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7. The Future of Western Warfare: Coalitions and Capability Gaps

Theo Farrell

The US National Intelligence Council’s (NIC) report *Tomorrow’s Security Challenges: The Defence Implications of Emerging Global Trends (TSC)* presents four future worlds – concert of powers, fragmented international system, rise of non-state networks, and return of great-power confrontations – as a heuristic device to identify and explore the challenges facing American policymakers and strategists out to 2025. *TSC* says nothing about the modalities of US military power projection in these four futures. Of course, this is appropriate given that *TSC* is a product of the NIC. But equally, it is appropriate for participants of this workshop to ponder what form US power projection is most likely to take.

One may predict, with a fair degree of certainty, that for the foreseeable future the United States will seek where possible to project military power in partnership with liked-minded states. This may occur within a formal framework, such as NATO, or through informal arrangement, i.e., an ad-hoc military coalition. Wartime partnership brings political and military benefits. Politically, it increases the legitimacy of the military campaign. And even for a superpower, like the United States, partnership in war offers military advantages. The ongoing war in Afghanistan points to three such benefits, in particular: More boots on the ground; increased civilian capacities; and more military specialists with a diversity of expertise, especially special operation forces (SOF) and other key enablers, such as medical, engineering, and counter-Improvised Explosive Devise (CIED) personnel.

To be sure, going into war alongside partners brings its own set of problems. At a minimum, there are coordination problems, both strategic and operational. Some military operations may require the authorization of all partner governments, and this reduces the agility of campaign command. Within the campaign itself, many national militaries create complications in the command chain and in planning, logistics, and the conduct of operations.

Yet for all these problems, the advantages of partnership in war outweigh the disadvantages. This is especially true, as noted, because partnership may take many different forms. I start by making the case for coalition warfare focusing on a core of states within the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). I go on to discuss some of the capability shortfalls of European coalition partners. While technology is the most obvious capability gap, I identify less-noted shortfalls in strategy and law. Finally, I discuss the implications in terms of the four futures presented in *TSC*.

Coalition warfare and the “fighting core”

It is hard to imagine a scenario where the United States would *go to war* unilaterally inside the next 14 years. Discrete unilateral use of force is possible, indeed likely. But any full-blown military campaign will almost certainly involve the United States in partnership with other states. Depending on where a future war lies on the necessity-discretion scale, partnership will come about due to demand or supply pressures. In a war at the necessity end of the spectrum, such as the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan, there will be supply pressures from US partners; indeed, any such war is likely to invoke Article 5 of the NATO Treaty. In a war situated closer to the discretion end of the scale, such as the 2003 invasion of Iraq, there will be demand pressures from within the US government to
gather partners in order to increase the international and domestic legitimacy of the military campaign.

The good news is that the United States has a number of fairly reliable military partners, i.e., Western states with a range of military capabilities and the willingness to project force globally alongside America. There is a core of states within NATO that have demonstrated this war-fighting potential, as well as Australia. Crucial here will be NATO’s reinvention of itself as a global security organization. In truth, NATO has failed to develop the machinery to project power globally; the NATO Response Force is a disappointment, having never deployed and eventually been downgraded. At the same time, NATO remains committed to its global security mission, and this is reinforced in the alliance’s New Strategic Concept adopted in November 2010.

As a large alliance of now 28 states, NATO packs a powerful legitimacy punch when it comes to war. Indeed, as a general principle, the most powerful states carry more authoritative weight in customary international law. This principle was tested to an extent in NATO’s war against Serbia over Kosovo in 1999. In this case, NATO chose not to assert the lawfulness of humanitarian intervention as an evolving exception to the general prohibition in international law against the threat or use of force against other states. However, NATO’s intervention was still widely recognised as legitimate even if, strictly speaking, it was unlawful, because this war was conducted by such a powerful group of states with clear humanitarian purpose.

Against this are some downsides. As a general rule, formal alliances are more unwieldy than ad-hoc coalitions. They have drawn out decision-making processes that can interfere with the military command of ongoing campaigns. Moreover, the less martial states within the alliance may restrain a more robust strategy. The problem is compounded by size and diversity, in that large alliances offer more opportunities for disagreement over strategy. NATO faces all these problems.

These coordination, size, and restraint problems were all evident in the Kosovo air campaign. NATO’s senior decision-making body, the North Atlantic Council, was tasked to authorize whole categories of targets. But NATO capitals ended up imposing a target-by-target approach requirement on the campaign commander, SACEUR Gen. Wesley Clarke. Sixty-four percent of the fixed targets required higher approval, with the more sensitive targets requiring approval from all 19 NATO capitals. At the end of the 78-day bombing campaign, there were some 150 fixed targets still awaiting approval from NATO capitals. NATO’s eastward expansion since the Kosovo campaign, growing the alliance from 19 to 28 members, has exacerbated its cumbersome character.

The current war in Afghanistan, formally NATO-led, further demonstrates the problem of caveats. Some NATO states have imposed stipulations to limit the possibility of their forces being drawn into the war. Some, such as Belgium, Bulgaria, and Greece, will not even permit their forces to leave International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) bases. Moreover, some of countries with large military forces, namely, Germany, Italy, and Spain, have deployed only to the more permissive northern and western regions of Afghanistan.

But Afghanistan also demonstrates the potential and importance of military partnerships for US war efforts. In crude numbers of boots on the ground, the role of partners has been essential. At the height of the European contribution, in mid-2010, the partners were contributing 41,500 troops to ISAF whilst the United States was providing 78,500. Moreover, the contribution of some states from 2006-2009, when the United States was focused on Iraq, was little short of essential: Britain, Canada, and Holland held the line in the south, leaving the US Army to concentrate on the east during this period.
Table 1. Key US military partners in Afghanistan: Number of troops, 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Troops</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>1,550</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>4,350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Britain</td>
<td>9,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holland</td>
<td>1,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>2,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>3,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>2,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>3,750</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data from ISAF Placemat, June 2010

Of course, as noted, there has been considerable variation in the capabilities and will of partners, ranging from Denmark’s small war-fighting force to Germany’s large and largely peacekeeping force. We also need to recognize that both capabilities and will have shifted over the course of the campaign. Britain, Canada, Denmark, and Holland all rapidly beefed up their forces in the south as the scale of the military challenge became evident. Germany has come under the most criticism for the strict caveats it has imposed on its force. But even here, the picture has changed. By 2010, there was open recognition in Germany of ‘Krieg in Afghanistan.’ Previously, Germany’s political elite refused to recognise that ISAF was engaged in war. Moreover, in 2009-2010 German forces engaged in a tough fight in Baghlan province (especially around the ‘highway triangle’).

In sum, the ISAF campaign suggests that there is a sizeable group of Western states that could be partners in any future US war effort. Table 1 lists the most significant US partners in ISAF in mid-2010. I call this group the ‘Fighting Core’ of NATO (+ Australia). Of course, the circumstances of any future war will be critical in determining who will be prepared to sign-up for war and also the form of partnership and contribution, i.e., NATO versus an ad-hoc coalition, special operation forces versus logistical support.

As a rule of thumb, NATO has been more advantageous in terms of increasing the legitimacy of a military campaign, but it is typically less advantageous than ad-hoc coalitions in terms of a campaign’s unity of effort. It is easier for the United States to exercise firm military leadership within ad-hoc coalitions. Indeed, the 1991 Gulf War and 2003 Iraq War both demonstrated that coalitions typically involve a core of war-fighting states, in addition to a larger grouping of war-supporting states, i.e., providing basing and logistical support, and some modest air, naval, or even ground forces. In both campaigns, the US multinational force commander was able to ensure unity of effort within the war-fighting core, which comprised the US, Britain, and France in the 1991 Gulf War and the US, Britain, and Australia in the 2003 Iraq War.

We should recognise the differences within the Fighting Core. I would suggest a rough ordering of three tiers, based on political will and military capabilities. For the United States, tier 1 and 2 states are those that can bring the most resources to bear during coalition wars. Tier 3 partners are also worth having on board, but, for a variety of reasons, bring less capability. Of course, the order of states within these tiers may be expected to change over the next 14 years.
Table 2. The Fighting Core in Select US-led Coalitions of War, 1991-Present

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tier 1</th>
<th>Tier 2</th>
<th>Tier 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Britain</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Denmark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>Holland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>Poland</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ranking: Author’s own.

Britain belongs in a category of its own as the US’s sole tier-1 partner. France comes close to Britain in terms of global reach and deployable forces. The gap between them is in deployable land forces and will. France deployed a light division in the 1991 Gulf War and could do so again. But in recent years, Britain has twice deployed a heavy division in a US-led war, in 1991 and 2003. The British military has been hit hard by cuts to the defence budget for 2011-2015. The Royal Air Force is to be slashed from 12 to six fast-jet squadrons, while the Royal Navy will similarly shrink from 23 to 19 frigates and destroyers. France will keep far larger air and naval forces in terms of numbers, though Britain is acquiring a range of next-generation air and naval platforms. Much uncertainty still surrounds the Royal Navy’s Future Carrier Program. The British Army will suffer the least cuts among the services. It will only lose one brigade, leaving it with five multi-role brigades, plus an air assault brigade and the Royal Navy’s marine brigade. In addition, coming out of the 2010 Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR), the British Army has managed to keep the requirement to be able to deploy a heavy division. Finally, it is interesting to note the British military assumption that any future war would be fought alongside the Americans. The British military’s Future Character of Conflict paper (the British version of TSC) explicitly states: “It is extremely unlikely that the UK will conduct warfighting without US leadership.” Thus, in terms of willingness and ability to wage war with the Americans, Britain remains well ahead of the pack.

France is the next most militarily capable state in the Fighting Core but gets relegated to tier 2 because of its awkward strategic relationship with the United States. Moreover, given its military potential, France has been a disappointing contributor to the ISAF campaign. Australia and Canada, also in tier 2, have far smaller armed forces than France, but both have been significant contributors to US-led campaigns. The Australian armed forces contributed around 2,000 strong to the US-led coalition in the 2003 Iraq. Most of these were navy and air force personnel. But, in both the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan and the 2003 Iraq War, Australia provided a sizeable SOF contingent. In recent years, the Australian contingent, comprising a combined arms battle group, engineers, mentors, and SOF, has operated in support of the Dutch task force in Uruzgan Province. In sum, Australia belongs in tier 2 for its recent track record of contributing to US-led coalitions and specifically for its SOF contribution, which is a key asset for the type of wars the United States is most likely to wage in the near future.
In Afghanistan, Canada contributed beyond what its capacity would predict, deploying almost 3,000 troops from an active force of around 66,000 (including an army of only 35,000). The Canadian Army has also demonstrated its willingness and ability to fight in difficult conflict zones. Canada has suffered 154 personnel killed in Afghanistan since 2001, which is the third-highest number of fatalities in ISAF and the highest number per force size in ISAF (Britain has suffered the second-highest rate of fatalities at 362). Whilst Canadian combat forces are due to withdraw from Afghanistan this year, the Canadian Army will leave behind a 950-strong training mission, and Canada will continue to lead the Kandahar Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT). In other words, Canada has been a reliable and resilient military partner in Afghanistan and hence belongs in tier 2 of the Fighting Core.

Tier 3 includes states with large military forces but modest useable capabilities – due to political constraints or military limitations – such as Germany, Italy, and Poland. Tier 3 also includes states, such as Holland and Denmark, with small, deployable, war-fighting militaries. For the Dutch, Afghanistan was a chance to show their steel and shake off a deservedly terrible reputation from the 1992-95 Bosnia campaign. In the event, the Dutch took a cautious approach to using force in Uruzgan Province; this created tension with a more gung-ho US special forces task force operating in the north of the province. This more cautious approach by the Dutch task force was consistent with Dutch strategy for Uruzgan, but it is also possible that political pressure to avoid Dutch casualties may have been a reinforcing incentive. Denmark is the most martial of the Nordic states, and the Danish had already shown how tough they were in Bosnia. Once again, they proved their mettle in central Helmand Province. It might be argued that at less than a thousand personnel, the Danish contribution to ISAF is not sufficient to qualify as a ‘significant’ partner. But, both the Danish and the Dutch contributions need to be seen in the context of contributing to a multinational brigade-plus sized package.

**Capability gaps**

We have had the good news: There is a Fighting Core of Western states that are viable partners for any future US-led military campaign. Now, the bad news. These potential military partners collectively, and individually to various degrees, have three capability gaps: Technological, strategic, and legal.

*The technology gap*

The transatlantic gap in military technology is old news. Way back in 1999, Gompert, Kugler, and Libicki warned that NATO needed to *Mind the Gap* that was opening up, with Europe lagging far behind US investments in Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) technologies. The key technologies then were in information technology (IT), reconnaissance, and precision strike. This past decade, European militaries have attempted to close these gaps. However, national conditions — military culture, existing modernization programs, and defense budget cuts — have produced great variation in European responses to the US military transformation. Germany raced ahead in developing a doctrine for military transformation, but bureaucratic obstacles have delayed investment in new technologies. In contrast, France pushed on with developing its next generation of technologies but has been slow to develop the concepts and doctrine for real transformation. Britain fell somewhere in between with a more balanced approach to developing both technologies and supporting
concepts. The net result has been that by the late 2000s there were many transformation gaps opening up within Europe.³

The situation has become more complicated as a result of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The US military has redirected some investment away from the potentially techno-centric wars of the future to meet the demands of the human-centric, counterinsurgency wars of today. Some argue that current wars require that more be spent on less high-technology platforms, such as Mine Resistant Ambush Protected vehicles (MRAPs) and Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs), as well as continued investment in Intelligence, Surveillance, Target Acquisition, and Reconnaissance (ISTAR) and networking of military forces. Those NATO partners that have been in the fight in the south have reequipped their forces for the campaign at hand. For example, Canada is upgrading 550 of its Generation III Light Armoured Vehicles (LAV III) to provide better anti-mine and CIED capabilities. Canada also urgently acquired some old technology, namely, Leopard II main battle tanks, which were rushed to theatre. Britain is at the forefront in Europe of arming for small wars. For example, the British Army has purchased some 400 MRAPs for the campaign in Afghanistan, with orders for another 300. The Royal Air Force operates Predator and Reaper UAVs, is developing its own Watchkeeper UAVs, and following the SDSR has launched a new Combat ISTAR program. Upgrades to Britain’s strategic and operational network have improved the ability of the British military to push Full Motion Video (FMV), biometrics, and other intelligence data into and around the battle space.

Thus, the technology gap for small wars has closed between the United States and key tier 1 and 2 war-fighting states. Of note here is that France is procuring some 600 new infantry fighting vehicles with enhanced blast protection. For the big European militaries less engaged in war fighting in Afghanistan — namely, Germany, Italy, and Spain — military modernization continues to be focused on future conventional war with some investment in RMA technologies. Yet, here the technology gap continues to grow.⁴

The strategy gap

Less well appreciated is the transatlantic strategy gap that has emerged in the post-Cold War era. Simply put, Europe states have lost the art of strategy. This is self-evident in the Afghanistan campaign. NATO assumed command of ISAF in 2003, but it did not produce a Comprehensive Strategic Political-Military Plan until April 2008. Even then, ISAF did not generate a coherent campaign plan until a year later, with the arrival of US Gen. Stanley McChrystal in the summer of 2009. In essence, it took American engagement for NATO and ISAF to develop a strategy for the war. Prior to 2009, the United States was preoccupied with the Iraq War, and the European allies were unable to formulate a strategy without America’s lead.

Of course, this problem pre-dates Afghanistan. Western use of force became divorced from strategy in the humanitarian interventions of the post-Cold War era. In Northern Iraq, Croatia, Bosnia, Somalia, Haiti, Sierra Leone, Kosovo, and East Timor, Western states allowed themselves to be drawn into other peoples’ wars. Western militaries fought not to defeat an opponent, but to achieve a range of less decisive goals — to enforce a peace, protect a population, disarm warring parties, and so forth. In most of these cases (Sierra Leone and East Timor are exceptions), Western states failed to develop coherent strategies for these conflicts for a variety of reasons.
The main reason was that the processes for generating campaign objectives and forces were de-linked. UN Security Council (UNSC) resolutions provided the mandates for all of these wars except Kosovo. Hence campaign objectives were generated through international diplomacy and mediated by the requirements of international law. In contrast, the contributions to these humanitarian campaigns were generated by various national political and bureaucratic processes. As a general trend, states tended to talk tough but failed to deliver the forces necessary to achieve the mission. Collective responsibility within the UN framework enabled individual states to shirk responsibility for failing humanitarian campaigns. Thus, Britain and France, Europe's major military powers, let the humanitarian situation in Bosnia fester for three years, and the blame was shared across a broad rainbow alliance of states involved in the UN Protection Force (UNPROFOR). There was also a significant element of posturing and symbolic use of force, not to impress opponents as part of a coercive or deterrent strategy, but to impress domestic audiences back home that their government was “doing something” about that humanitarian crisis. It can be argued that a similar dynamic is at play in the current NATO campaign in Libya. Political opportunism and posturing triggered British and French military intervention, without an agreed strategy in place.

The capacity for strategy making has also been retarded in the West as a consequence of the Cold War, when Western strategy was focused on the technicalities of nuclear targeting and conventional force ratios on the intra-European front. Military technicalities were swapped for legal technicalities over two decades of humanitarian campaigning. The real matter of strategy — linking war objectives, resources, and politics — was lost from view, and the skill of producing a plan that marries these moving parts was also lost.

These two fundamental problems — collective irresponsibility and an overly technical, apolitical approach to campaign planning — dogged the Afghanistan war until late 2009 when the United States finally took responsibility for the war and appointed a new campaign commander who understood that the conflict was primarily about politics. This goes to suggest that the art of strategy has not been lost in America, though the United States did commit some grievous strategic errors in Iraq and Afghanistan under the administration of President George W. Bush. In Britain, the military openly recognizes its failure to think strategically about the challenges in Iraq and Afghanistan and, indeed, the Chief of the Defense Staff, Sir David Richards, has directed the creation of a military strategy shop within the Ministry of Defense (MOD).

The legal gap

European states are bound, in a way that the United States is not, when it comes to legal restrictions on the use of force. A basic distinction needs to be drawn out between international law on when and how force may (and may not) be used. On both, but especially the latter, Europeans adhere more strictly to the law. Therein lies a problem for coalition operations that is also under-acknowledged.

As a general rule, the UN Charter prohibits states from using, or threatening to use, military force against another state or civilians except under specific, restricted circumstances. This is a peremptory norm of international law from which there are no derogations. However, there are two exceptions to this rule — namely, use of force in self-defence and the UNSC authorising the use of force to restore international peace and security. Some states, especially the United States and Israel, take an expansive view of what qualifies self-defence, to include use of force to prevent a threat from emerging. Use of force to pre-empt an imminent attack may be legal under customary international law. Few states, though, recognize the legality of preventive use of force where a threat is not imminent. As
a superpower, the United States has felt it necessary to use force on a number of occasions since 1945 to protect its interests and thereby, as US policymakers see it, global security.

In using force to protect global interests and prevent threats from materializing, the United States is not simply pursuing a “might makes right” approach. Rather, the United States and European states have different philosophical approaches to international law. European states generally take a positivist approach, rooted in the work of English and German scholars of the mid-19th to mid-20th centuries, which sees law as a set of rules agreed by states in agreements and customary practice. They consider states bound by these rules, regardless of the ethics of the situation. In other words, for legal positivism, international law is not about advancing moral outcomes in world politics but simply regulating state interaction. This view was challenged by Liberal theorists in mid-20th century America, in the context of an emerging Cold War struggle to promote democracy and contain and defeat Communism. The legacy of this is a Liberal approach to international law, where US policymakers seek to interpret and stretch the law so that it may be used to advance Liberal values. To be sure, necessity born of global interests and responsibilities gives the United States reason enough to be creative with the law. But the point is that this creativity is rooted in a Liberal approach that seeks to make law serve specific moral ends.

The political force in Europe that espouses a legal prohibition on use of force appears to have grown with the end of the Cold War. This is not to say that European states are entirely bound by international law on use of force. In NATO’s 1999 Kosovo War, European states used force without lawful right. However, the 2003 Iraq War appears to have hardened European opinion on the necessity of legal grounds for the use of force. Notably, France and Germany were strong opponents of the US-led invasion, mostly on political grounds, but they used law as the framework through which to argue their case with the United States. Perhaps less appreciated is the impact of this war on British political opinion. The debate in Britain mostly revolved around the legality of the war, rather than the military necessity of it. In deciding to support an illegal war by the United States — which is how it was view by most Britons and, crucially, the British Labour Party — then-Prime Minister Tony Blair effectively committed political suicide. This episode may be expected to throw a long shadow over British politics for years to come. Indeed, we see it already in the great lengths to which the current British coalition government has gone to establish the legal basis of NATO’s ongoing air campaign in Libya.

An even more pronounced transatlantic legal gap exists on international law regulating the conduct of warfare, i.e., the Law of Armed Conflict (LOAC). Here, too, US military forces view themselves as less constrained than their European counterparts. Two areas are worth highlighting. The first is targeting. In modern war, many targets — such as transportation, communications, and power infrastructure — serve both civilian and military uses. This is particularly so in small wars where the opponents include non-state actors. European states are bound by the 1971 Additional Protocols of the Geneva Conventions, which clarify the law on dual-use targets in a way that restricts when force may be directed against them. The United States is not a signatory of the 1977 Additional Protocols and, accordingly, adopts a more expansive interpretation of the law on attacking dual-use targets. Hence, when NATO sought to redouble the pressure on Serbia in the Kosovo War by extending its air campaign to dual-use targets in and around the Belgrade capital, European air forces were unable to execute most of the target packages based on their international legal commitments.

The second area in the LOAC is the impact of European and domestic law on military operations. Incredible as it may sound to American ears, the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) has a direct impact on how European militaries fight. The ECHR creates a high bar for European
militaries in terms of their duty to care for service personnel. Obviously, allowances are made for conventional war but less so for counterinsurgency campaigns and other asymmetric conflicts. Even more profoundly, the ECHR creates obligations for European militaries with respect to how they treat civilians, and especially detainees, in such campaigns. The ECHR reinforces and exceeds the obligations under the LOAC, giving foreign affected civilians the right to pursue legal action in Europe against offending European militaries.

European militaries may face additional restrictions under domestic law in how they conduct operations. This may be clearly seen in the case of Britain. In operations outside of war, British forces may only use force in self-defence. Up to the mid-2000s, this severely hindered British forces in Afghanistan and Iraq; for instance, insurgents could not be targeted unless they were armed and presented an immediate threat. Moreover, British military authorities are required to investigate lethal use of force outside of war and report any irregularities to the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) for possible prosecution under British criminal law. The realities of combat operations have led British legal advisors to reinterpret the law to permit the targeting of, for instance, insurgent spotters (what British soldiers call “dickers”). But, still today, in escalation of force incidents resulting in civilian deaths, British troops face the ever-present risk that the CPS may prosecute.

Implications for TSC

_Tomorrow's Security Challenges_ presents a world of trouble for the United States in the near future, or more precisely four worlds each with their own sets of threats. Consistent cooperation between allies has demonstrated that America need not face these dangers alone. The West contains a Fighting Core of states from which America can fashion military coalitions. In some cases, NATO itself may act, possibly even without UNSC authorisation, as it did in Kosovo in 1999. This would provide a powerful legitimacy boost to any US-led military campaign, but it would undoubtedly come at some cost to unity of command and effort. Alternatively, a coalition of states from the Fighting Core may join a US-led campaign, offering less by way of legitimacy but better unity of command and effort.

It is a brave, or foolhardy, social scientist who would predict the future. But in the spirit of _TSC_, we may roughly sketch out the prospects for US-led coalition warfare in each of the four futures presented in the _TSC_. I shall do so along three parameters: 1) The probability of war generating the requirement for a Western coalition, 2) the likely supply of coalition partners from the Western Fighting Core, and 3) the likely effectiveness of western coalitions in terms of legitimacy and military capabilities.

_The Concert of Powers_ scenario is the most benign future for the United States out to 2025. On the whole, the international community works effectively through various multilateral institutions and channels to deal with the major security challenges facing the world. The probability of war is low, and the US military will be mostly conducting operations other than war. Ironically while the demand for coalition partners may be low, the supply is likely to be high given the mood of multilateralism and the limited risk of actual fighting. The prospects for US-led military coalitions are reasonably good in this scenario. Indeed, most US military operations are likely to occur in partnership with allies, especially NATO allies. There will be a degree of disunity of effort but this may be accommodated without too much trouble given the relatively low tempo and risk in operations other than war.
Table 3. Future prospects for US-led coalition warfare

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Future World Scenario</th>
<th>Probability of War</th>
<th>Coalition Supply</th>
<th>Coalition Effectiveness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Concert of powers</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fragmented international system</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rise of non-state networks</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great-power confrontations</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low to medium</td>
<td>Low to high</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Fragmented International System scenario is the most worrying future, because it is the most plausible of the four. This sees a world where Western power is diffused into regional blocs, and international consensus breaks down on how to deal with major security challenges. Here, the probability of war is medium, with relative decline of US power creating instability in the Middle East and with nuclear proliferation creating pressure for preventive military action. Ironically, and unfortunately, the supply of coalition partners is likely to be low in such a world. The NATO partners are unlikely to be able to agree sufficiently to commit the Alliance to war. The UNSC is also likely to be deadlocked, and in the absence of an authorising UNSC resolution, this will create a further obstacle to European participation in any US-led war. The United States should still be able to drum up a small coalition from within the Fighting Core, namely Britain and a couple of others. However, with few partners, the coalition would have limited effectiveness in terms of providing legitimacy and even resources to the campaign.10

The Rise of Non-State Networks is a future where America faces a myriad of security challenges associated with the decline of states, rise of violent extremism, and an increase in transnational terrorism and crime. In this future, US forces must concentrate on counterterrorism (CT) and irregular warfare. There is a medium probability of war of the kind the United States is waging in Afghanistan — not large-scale conventional warfare, but large-scale counterinsurgency warfare. The supply of coalition partners will also be medium. The pool of coalition partners will be large in an Afghan-type scenario, where the war is clearly just and legal. The pool will be smaller in an Iraq-type scenario, where the legality and legitimacy of the war are open to question. The effectiveness of military coalitions will be high because the Fighting Core, especially tier 1 and 2 states, will bring military capabilities optimised for CT and irregular warfare.

The Return of Great Power Confrontations is the most alarmist but, fortunately, least plausible future world for America. It forecasts a general shift in power from West to East (this trend is plausible enough), and increased competition between status quo and revisionist powers over “resources, markets, and influence.” This future has all the nightmare scenarios lumped together: The rise of China, a resurgent Russia, and energy insecurity. TSC suggests that all-out major conventional war is
still unlikely in this future, but it foresees a return to pre-1914 style arms races and military confrontations between the United States and the rising powers. Most students of military history will agree that arms races coupled with multiple military confrontations lead to a high probability for conventional war. The supply of coalition partners in this future scenario will be low to medium: Low if the main challenge comes from China, because Europeans tend to view this threat differently than the United States; medium if the primary threat comes from a resurgent Russia or access to energy supplies. Some Europeans would plausibly support a war triggered by either threat, but other European states, especially Germany, would still favor non-military responses. Under this scenario, the effectiveness of military coalitions will be low to high. It will be low if the supply of coalition partners is low, impacting on the legitimacy uplift. Of course, in an era of great-power competition, low legitimacy is to be expected and hence more tolerable. In terms of military capabilities, a small coalition could have medium to high effectiveness at protecting access to the global commons or containing a rising China, because Europeans have relatively strong naval forces. Effectiveness will be high both in terms of legitimacy and military capabilities in the case of a large coalition/NATO military response to aggression from a resurgent Russia.

Conclusions

It is not too much of a stretch to say that military coalitions are the new norm for Western warfare. This paper has drawn out the distinction between formal alliances (focusing on NATO) and ad-hoc coalitions to explore the political legitimacy versus military capability benefits and constraints of military coalitions. In reality, future US-led coalitions may come in all shapes and sizes. Indeed, by identifying three tiers of military partners, the implication is that the Fighting Core from within NATO may form its own ad-hoc coalition, thus offering a legitimacy and capability uplift. Obviously, there are also other alliance and coalition partners outside of NATO that are important to the United States, including the African Union, Gulf Cooperation Council, and Association of Southeast Asian Nations. Depending on the location and nature of a particular future conflict, one of these alliances may provide more of a legitimacy uplift than NATO. Indeed, for the United States, the support of the Arab League was crucial in launching the air campaign against Libya, though, interestingly, the United States handed over control of the campaign to NATO about a week later in order to deflect criticisms from the Arab League about the scale of the bombings against Mu’amar Qadhifi’s forces.

Regardless of which future, and whatever form and configuration of military coalition, any US wartime partnership with the Europeans will suffer from capability gaps in technology, strategy, and law. These gaps do not damn future coalitions; US strategists and policymakers simply need to be alert to them and take remedial action. Here again, Afghanistan shows the way. Coalition contingents may be parcelled out to areas and missions in the theatre of operations, depending on military capabilities and national caveats. Even within national areas of operation, contingents with limited operational capabilities due to military or political constraints may be augmented with more robust US units. Hence, the Italian and Spanish campaign in Regional Command (RC)-West and the German-led campaign in Regional Command-North, depend on air and combat support from US task forces that are dedicated to each of these RCs. This blending of US and European forces offers a useful model for dealing with the legal capability gap, in particular. Of course, the technology gap may create some problems in terms of multinational operations within these blended force constructs. Finally, Afghanistan also underlines the imperative for US leadership to overcome the
strategy gap and to impose unity of command on coalitions, thereby ensuring unity of effort in the campaign.

1 Jeremy Pressman, *Warring Friends: Alliance Restraint in International Politics* (Cornell University Press, 2008)

2 I do not want to overdraw the distinction between NATO and ad hoc coalitions. NATO is able to exercise unity of effort, especially around a core of war-fighting states, as we have seen in Afghanistan since late 2009.


5 Sierra Leone is an exception, with Britain stepping in to rescue a failing UN peacekeeping missions, and deploying a sufficiently capable naval and ground task force for the mission.


7 Since the 1990s, the UNSC has authorised the use of force in response to a number of humanitarian crises that it judged were threats to international peace and security. However, most states refuse to recognise humanitarian intervention in itself as a lawful exception to the prohibition on the use of force.

8 Moreover, the US constitution does not recognise the superiority of international law, which is most unusual; for most states, international law trumps domestic law.


10 Of course, legitimacy in the exercise of military power may become less important in a fragmented international system, as discord and disagreement will characterise the international politics of this future.