in Thomas G. Mahnken and Thomas A. Keaney, eds., *War in Iraq: Planning and Execution* (New York: Routledge, 2007), p. 13.

^{xxii} Donald P. Wright and Timothy R. Reese, *On Point II: Transition to the New Campaign* (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2008), p. 142.

^{xxiii} Stephen Benedict Dyson, "What Really Happened in Planning for Postwar Iraq," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 128, No. 3 (Fall 2013), pp. 455-488; Nora Bensahel, Olga Oliker, Keith Crane, Richard R. Brennan Jr., Heather S. Gregg, Thomas Sullivan, and Andrew Rathmell, *After Saddam: Prewar Planning and the Occupation of Iraq* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND, 2008).

^{xxiv} Aaron Rapport, "The Long and Short of It: Cognitive Constraints on Leaders' Assessments of 'Postwar' Iraq," *International Security*, Volume 37, Number 3 (Winter 2012), p. 148.

^{xxv} Ivo H. Daalder and James M. Lindsay, *America Unbound: The Bush Revolution in Foreign Policy* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 2003), p. 151; David L. Phillips, *Losing Iraq: Inside the Postwar Reconstruction Fiasco* (New York: Westview, 2005), pp. 131, 138; Bensahel, et al., *After Saddam*, pp. xxii, 17, 60-63.

^{xxvi} Dyson, "What Really Happened in Planning for Postwar Iraq," p. 469.

^{xxvii} Wilson, "America's Anabasis," p. 11.

^{xxviii} Tommy Franks, *American Soldier* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2004) pp. 440-441; Rose, *How Wars End*, p. 3; Bob Woodward, *Plan of Attack* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004); Dyson, “What Really Happened in Planning for Postwar Iraq?”

^{xxix} Rapport, “The Long and Short of It,” p. 158; Michael R. Gordon and Bernard E. Trainor, *Cobra II: The Inside Story of the Invasion and Occupation of Iraq* (New York: Pantheon, 2006), p. 161; Bob Woodward, *State of Denial* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2006), pp. 130–136.

^{xxx} Woodward, *State of Denial*, pp. 149–150.

^{xxxi} Anthony Cordesman, “Planning for a Self-Inflicted Wound: U.S. Policy to Reshape a Post-Saddam Iraq” (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, December 31, 2002), available at: <http://www.comw.org/warreport/fulltext/0212cordesman.pdf>

^{xxxii} Bensahel et al., *After Saddam*; David A. Lake, “Two Cheers for Bargaining Theory: Assessing Rationalist Explanations of the Iraq War,” *International Security*, Vol. 35, No. 3 (Winter 2010/11), pp. 7-52; Gordon and Trainor, *Cobra II*; George Packer, *The Assassins’ Gate: America in Iraq* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005); Phillips, *Losing Iraq*.

^{xxxiii} Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction, *Hard Lessons: The Iraq Reconstruction Experience* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2009), pp. 323–324; Gordon and Trainor, *Cobra II*, pp. 142-150.

^{xxxiv} Interview with John Abizaid, August 8, 2013.

^{xxxv} Dyson, “What Really Happened in Planning for Postwar Iraq?,” p. 478.

^{xxxvi} Joseph E. Stiglitz and Linda J. Bilmes, *The Three Trillion Dollar War: The True Cost of the Iraq Conflict* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2008). On casualties in Iraq, see Iraq Body Count, available at: <http://www.iraqbodycount.org/>

^{xxxvii} For a discussion, see Richard K. Betts, *American Force: Dangers, Delusions, and Dilemmas in National Security* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2012), p. 243.

^{xxxviii} Rose, *How Wars End*, p. 2.

^{xxxix} Rapport, “The Long and Short of It,” p. 164.

^{xl} Dyson, “What Really Happened in Planning for Postwar Iraq?”; Lee, “Winning the War but Losing the Peace?”

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- ^{xli} Bensahel, et al., *After Saddam*, p. 239.
- ^{xlii} Thomas E. Ricks, *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq* (New York: Penguin Press, 2006), p. 127.
- ^{xliii} Daniel Kahneman and Jonathan Renshon, “Hawkish Biases,” in *American Foreign Policy and the Politics of Fear: Threat Inflation Since 9/11*, edited by Trevor Thrall and Jane Cramer (New York: Routledge, 2009), pp. 79-96; Dominic Johnson, *Overconfidence and War: The Havoc and Glory of Positive Illusions* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004); Shelley E. Taylor, and Jonathan D. Brown, “Illusion and Well-Being: A Social Psychological Perspective on Mental Health,” *Psychological Bulletin*, Vol. 103, No. 2 (February 1988), pp. 193-210.
- ^{xliv} Geoffrey A. Blainey, *The Causes of War* (New York: Free Press, 1973), p. 35; Stephen Van Evera, *Causes of War: Power and the Roots of Conflict* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), p. 16.
- ^{xlv} Paul Wolfowitz interview with National Public Radio, February 19, 2003, available at: <http://www.defense.gov/transcripts/transcript.aspx?transcriptid=1937>
- ^{xlvi} Ricks, *Fiasco*, p. 111.
- ^{xlvii} Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Culture of Defeat: On National Trauma, Mourning, and Recovery* (New York: Picador, 2004), p. 6.
- ^{xlviii} David A. Armor and Shelley E. Taylor, “Situating Optimism: Specific Outcome Expectancies and Self-Regulation,” in Mark P. Zanna, ed., *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, Vol. 30 (New York, Academic Press, 1998), p. 361; Johnson, *Overconfidence and War*.
- ^{xlix} Interview with James Stavridis, September 16, 2013.
- ^l Rapport, “The Long and Short of It,” p. 143.
- ^{li} Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction, *Hard Lessons*, p. 31. In his study of military occupations, David Edelstein noted a consistent and often unwarranted degree of optimism about the likely success of nation-building. David M. Edelstein, *Occupational Hazards: Success and Failure in Military Occupations* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008).
- ^{lii} Heinz Heckhausen and Peter M. Gollwitzer, “Thought Contents and Cognitive Functioning in Motivational versus Volitional States of Mind,” *Motivation and Emotion*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (June 1987), p. 103.

^{liii} Dominic Johnson and Dominic Tierney, “The Rubicon Theory of War: How the Path to Conflict Becomes the Point of No Return,” with Dominic Johnson, *International Security*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (Summer 2011), pp. 7-40.

^{liv} It is debatable when exactly administration officials saw war as certain and adopted implemental mindsets. In July 2002, Richard Haass, then the Director of Policy Planning at the State Department, realized that Bush had decided to confront Iraq. Nicholas Lemann, “How It Came to War,” *The New Yorker*, March 31, 2003.

^{lv} Bruce W. Jentleson and Rebecca Britton, “Still Pretty Prudent: Post-Cold War American Public Opinion on the Use of Military Force,” *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 42, No. 4 (August, 1998), pp. 395-417.

^{lvi} Dominic Tierney, *How We Fight: Crusades, Quagmires, and the American Way of War* (New York: Little, Brown, 2010).

^{lvii} The U.S.-led peacekeeping missions in the Balkans helped create reasonable peace and stability in the region with zero U.S. casualties, but the American public remained skeptical. See Tierney, *How We Fight*, chapter 8.

^{lviii} Tierney, *How We Fight*, chapter 3.

^{lix} Weigley, *The American Way of War* p. 36.

^{lx} “Making Sense of the Mission,” *New York Times* April 11, 2004; David Fitzgerald, *Learning to Forget: US Army Counterinsurgency Doctrine and Practice from Vietnam to Iraq*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013; Crane, “Phase IV Operations,” p. 17.

^{lxi} Robert Gates, speech at the Association of the United States Army, Washington D.C., October 10, 2007, available at: <http://www.defense.gov/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=1181>

^{lxii} “Bush Backs into Nation Building,” *Washington Post*, February 26, 2003.

^{lxiii} “How a ‘Good War’ in Afghanistan Went Bad,” *New York Times*, August 12, 2007.

^{lxiv} Donald Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown: A Memoir* (New York: Sentinel, 2011), p. 667; Linda Robinson, *Tell Me How This Ends: General Petraeus and the Search for a Way Out of Iraq* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2009).

^{lxv} Crane, “Phase IV Operations,” p. 12; Bensahel, et al., *After Saddam*, p. 48.

^{lxvi} Rose, *How Wars End*, pp. 247, 268; Thomas E. Ricks, “General Failure,” *The Atlantic* (October 24, 2012). Available at:

<http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2012/11/general-failure/309148/4/>

^{lxvii} Interview with Thomas Pickering, January 3, 2014.

^{lxviii} However, the problem with a devil’s advocate is that ritualized dissent may be discounted and could even boost confidence in the original strategy by giving the impression that all options have been considered. An alternative idea is to form a *murder board*, or a committee of notables tasked with finding flaws in a military plan and killing the idea. A single devil’s advocate can be ignored: a whole choir of devils is harder to disregard.

^{lxix} Interview with James Stavridis, September 16, 2013.

^{lxx} Cohen and Gooch, *Military Misfortunes*, p. 38.

^{lxxi} Irving Chernev, *Capablanca’s Best Chess Endings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. v.

^{lxxii} Bensahel, et al., *After Saddam*, p. 242.

^{lxxiii} Rose, *How Wars End*, p. 285.

^{lxxiv} Douglas J. Feith, *War and Decision: Inside the Pentagon at the Dawn of the War on Terrorism* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008), pp. 275-276; Bensahel, et al., *After Saddam*, xxviii.

^{lxxv} Department of Defense, “Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense,” January 2012, available at: http://www.defense.gov/news/defense_strategic_guidance.pdf