

On War Series# **50-1** | **101-51** | **152-102** | **203-153** | **241-204****THE FREE CONGRESS COMMENTARY
BY WILLIAM S. LIND****On War #241
November 26, 2007**[In the Fox's Lair](#)

William S. Lind

One reason parts of Iraq have quieted down, at least for a while, has received widespread attention: the Sunni split from al-Qaeda. Al-Qaeda's own tactics alienated its base, which is usually a fatal political mistake, and for once we were wise enough not to get in the way of an enemy who was making a blunder.

But there has been little comment on an equally important reason for improved stability in Iraq, Muqtada al-Sadr's stand-down order to his Mahdi Army militia. Just as it seemed we were headed straight for a war with the Shiites, they sheered away. We now appear to be doing the same; at least the papers here no longer report daily raids and air strikes on Shiite areas. That too suggests we may have learned something.

But it does not explain the Mahdi Army's quiescence. I have no secret agent in the Desert Fox's lair, so I cannot report what Mr. al-Sadr is thinking. I doubt he is afraid of a confrontation with the U.S. military. Fighting the Americans is more likely to strengthen than weaken his hold on his own movement. So what gives?

The Sunday, November 18 *New York Times* made passing mention of a possible clue. It suggested that the Mahdi Army and some other Shiites have backed away from confronting the U.S. because Iran asked them to.

If that is true, it bumps the same question up a level. Why are the Iranians asking their allies in Iraq to give us a break? I doubt it is out of charity, or fear, although elements within Iran that do not want a war with the United States seem to be gaining political strength.

Here's a hypothesis. What if the Iranians had determined, rightly or wrongly (and I suspect rightly), that the Bush administration has already decided to attack Iran before the end of its term? Two actions would seem logical on their part. First, try to maneuver the Americans into the worst possible position on the moral level by denying them pretexts for an attack. Telling their allied Shiite militias in Iraq to cool it would be part of that, as would reducing the flow of Iranian arms to Iraqi insurgents and improving cooperation with the international community on the nuclear issue. We see evidence of the latter two actions as well as the first.

Second, they would tell their allies in Iraq to keep their powder dry. Back off for now, train, build up stocks of weapons and explosives and work out plans for what they will do as their part of the Iranian counter-attack. Counter-attack there will certainly be, on the ground against our forces in Iraq, in one form or another. In almost all possible counter-attack scenarios, it would be highly valuable to Iran if the Mahdi Army and other Shiite militias could cut the Americans' supply lines running up from Kuwait and slow down their movements so that they could not mass their widely dispersed forces. In John Boyd's phrase, it would be a classic Cheng-Chi operation.

Again, I cannot say this is what lies behind the Mahdi Army's stand-down; Zeppelin reconnaissance over Iran has been inconclusive. But it is consistent with three probabilities: that the Bush administration has decided to bomb Iran, that the Iranians plan in response to roll up our army in Iraq and that Muqtada al-Sadr and other Iraqi Shiite leaders coordinate their actions closely with Tehran.

In past wars, quiet periods at the front have often preceded a "big push" by one side or both. Such may prove to be the case in Iraq as well, at least as far as Muqtada al-Sadr and his Mahdi Army are concerned. If so, in view of the situations in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Lebanon and the almost certain failure of the Tea Lady's Annapolis initiative, 2008 may see the Islamic world in

flames from the Himalayas to the Mediterranean. To paraphrase Horace Greeley, buy gold, young man, buy gold.

William S. Lind, expressing his own personal opinion, is Director for the Center for Cultural Conservatism for the Free Congress Foundation.

On War #240
November 13, 2007

[Cops Who Think](#)

William S. Lind

Like most militaries, most police departments are not famous for their intellectual attainments. Doughnuts, it seems, are not brain food. Fortunately, that is beginning to change. Police are starting to understand that they, not the military, are on the front line of Fourth Generation war, and they need to think about what that means for them.

Up until now, the leading police agency in thinking about 4GW has been the Los Angeles Sheriffs Department. That is not surprising; cops in L.A. face 4GW on the streets all the time, in the form of war between ethnically-defined gangs.

But the east coast is waking up. The New York City Police Department has just put out an interesting study of the most dangerous variety of 4GW, the local kind. Titled *Radicalization in the West: The Homegrown Threat* and written by two NYPD Senior Intelligence Analysts, Mitchell D. Silber and Arvin Bhatt, this monograph is an important contribution to the slowly-growing corpus of 4GW literature.

The title is slightly and unintentionally misleading. The study reflects just one kind of homegrown 4GW threat, the Islamic variety. I'm sure the NYPD recognizes that there are many other domestic sources of 4GW beyond Islam, but it might want to clarify that point in a future edition.

[Radicalization in the West: The Homegrown Threat](#) [2.1 MB PDF] proceeds from one unstated but critically important assumption: if police are acting as "first responders," after an incident has occurred, they have failed. Success in defending civil society requires not first response but prevention.

Prevention can only be done by police, because only police, not the military, are sufficiently integrated with society to get the "tips" prevention usually requires. The need for such integration in turn explains why police should never allow themselves to be militarized, despite most cops' enthusiasm for military gear. Militarization automatically separates police from civil society, which leaves them blind and deaf.

The study begins with an observation by NYC Police Commissioner Raymond W. Kelly:

While the threat from overseas remains, many of the terrorist attacks or thwarted plots against cities in Europe, Canada, Australia and the United States have been conceptualized and planned by local residents/citizens who sought to attack their country of residence.

The bulk of the study seeks to identify a pattern these homegrown 4GW fighters follow in their self-development.

Where once we would have defined the initial indicator of the threat at the point where a terrorist or group of terrorists would actually plan an attack, we have now shifted our focus to a much earlier point—a point where we believe the potential terrorist or group of terrorists begin and progress through a process of radicalization. The culmination of this process is a terrorist attack...

An assessment of the various reported models of radicalization leads to the conclusion that the radicalization process is composed of four distinct phases:

- Stage 1 : Pre-radicalization
- Stage 2 : Self-radicalization

- Stage 3 : Indoctrination
- Stage 4 : Jihadization

Each of these phases is unique and has specific signatures...

The NYPD shows its grasp of the realities of 4GW by not seeing the enemy as a structure or organization:

Al-Qaeda has provided the inspiration for homegrown radicalization and terrorism; direct command and control by al-Qaeda has been the exception rather than the rule among the case studies reviewed in this study...

Rather, it (radicalization) is a phenomenon that occurs because the individual is looking for an identity and a cause...

- Salafist Islam provides the identity and cause these young men are seeking -- and as a number of the case studies show, it has an appeal beyond ethnic boundaries. The NYPD study correctly notes that:
- This (Salafist) ideology is proliferating in Western democracies at a logarithmic rate...
- The Internet is a driver and enabler for the process of radicalization...
- Prior to 9/11, the entire radicalization process moved at a much slower rate...
- The radicalization process is accelerating in terms of how long it takes and the individuals are continuing to get younger.

For those who believe the "terrorist" threat is waning, *Radicalization in the West: The Homegrown Threat* should provide a needed wake-up call. Al-Qaeda may today be less able to carry off 9/11 style operations than it was when it had its Afghan sanctuaries, but it has replaced that operational model with a model based on "leaderless resistance." The "leaderless resistance" model is less vulnerable to counter-attack by state armed forces and may, over time, also be more deadly.

The good news here is that unlike the military, the cops get it. Perhaps that should not surprise us. Several years ago, I gave my "Four Generations of Modern War" talk to a police conference. I did not modify the talk for a police audience; I told them I did not know enough about policing to be able to do that. They had to translate it from military to police terms themselves.

While perhaps 10% of the average military audience gets what I am saying, 90% of the cops got it. For cops, the real world is the street, not the internal world of promotion and budget politics that absorbs most American military officers. Outward focus, it seems, makes a difference.

Note: There will be no "On War" column Thanksgiving week.

William S. Lind, expressing his own personal opinion, is Director for the Center for Cultural Conservatism for the Free Congress Foundation.

On War #239
October 29, 2007

[A Question for Would-Be Presidents](#)

William S. Lind

As the Presidential debate wallow their sorry way through a sea of inanities, leaving in their wake 600 million glazed eyes, a novel thought occurs: what if some mad cur introduced a real question into one of them? At the very least, it would be fun to watch the puppets' strings snap (each party has a single candidate who is not a Punchinello, Ron Paul for the Republicans and Dennis Kucinich for the Democrats). I have just such a question at hand, one that happens to be central to the future of our republic: How, dear sir or madam, do you propose, if elected President, to avoid a long war?

Wouldn't it be fun to watch Senator McNasty and Lady MacBeth, the Great Chicago Vacuum and the Little Brooklyn Duce wrestle

with that?

Make no mistake, the Washington Establishment intends our future will be defined by a long war, with all that entails. Commentator/Cunctator Fabius Maximus wrote on July 24, 2007,

The flood of information and commentary available today can obscure events of the greatest significance. We see that today, as America takes another step toward the long war. Without thought or reflection, without debate by our elected officials, without our consent.

Fabius cites as evidence the opening lines of the 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review:

The United States is a nation engaged in what will be a long war. Since the attacks of September 11, 2001, our Nation has fought a global war against violent extremists who use terrorism as their weapon of choice, and who seek to destroy our free way of life.

As usual in Washington, the names are changed to protect the guilty. *Washington Post* columnist Jim Hoagland wrote on October 21,

Pentagon leaders have, in fact, shifted to talking of "an era of persistent conflict" rather than "the long war," a phrase that implied a military-dominated struggle with distinct battlefields and a clearly defined end. Today that sounds downright optimistic.

"Persistent conflict"...is "the new normal," General George Casey, the Army's chief of staff, told the House Armed Services Committee last month. The Army must remake itself with that in mind, he added.

What's wrong with this picture? Sun Tzu said it succinctly: "There is no instance of a nation benefiting from prolonged warfare." Acceptance by any Presidential candidate of a "long war" or "persistent conflict" is an admission of grand strategic imbecility. Which, just possibly, ought not be the highest qualification for public office, all appearances notwithstanding.

Our first, recently concluded long war should serve as a caution. Philip Bobbit said,

The "Long War" is a term for the conflict that began in 1914 with the First World War and concluded in 1990 with the end of the Cold War. The Long War embraces the First World War, the Bolshevik Revolution, the Spanish Civil War, the Second World War, the Korean War, the War in Vietnam and the Cold War.

In 1914, America was a republic with a small federal government, a self-reliant citizenry, growing industry, an expanding middle class, an uplifting culture and exemplary morals. By 1990 and the end of that long war, we had become a tawdry and increasingly resented world empire with a vast, endlessly intrusive federal government, a population of willingly manipulated consumers, shrinking industry, a vanishing middle class, a debauched culture and morals that would shame a self-respecting stoat.

Where will another long war leave us? We need not speculate at random. The Newspeak "Patriot Act," a plunging dollar, \$2 trillion for one lost war and the devil knows how much for a second, a flood of Third World immigrants and cultural Marxism rampant in the highest places all point to the answer. What's left of America won't be worth a bucket of warm spit, or however you say that in Spanish.

A long war, or "persistent conflict," is not inevitable. It is ours only if we choose it. There are alternatives. A defensive, rather than an offensive, grand strategy is one. Closing our borders and minding our own goddam business is another. Iraq, Afghanistan, the Sudan, wherever can stew in their own heathen juice.

So how about it, all you would-be Presidents: what do you intend to do to keep America out of an inevitably disastrous long war? If you cannot answer that question, you shouldn't be running for dogcatcher of Dogpatch.

William S. Lind, expressing his own personal opinion, is Director for the Center for Cultural Conservatism for the Free Congress Foundation.

On War #238
October 23, 2007

[Mahan or Corbett?](#)

William S. Lind

In an article in the November issue of the Atlantic Monthly, "America's Elegant Decline," Robert Kaplan reminds us of a geostrategic reality we can easily forget in the face of Fourth Generation wars in Iraq and Afghanistan: we are inescapably a maritime power.

When Kaplan says that "Hulls in the water could soon displace boots on the ground as the most important military catchphrase of our time," he engages in navalist hyperbole, unless he is anticipating the general Resurrection when the sea will give up her dead. We face no credible blue-water naval challenger. The Pentagon's threat inflators keep trying to puff the magic dragon, but the Chinese Navy remains merely a collection of ships.

We do not need naval supremacy because, as Kaplan writes, "'Regular wars' between major states could be as frequent in the 21st century as they were in the 20th." If states are so foolish as to fight "regular wars," they will find most are won by non-state, Fourth Generation elements as defeated (and sometimes victorious) states disintegrate.

Rather, we need naval supremacy because in a world where the state is weakening, water, and transport by water, grow in importance. People today think of land uniting and water dividing, but that became true only recently, with the rise of the state and the development of railways (which can only function in the safety and order created by states). From the dawn of river and sea-faring until the mid-19th century, water united and land divided. It was easier, safer, cheaper and faster to move goods and people by water than by land.

So it will be again in a 21st century dominated by Fourth Generation war and declining or disappearing states. Already, in places such as the Congo, the only way to move is on the rivers. A country that can control waterways anywhere in the world will have a great strategic advantage. Given our maritime geography and our long and proud naval tradition, that country should be the United States.

Unfortunately, we are not developing the naval capabilities we need to do that. The reason shows once again the importance of military theory. The U.S. Navy has to choose between two naval theorists, Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan and Sir Julian Corbett, and it has chosen wrongly.

Kaplan writes,

The best way to understand the tenuousness of our grip on "hard," military power (to say nothing of "soft," diplomatic power) is to understand our situation at sea. This requires an acquaintance with two books published a century ago: Mahan's *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 1660-1783*, which was written in 1890, and Julian S. Corbett's *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy*, which came out in 1911...

Mahan believed in concentrating national naval forces in search of the decisive battle: For him, success was about sinking the other fleet...

Julian Corbett, a British historian, did not so much disagree with Mahan as offer a subtler approach, placing greater emphasis on doing more with less.

Kaplan gets Mahan right, but not Corbett. Mahan in essence wrote naval theory for children; I was much impressed by *The Influence of Sea Power on History* when I was fifteen. Corbett in contrast writes for adults, focusing not on great naval battles but on the use of sea power in a larger context. That larger context is strategy suited to a maritime power, which expresses itself in amphibious warfare directed at a continental enemy's vulnerable peripheries. Corbett's two-volume history, *England in the Seven Year's War*, is probably the deepest study of amphibious warfare ever written.

Where Kaplan really goes wrong is when he writes, "By necessity, the American Navy is turning from Mahan to Corbett." On the contrary, if you look at the U. S. Navy's shipbuilding program, it is almost purely Mahanian. Today as throughout the Cold War, the U.S. Navy is building a fleet perfectly designed to fight the navy of Imperial Japan. If someone wants to contest control of

the Pacific Ocean in a war between aircraft carrier task forces, we are ready. Unfortunately, no one does, absent that general Resurrection when *Shokaku* and *Zuikaku*, *Soryu* and *Hiryu* will rise from their watery graves.

Were the U.S. Navy really to turn to Corbett, it would build lots of ships designed for operations in coastal waters and on rivers, often with troops on board. But such ships are small ships, and the U.S. Navy hates small ships. Some thirty years ago, when the Senator I worked for was trying to push the Navy into buying some small, fast missile boats, the PHMs, the then-Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Holloway, said contemptuously in testimony, "The U.S. Navy has no place for little ships."

That attitude has not changed. Kaplan quotes a former deputy assistant secretary of defense, Jim Thomas, as saying, "The Navy is not primarily about low-level raiding, piracy patrols, and riverine warfare. If we delude ourselves into thinking that it is, we're finished as a great power."

Those are precisely the missions we need a Navy for in a Fourth Generation world -- a world in which, as I have noted before, the term "great power" has no meaning.

William S. Lind, expressing his own personal opinion, is Director for the Center for Cultural Conservatism for the Free Congress Foundation.

On War #237
October 15, 2007

[Out of the Frying Pan...](#)

William S. Lind

The Pentagon last week floated a trial balloon suggesting that all U.S. Marines might pullout of Iraq and head to Afghanistan, while the Army would do the opposite and concentrate on Iraq. The rationale was mere administrative efficiency or neatness, which hardly justifies the turmoil the proposal would cause. I would personally be happy to see my Marine friends leave Iraq before the roof there falls in, but trading Iraq for Afghanistan is little more than a jump out of the frying pan into the fire.

If, however, a Marine Corps takeover of the war in Afghanistan were used as an opportunity to change the way we are waging that war, then it would be more than justified. What would meaningful change entail?

First, we would have to adopt a realistic strategic goal, one that might be attainable. The present strategic goal of turning Afghanistan into a modern, secular, capitalist state with "equal rights for women" and similar claptrap lies in the in realm of fantasy. The most Afghanistan can become is Afghanistan in its better periods, which is to say a country with a weak central government, strong local warlords, endemic tribal civil war, a drug-based economy and a traditional Islamic society and culture. The dominant tribe, controlling the central government in Kabul, will be the Pashtun, because it always has been.

There are two possible strategies for attaining this goal, neither of which guarantees success, but both of which have a potential for success, unlike what we and NATO are doing now. The first is to split the Pashtun from the Taliban, making the Pashtun our allies instead of our enemies. Since the Pashtun always win in the end, we must be allied with them if we are not to lose.

The second possible strategy is to split the Taliban from al-Qaeda and similar ethnically Arab 4GW entities and make a deal with them in which they would again get Kabul and the government. That central government will, as always in Afghan history, be weak, so we are not giving up all that much. This strategy has the advantage that it would reduce the pressure on Pakistan, which remains a *de facto* ally of the Taliban. If Pakistan goes, and it is going, our position in the region collapses overnight.

Of the two strategic options, I think the second is more likely to work. It gives us a central authority to make a deal with; other than the Taliban, who can deliver the Pashtun to the alliance we need? The same lack of an alternate legitimate authority—the Karzai government is not one—makes splitting the Pashtun from the Taliban a tall order. Most probably, attempting to do so will leave us enmeshed in endless local politics we can neither understand nor bring to any sort of useful conclusion. While we would have to swallow some of our (overweening) pride to give Kabul back to the Taliban, the Taliban is not in and of itself any threat to America, so long as it is not in bed with al-Qaeda.

Both strategic options require a radical change in American tactics, from "winning battles" defined by "kills" to the tactics of de-escalation. The FMFM-IA lays out in detail what a tactics of de-escalation means. Suffice it here to say here that it includes an

end to airstrikes, trying to capture rather than kill those Pashtun we have to fight (and treating prisoners very well, as future allies), and replacing the American addiction to firepower with good light infantry tactics.

If the Bush administration is able to adopt these strategic recommendations, then handing Afghanistan over to the Marine Corps makes sense. The Marine Corps has generals who can think in strategic terms (if the Army has any, it has not sent them to Afghanistan). It is perhaps slightly less addicted to firepower than the Army, though Marine aviation may be a problem. While Marine infantry tactics are little if any better than the Army's, it would be easier to retrain Marine infantry in true light infantry tactics, if only because the Marine Corps is smaller. Perhaps most importantly, Marines have learned something of the tactics of de-escalation in Anbar province in Iraq. Had they not done so, Anbar would still be an al-Qaeda stronghold.

The choke point, as always, is the Bush administration. The Marine Corps on its own cannot change our strategy in Afghanistan. It can advocate a change. Perhaps it can line up DOD and the State Department behind such a change. But in the end, only the White House can make the change. Will it? Only if it learns from experience, which so far it has shown no ability to do.

William S. Lind, expressing his own personal opinion, is Director for the Center for Cultural Conservatism for the Free Congress Foundation.

On War #236
October 9, 2007

[Not so fast, John](#)

William S. Lind

Major General John Kelly is one of the Marine Corps' most thoughtful and most able leaders. Many who hope to see the Marine Corps' doctrine of Maneuver Warfare someday become real instead of just words on paper pray he has a bright future. When, as a major, he was commander of Infantry Officers' Course at Quantico, he did what every Marine school director should do: he hauled all the old, Second Generation lesson plans out into the courtyard, poured gasoline on them and burned them. I have known him since that time, and I regard him as a personal friend.

In late September, speaking to the San Diego Military Advisory Council, General Kelly said:

I left Iraq three years ago last month. I returned a week ago after a two week visit of getting the lay of the land for my upcoming deployment. It is still a dangerous and foreboding land, but what I experienced personally was amazing and remarkable -- we are winning, we are really winning. No one told me to say that, I saw it for myself.

I have to reply, not so fast, John. I have no doubt the situation General Kelly found in Anbar Province is much quieter than it was just a short time ago. That means fewer casualties, for which we are all thankful. But in the inherent complexity of a Fourth Generation situation, it does not mean we are winning. If we put the improved situation in Anbar in context, we quickly see there is less to it than first meets the eye.

That context begins with the fact that Anbar is quieter primarily because of what al Qaeda did, namely alienating its base, not what we did. We enabled the local Sunnis to turn on al Qaeda by ceasing or at least diminishing our attacks on the local population. But if al Qaeda had not blundered, the situation would be about what it had been since the real war started. We have not found a silver bullet for 4GW.

Nor is the war in Iraq a binary conflict, America vs. al Qaeda, although, that is how Washington now portrays it. Al Qaeda is only one of a vast array of non-state actors, fighting for many different kinds of goals. If al Qaeda in Iraq disappeared tomorrow, Iraq would remain chaotic.

The fact that some Sunni tribes have turned on al Qaeda does not mean they like us. It just means we have for the moment become the #2 enemy instead of #1, or perhaps #3, with the Shiites ranking ahead of us. Some think the Sunnis are just getting whatever they can from us as they prepare for another, more bitter round of the Sunni vs. Shiite civil war.

But the biggest reason for saying "not so fast" is that the reduction of violence in Anbar does not necessary point toward the rise of a state in the now-stateless region of Mesopotamia. As I have argued repeatedly in this column and elsewhere, we can only win in Iraq if a new state emerges there. Far from pointing toward that, our new working relationship with some Sunni sheiks

points away from it.

The sheiks represent local, feudal power, not a state. We are working with them precisely because there is no Iraqi state to work with (the Maliki government is a polite fiction). From a practical standpoint, there is nothing else we can do to get any results. But our alliances with Sunni sheiks in effect represents our acceptance, *de facto* if not *de jure*, of the reality that there is no state.

The sheiks, we must recognize, do not accept the Shiite puppet government in Baghdad (nothing illustrates its puppet nature better than its inability to expel Blackwater) or its armed forces, which are mostly Shiite militias who get government paychecks. The Baghdad government recognizes this fact. A story in the October 1 *Cleveland Plain Dealer* quotes Prime Minister al-Maliki's United Iraqi Alliance (Shiite) as condemning

"authorizing the (Sunni tribal) groups to conduct security acts away from the jurisdiction of the government and without its knowledge."

The statement went on: "We demand that the American administration stop this adventure, which is rejected by all the sons of the people and its national political powers."

Rightly, the ruling Shiites fear that what we are actually creating is new Sunni militias, which will fight the Shiite militias.

Finally, as if all this did not throw enough cold water on any notion that we are winning, just as the Marines are ramping down our war with the Iraqi Sunnis, in Anbar, the U.S. Army is ramping up a war with the Shiite population. Almost every day we read about another raid on the Shiite, all too often one where we have called in airstrikes on populated Shiite neighborhoods. A story in the October 6 *Plain Dealer*, U.S. raid north of Baghdad kills 25," was typical:

An Iraqi army official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said U.S. aircraft bombed the neighborhood repeatedly and he claimed civilians, including seven children, were among those killed.

He said the civilians had rushed out to help those hurt in the initial bombing...

...the town's top official said U. S. forces targeted areas built up by the locals to protect their Shiite neighborhoods against attacks by al-Qaida gunmen.

If we have not enjoyed fighting the 20% of the Iraqi population that is Sunni, how much pleasure will we find in fighting the 60% that is Shiite? Of course, an American attack on Iran will only intensify our war with Iraq's Shiites.

So no, we are not winning in Iraq. The only meaningful definition of "winning" is seeing the re-emergence of a real Iraqi state, and by that standard we are no closer to victory than we ever were. Nor can I see anything on the horizon that could move us closer to such a victory, other than a complete American withdrawal, which begins to look as unlikely under Hillary as under George. All we see on the horizon of Anbar province, sadly, is another mirage.

William S. Lind, expressing his own personal opinion, is Director for the Center for Cultural Conservatism for the Free Congress Foundation.

On War #235
October 2, 2007

[John Boyd's Book](#)

William S. Lind

Colonel John Boyd, America's greatest military theorist, never wrote a book. But as a Marine friend of mine said, Col. Frans Osinga's new book, *Science, Strategy and War: The Strategic Theory of John Boyd*, is the book Boyd would have written if he had written a book. (As someone who worked with Boyd for about 15 years, I think the reason he did not write a book is that he loved giving his briefings, and he feared that if people could find his work in a book they would not ask him to brief.)

The central point Osinga makes is that, contrary to what is widely believed, Boyd's work cannot be summarized in the concept

of the OODA Loop. The OODA Loop concept says that in any conflict, all parties go through repeated cycles of Observing, Orienting, Deciding and Acting, and whoever can go through the cycle consistently faster will win. At the tactical level, this is often true.

But as Osinga points out, as soon as one moves up into the operational, strategic and grand strategic levels, Boyd's theory grows far more complex. There, accuracy of observation and especially of orientation become at least as important as tempo. Attaining accuracy requires far more than "information." In Boyd's own less-than-simple words,

Orientation is an interactive process of many-sided implicit cross-referencing projections, empathies, correlations, and rejections that is shaped by and shapes the interplay of genetic heritage, cultural tradition, previous experiences and unfolding circumstances.

Orientation is the Schwerpunkt. It shapes the way we interact with the environment—hence orientation shapes the way we observe, the way we decide, the way we act.

In this sense

Orientation shapes the character of present observation-orientation-decision-action loops—while these present loops shape the character of future orientation.

To make sense of all this, and more, Osinga begins by studying what Boyd studied. He works his way through Boyd's vast bibliography, which includes not only military history but also scientific thought and epistemology. Boyd immersed himself in multiple disciplines, applying his own prescription of analysis and synthesis, intellectual openness and constant cross-referencing to the creation of his military theories.

Osinga then proceeds to describe, discuss and analyze Boyd's vast briefings in chronological order, that is to say in the order in which Boyd developed them. Boyd's most famous briefing was *Patterns of Conflict*, with its contrast between attrition warfare and maneuver warfare. Again, Osinga notes that there is far more here than speed through the OODA Loop. Of key importance to Fourth Generation war, Boyd introduces his three levels of war: not the traditional tactical-operational-strategic but physical-mental-moral. As Osinga writes,

In *Patterns of Conflict* Boyd has thus offered his audience a new look at military history. With the conceptual lenses science offered him, with uncertainty as the key problem organisms and organizations have to surmount, he sheds new light on the dynamics of war...

Gradually he unfolds a novel conceptualization of tactics, grand tactics, strategy and grand strategy that revolves around the process of adaptation in which open, complex adaptive systems are constantly engaged.

Boyd's next briefing, my personal favorite, was *Organic Design for Command and Control*. It offers a devastating implied critique of the way the U.S. military is using technology to "improve" command and control. Boyd argues that, from a maneuverist perspective, you don't even want command and control, but rather appreciation and leadership.

From this point on to the conclusion of Boyd's work, each briefing becomes more theoretical and abstract. He offers one of the few useful definitions of strategy: "The Strategic Game is one of Interaction and Isolation." He describes a "conceptual spiral" that leads to a deeper understanding of how we can cope with uncertainty. Finally, he offers "the real OODA Loop," which is far too complex to present here but supports Osinga's assertion that there is more to it than speed, at least above the tactical level.

The John Boyd who emerges from this outstanding book is the John Boyd I knew. He was the opposite of the narrow technician, the type our armed services seem to prefer and promote. He ranged across a vast intellectual landscape, drawing from the most unlikely places ideas he could assemble in new ways to reveal more about the nature and conduct of war. (I must relate one anecdote, one of the few occasions where I saw Boyd get shot down. Over dinner with General Hermann Balck, Boyd thought to pay Balck a jocular compliment. He said to him, "General, with your extraordinarily quick reactions (still evident despite Balck's 80+ years), you would have made a great fighter pilot." Balck instantly replied, "Ich bin kein Techniker"—I am not a technician!)

I say unreservedly, "Buy this book!" Yes, it costs more than \$100. But Col. Osinga (Royal Netherlands Air Force—truly, no

prophet is honored in his own country) told me that if he can sell just a few more, his publisher will bring it out in paperback. So let the kids go hungry for a few nights and plunk down the cash. If you have any interest in war, this is a book your library cannot do without. Just as America cannot do without John Boyd's ideas, although our military has not yet figured that out.

William S. Lind, expressing his own personal opinion, is Director for the Center for Cultural Conservatism for the Free Congress Foundation.

On War #234
September 25, 2007

A Ticking Bomb

William S. Lind

I returned at the end of last week from the Imperial fall maneuvers, held this year in *Ostland*. His Majesty's forces prevailed, for much the same reasons that Blue usually wins in American war games. As someone who has led Red to victory in several senior-level games conducted in Washington, I can assure you that isn't supposed to happen.

I don't think it possible for any historian to visit the Baltic countries or the rest of Central Europe and not reflect on the catastrophes World War I brought for that part of the world. Communism, World War II, National Socialism, the extinction of some communities and the expulsion of others, wholesale alteration of national boundaries, all these and more flowed from the assassination of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand on June 28, 1914. One pebble touched off an avalanche.

It did so because it occurred, not as an isolated incident, but as one more in a series of crises that rocked Europe in its last ten years of peace, 1904-1914. Each of those crises had the potential to touch off a general European war, and each further destabilized the region, making the next incident all the more dangerous. 1905-06 witnessed the First Moroccan Crisis, when the German Foreign Office (whose motto, after Bismarck, might well be, "Clowns unto ages of ages") compelled a very reluctant Kaiser Wilhelm II to land at Tangier as a challenge to France. 1908 brought the Bosnian Annexation Crisis, where Austria humiliated Russia and left her anxious for revenge. Then came the Second Moroccan Crisis of 1911, the Tripolitan War of 1911-1912 (a war Italy actually won, against the tottering Ottoman Empire) and the Balkan Wars of 1912-13. By 1914, it had become a question more of which crisis would finally set all Europe ablaze than of whether peace would endure. This was true despite the fact that, in the abstract, no major European state wanted war.

If this downward spiral of events in Europe reminds us of the Middle East today, it should. There too we see a series of crises, each holding the potential of kicking off a much larger war. There are almost too many to list: the war in Iraq, the U.S. versus Iran, Israel vs. Syria, the U.S. vs. Syria, Syria vs. Lebanon, Turkey vs. Kurdistan, the war in Afghanistan, the de-stabilization of Pakistan, Hamas, Hezbollah, al Qaeda, and the permanent crisis of Israel vs. the Palestinians. Each is a tick of the bomb, bringing us closer and closer to the explosion no one wants, no one outside the neo-con cabal and Likud, anyway.

A basic rule of history is that the inevitable eventually happens. If you keep on smoking in the powder magazine, you will at some point blow it up. No one can predict the specific event or its timing, but everyone can see the trend and where it is leading.

In the Middle East today, as in Europe in the decade before World War I, the desperate need is for a country or a leader to reverse the trend. Then, the two European leaders most opposed to war, Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany and Tsar Nicholas II of Russia, were able to do little more than drag their feet, trying to slow the train of events down. That was not enough, and it will not be enough today in the Middle East either.

Where do we see a leader who can turn aside the march toward war? Not in the Middle East itself, nor among American Presidential candidates, only two of whom, Ron Paul and Dennis Kucinich, represent a real change of direction. Not in Europe, whose heads of government are terrified of breaking with the Americans. Not in Moscow or Beijing, both of which are happy to see America digging its own grave. No matter where we look, the horizon is empty.

Where vision is wanting, the people perish. As they did in Central Europe in the 20th century, by the tens of millions.

William S. Lind, expressing his own personal opinion, is Director for the Center for Cultural Conservatism for the Free Congress Foundation.

On War #233
September 4, 2007

[A Seam to Exploit?](#)

William S. Lind

[The views expressed in this article are those of Mr. Lind, writing in his personal capacity. They do not reflect the opinions or policy positions of the Free Congress Foundation, its officers, board or employees, or those of Kettle Creek Corporation.]

It is reasonably clear that, contrary to the White House's claims, the "surge" had little or nothing to do with the improved situation in Anbar province in Iraq. That security there has improved is a fact; a Marine friend who just returned told me the whole province is now quiet. If we look past the Bush administration's propaganda and ask ourselves what really happened, we may find something of great value, namely a "seam" in Islamic Fourth Generation forces that we can exploit.

As is widely known, the key to turning the situation in Anbar around was a decision by the local Sunni clans and tribes to turn against al-Qaeda. We did not make that happen, although we did make it possible, not by what we did but what we stopped doing, i.e., brutalizing the local population. Once U.S. forces in Anbar adopted a policy of de-escalation, the sheiks had the option of putting al-Qaeda instead of us at the top of their enemies list. De-escalation was, to use a favorite military term, the enabler.

As is also widely recognized, al-Qaeda itself then provided the motivator by its treatment of local Sunnis. Its error was one common to revolutionary movements, trying to impose its program before it had won the war. Worse, it did so brutally, using assassinations, car bombings that caused mass casualties and other typical terror tactics. Some reports suggest the final straw for Anbar's Sunnis was a demand by foreign al-Qaeda fighters for forced marriages with local women.

Again, in itself this is nothing new. Where we may begin to perceive something new, a potential seam in Islamic 4GW operations, is in al-Qaeda's response to its own blunder. It has refused to change course.

When other revolutionary groups have alienated the population by unveiling their program too soon, before they consolidated power, their leadership has quickly ordered a reversal. Mao had to do so, and so did Lenin, in the famous NEP of the early 1920s. Competent leadership usually understands that a "broad front" strategy is a necessity until their power is so great it cannot be challenged.

Why doesn't al-Qaeda's leadership do the same? Here is where it starts to get interesting. Perhaps they have not done so because they cannot.

Unlike Bolsheviks and other revolutionary parties that acted within a state framework and modeled themselves on the governments of states, Fourth Generation entities based on religious or "cause" appeals cannot practice what the Marxist-Leninists called "democratic centralism." They cannot simply issue orders from the top and have those orders obeyed. Their organizations are too loosely structured for that. The leadership can inspire and give general guidance, but it cannot do much more than that. It cannot get its fighters to do things they don't want to do, or stop doing things they very much do want to do.

Here we may see a flip side of the de-centralization that makes 4GW entities so difficult for states to fight directly. One of state armed forces' favorite tactics, going after the leadership, has been shown over and over again not to accomplish much because local 4GW fighters do not depend on that leadership. But just as they do not depend on it, they also do not have to obey it. Their autonomy cuts both ways.

I am assuming that the leadership of al-Qaeda in Iraq and Osama himself are wise enough to want to reverse course in Anbar province, de-emphasize their extremist program and return to a broad front strategy. That assumption may be in error. They may be as detached from reality as their fanatical fighters, moved by the same fanaticism to enact their program prematurely. If so, our job of defeating them in Iraq will be all the easier (which does not necessarily move us closer to seeing a state re-emerge in Iraq).

But if my assumption is valid and al-Qaeda's leadership wants to change course but cannot, we may have found a seam in 4GW entities we can exploit. It will not exist in all 4GW organizations; gangs, for example, often have tight top-down discipline.

Where they are de-centralized, however, this dynamic of imposing their program prematurely may prevail widely. If that proves to be the case, then these entities will carry within them the seed of their own destruction. Our strategy, in turn, must allow this dynamic to play itself out, which means we must de-escalate and take the pressure off.

As is true of most Fourth Generation theory, it is too soon to know if this insight is valid. But if we are to learn how to defeat Fourth Generation enemies, this is the sort of question we must continually ask about Fourth Generation war. We must constantly seek seams in our opponents that allow us to fold them back on themselves, or permit them to fold back on themselves with us careful not to get in their way as they do so. It is greatly to the credit of the Marines in Anbar province that they have learned that inaction is a form of action. Making that realization part of our doctrine for 4GW could in turn represent a real step forward.

Note: There will be no new *On War* columns for the next two weeks, as I will be off for the usual Imperial fall maneuvers, this time in the Baltikum and Ostpreussen, focusing on Operation Albion. The sight of *S.M.S. König* steaming off Oesel Island should be an inspiring one.

Stolz weht die Flagge Schwarz-Weiss-Rot!

William S. Lind, expressing his own personal opinion, is Director for the Center for Cultural Conservatism for the Free Congress Foundation.

On War #232
August 29, 2007

Truth-tellers

William S. Lind

[The views expressed in this article are those of Mr. Lind, writing in his personal capacity. They do not reflect the opinions or policy positions of the Free Congress Foundation, its officers, board or employees, or those of Kettle Creek Corporation.]

As good news continues to flow from the "surge" – some of it true, some of it false and all of it spun – it is easy to forget the bottom line. The bottom line is whether or not we are beginning to see the re-emergence of a state in Iraq. Three recent news stories throw some light on that question, and it is not a favorable light.

The first, by Steven Hurst of the AP, ran in the August 26 *Cleveland Plain Dealer* under the title, "Sectarian violence in Iraq nearly double '06 level." Relying on the AP's own figures, the story reported that:

- Iraq is suffering about double the number of war-related deaths throughout the country compared with last year – an average daily toll of 33 in 2006 and 62 so far this year.
- Nearly 1,000 more people have been killed in violence across Iraq in the first eight months of this year than in all of 2006
- Baghdad has gone from representing 76 percent of all civilian and police war-related deaths in Iraq in January to 52 percent in July, bringing it back to the same spot it was roughly a year ago.

Taken together, these figures illustrate an old saying about counter-insurgency, namely that it is like trying to pick up mercury. When counter-insurgency forces surge in one place, as we have in Baghdad, the insurgents roll someplace else. Meanwhile, the insurgency as a whole continues to grow.

The second story, "Militias Seizing Control of Electricity Grid" by James Glanz and Stephen Farrell, ran in the August 23 *New York Times*. It reports that:

Armed groups increasingly control the antiquated switching stations that channel electricity around Iraq, the electricity minister said Wednesday.

That is dividing the national grid into fiefs that, he said, often refuse to share electricity generated locally with Baghdad and other power-starved areas in the center of Iraq...

In some cases, Mr. Wahid and other Iraqi officials say, insurgents cut power to the capital as part of their effort to topple the government.

But the officials said it was clear that in other cases, local militias, gangs, and even some provincial military and civilian officials held on to the power simply to try to help their own areas.

The use of the term "fiefs" is a truth-teller of some importance. The rise of fiefdoms and the transfer of loyalty to local regions are signs of movement away from a state, not toward the re-emergence of an Iraqi state. That has already happened in Iraq with regard to security. The fact that it is now spreading even into distribution of electricity from what was once a national grid is not good news. Arguably, it tells us more about the general direction of Iraq than do claims of success from the "surge."

The third story, "Children Doing Battle in Iraq" from the August 27 *Los Angeles Times*, points to further long-term disorder in Iraq:

Child fighters, once a rare presence on Iraq's battlefields, are playing a significant and growing role in kidnappings, killings and roadside bombings in the country, U.S. military officials say.

Boys, some as young as 11, now outnumber foreign fighters at U.S. detention camps in Iraq. Since March, their numbers have risen to 800 from 100...

The rise of child fighters will eventually make the Iraq conflict more gruesome, said Peter W. Singer, a Brookings Institution expert on child fighters.

He said militant leaders often treat children as a cheap commodity, and peace will be less attainable because "conflict entrepreneurs" now have an established and pliable fighting force in their communities.

As we have seen in Africa, when children become fighters at an early age, they provide a pool of men who for at least a generation cannot do anything but fight. It is difficult to "de-program" them into peaceful citizens. In turn, this leads to what we might call "supply-side war," war driven largely by the presence of men who want to fight. This kind of half-war, half-brigandage swarmed over Europe during the interval between the end of the Middle Ages and the rise of the state. After Westphalia, the state put an end to it by rounding up the brigands and hanging them. In Iraq, where the fictional state cannot even round up kilowatts, supply-side war suggests that disorder will be rampant, and a state non-existent, for quite some time.

When Congress comes back into session in September to hear General Petraeus's report, we may hope that it will pursue these indicators and other truth-tellers like them and not confine itself to what the general tells it. Truth may be found more at the margins of what General Petraeus says, or in what he chooses not to address. For once, we need Members of Congress to think like statesmen, not like lawyers.

On War #231
August 19, 2007

[More Kabuki?](#)

William S. Lind

[The views expressed in this article are those of Mr. Lind, writing in his personal capacity. They do not reflect the opinions or policy positions of the Free Congress Foundation, its officers, board or employees, or those of Kettle Creek Corporation.]

September approaches, and with it the supposed watershed in the Iraq war that General David Petraeus's report to Congress will represent. In reality, the report will make little difference in what the Democratically-controlled Congress does, because it has already decided what it will do, namely pretend to try to end the war while actually ensuring its continuation through the 2008 elections. That strategy seems to offer the best promise of electing more Democrats.

Nonetheless, much of the country eagerly wants to hear what General Petraeus has to say. What he says about the progress of the war in Iraq, however, is a secondary question. The primary question is, how credible is his report? Will it be a real military analysis, honest and forthright, or will it just be more kabuki, political "spin" dictated by the Bush White House? If it is the latter, then its content is immaterial, because it is not credible.

I do not know General Petraeus, and I therefore cannot judge his character. What I have seen of his work is certainly better than that of his predecessors. His attempt to move our forces in Iraq out of their bases and into the neighborhoods where counter-insurgency must be fought is laudable, if hopelessly too late.

A story in the August 16 *Cleveland Plain Dealer* by AP's Steven Hurst unfortunately brings General Petraeus's credibility into some question. Hurst wrote:

One of the most significant shifts for U.S. forces recently has been recruiting allies among former Sunni insurgent areas such as the western Anbar province. "A pretty big deal," said Petraeus.

"You have to pinch yourself a little to make sure that is real because that is a very significant development in this kind of operation in counterinsurgency," he said.

"It's all about the local people. When all the sudden the local people are on the side of the new Iraq instead of on the side of the insurgents or even al-Qaida, that's a very significant change."

The willingness of some Sunni tribes and insurgent groups to work with U.S. forces in al Anbar against al-Qaida is significant locally, However, all my sources state emphatically that the Sunnis who are now willing to work with us do not accept "the new Iraq," which is Newspeak for the al-Maliki government in Baghdad and Iraq's future status as an American satellite with large U.S. forces permanently based on its soil. As is usually the case in Fourth Generation war, the U.S. – Sunni local alliances are temporary tactical expedients, nothing more. The Sunnis we are working with make quite clear their continuing rejection of al-Maliki, Baghdad and the "New Iraq" at the same time they also reject al-Qaeda's terror tactics (including against Sunnis) and its goal of a puritanical Islamic theocracy.

This is just one slip on General Petraeus's part, and given the way the U.S. military invents good news to pass up the chain, it may reflect what he is being told. At the same time, the term "New Iraq" is a Bushism. So does its use reflect what is coming up the chain or what is coming down?

It is the latter possibility that is troubling, because it is the norm, not the exception. As American military officers gain rank, they soon learn that the absolute worst political sin is "committing truth." Any time they say something that contradicts what is coming out of the White House or the Office of the Secretary of Defense, they find themselves in very hot water. If they persist in the annoying practice, they discover they do not qualify for senior commands.

If General Petraeus is to present a genuine military report in September and not a "cooked" political document, he will have to buck the system. It should be fairly easy to judge whether he has done that or not, because if he has, the White House will howl. The gap between the reality in Iraq and the administration's rhetoric is so wide that it should show dramatically in any genuine military analysis. If it does not, and if the White House regards his report complacently, with just a few quibbles as part of the kabuki, then it amounts to nothing more than one of Napoleon's bulletins – from which we got the phrase, "to lie like a bulletin."

Come September, we will find out what General Petraeus is made of. Depending on that, we may also find out something about the war in Iraq.

William S. Lind, expressing his own personal opinion, is Director for the Center for Cultural Conservatism for the Free Congress Foundation.

On War #230
August 13, 2007

[Importing More Fourth Generation War](#)

William S. Lind

[The views expressed in this article are those of Mr. Lind, writing in his personal capacity. They do not reflect the opinions or policy positions of the Free Congress Foundation, its officers, board or employees, or those of Kettle Creek Corporation.]

One of Fourth Generation war's more effective Trojan horses is refugees. They arrive on someone's shore desperate, pathetic, deeply grateful for the smallest crust or copper flung their way. Only a Scrooge could have a heart so cold as to turn them away.

Regrettably, in a Fourth Generation world, Western countries need lots of Scrooges in charge of their immigration policies. A story in the July 15, 2007 *New York Times* by Theo Emery, "In Nashville, a Street Gang Emerges in a Kurdish Enclave," tells an all-too common story:

Miles from downtown, Nashville's southern, neighborhoods are home to a thriving enclave of Kurdish immigrants ...

Bound by a common language and ethnicity, Kurds here tend to shun attention. But a growing problem has turned an unwanted spotlight on them a group called the Kurdish Pride Gang, thought to be the nation's only Kurdish street gang ...

Police officials say that Kurdish Pride members have grown increasingly vicious and brazen. Investigators believe that the gang has committed about 110 home burglaries since January, including two involving rapes, said Mark Anderson, a Nashville police detective who works in a gang unit.

In a case involving the rape of a pregnant victim, a 17-year-old suspect, Zana Noroly, hanged himself in his jail cell in April. Messages in his memory are ubiquitous on the Web pages of Kurdish youth ...

Earlier this month, a grand jury indicted four members of the gang for conspiracy to commit first-degree murder in a case in which a gang leader, Aka Nejad, is accused of shooting at a park policeman who interrupted a drug deal last year.

This particular imported 4GW problem – gangs are a major source of Fourth Generation war – comes from a group of refugees who are, on other counts, models. Kurds are generally hard-working, competent, family-oriented people who quickly become members of the middle class. Again quoting police officer Mark Anderson, the *Times* story notes that

"Kurdish Pride are not the kind of kids that normally join gangs."

"For the most part, they come from two-parent homes, they come from families with a strong work ethic, where education is important," he said.

The *Times* also notes that most Nashville Kurds are deeply distressed by Kurdish Pride. It quotes Kirmanj Gundi, a professor at Tennessee State University in Nashville:

"We did everything to build a good reputation here in Nashville and elsewhere," said Mr. Gundi, 46, who is Kurdish, "and all of a sudden a few irresponsible hoodlums have tried to tarnish the reputations we've been working so hard over the years to create. That's sad. "

The root of the problem, as is usual in Fourth Generation war, is loyalty. As the *Times* story says, the Kurds, like virtually all refugees from other cultures, are "bound by a common language and ethnicity." Those bonds are stronger than formal American citizenship, and they provide a rich soil in which 4GW can grow. In America 's poisonous popular culture, the necessary seeds are quickly planted among young men by the same rock and rap music, video games and examples from the culturally disintegrated black community that have overwhelmed Hispanics and other immigrants. As always, the cultural Marxists fly cover over the whole diabolical mess, labeling any serious discussion of the problem "racism."

Once a state faces 4GW springing from a community of refugees, its options are limited. It can adopt a variant of the old Ottoman millet system, and demand that the community police itself, or it can try to attack the problem directly through the police. Both approaches usually founder on the same bonds of a common language and culture that provide the alternate

primary loyalty. The millet system also accepts the weakness of the state as a given, which in turn accelerates the state's decline.

In the real world, as opposed to the dream world of "multiculturalist" ideologues, there is only one way to prevent refugees from other cultures from serving as Trojan horses for Fourth Generation war: do not admit the refugees. They are carrying a plague for which states have no cure. It may seem heartless to turn plague carriers away at the door, but it is also necessary to survival. When the state's fundamental peace, security and order are at stake, the head, not the heart, must be the governing organ. America is particular must learn this lesson fast – for much of Europe, it is already too late – as cries grow to admit hordes of refugees from Iraq.

William S. Lind, expressing his own personal opinion, is Director for the Center for Cultural Conservatism for the Free Congress Foundation.

On War #229

August 7, 2007

[One Step Forward, Two Steps Back](#)

William S. Lind

The "surge" in Iraq continues to generate good news, at least in the American press. Today's *Cleveland Plain Dealer* includes a typical story, in this case by Robert Burns of the Associated Press:

The new U.S. military strategy in Iraq, unveiled six months ago to little acclaim, is working...

The U.S. military, partnering in many cases with Iraqi forces, is now creating (a) security cushion — not everywhere, but in much of the north, the west and most important in key areas of Baghdad...

The U.S. military has caught some momentum, thanks to the extra 30,000 troops — for a total of 159,000 on the ground — that Bush agreed to send as part of the new counterinsurgency strategy announced in January. The troops are interacting more with the local people and are protecting them more effectively.

To the degree the good news is true, it probably has more to do with the last sentence quoted above than with troop numbers. It may also reflect a large dose of *post hoc ergo propter hoc* reasoning. Some of the decline in violence in Baghdad is due not to U.S. troops but to the fact that the Shiites have completed the ethnic cleansing of mixed Sunni-Shiite neighborhoods. A good portion of the improvement in Anbar province is a product of Al Qaeda blunders, which have alienated part of its base. While adoption of classic counter-insurgency techniques by U.S. forces is genuine good news, we should not assume events in Iraq are solely or even primarily a result of our actions. We are one player among many, and not always the most important.

It is also easy to forget the strategic measure of effectiveness, i.e., whether or not we see the re-emergence of a state in Iraq. Such American successes as are real stem largely from accepting the fact that there is no state and filling the void with local alliances. As Mr. Burns writes,

Despite political setbacks, American commanders are clinging to a hope that stability might be built from the bottom up — with local groups joining or aiding U.S. efforts to root out extremists — rather than from the top down, where national leaders have failed to act.

That is what American commanders should do, because it is all they can do. But it is a step away from, not toward, a restored Iraqi state.

That strategic step backwards is accompanied by a large and dangerous operational step backwards, namely moving toward a war with Iraq's Shiites. The August 6 *Plain Dealer*, in a story by AP's Kim Gamel reported that

Attacks against U.S. forces were down sharply last month nationwide, and military officials have expressed cautious optimism that a security crackdown is working. At the same time, the number of attacks launched by breakaway factions of the Shiite Mahdi Army militia has increased, said Lt. Gen. Raymond Odierno, second-in-

command.

He did not provide a total number of militia attacks. But he said 73 percent of the attacks that wounded or killed U.S. troops last month in Baghdad were launched by Shiite militiamen, nearly double that figure six months earlier.

This is a danger sign that should engage the urgent attention of senior American commanders. If we replace a war against Iraqis Sunnis with a war against the Shiites, we will not only have suffered a serious, self-inflicted operational defeat, we will endanger our whole position in Iraq, since our supply lines mostly run through Shiite country.

I say such a defeat would be self-inflicted because Shiite attacks on Americans in Baghdad seem to be responses to American actions. In dealing with the Shiites, we appear to be doing what spurred the growth of the Sunni insurgency, i.e., raids, air strikes and a "kill or capture" policy directed against local Shiite leaders. Not only does this lead to retaliation, it also fractures Muqtada al-Sadr's Mahdi Army as he tries to avoid fighting us. Such fracturing works against, not for, the potential re-creation of an Iraqi state.

A return to practices we know are counter-productive in dealing with Iraq's Shiites raises the question of motive. Are we so bloody stupid that at the same time we seem to have learned something about counter-insurgency against the Sunnis we are making the same old mistakes with the Shiites? Perhaps.

But perhaps something else is going on here. According to the story by Miss Gamel, General Odierno blamed not his own actions but Iran for the rise in Shiite attacks on Americans. Is a war with Iraq's Shiites a prelude to war with Iran? For the sake of the army we have in Iraq and our strategic position in the region, let us hope not. Sometimes, sheer stupidity is the most reassuring explanation for our actions.

William S. Lind, expressing his own personal opinion, is Director for the Center for Cultural Conservatism for the Free Congress Foundation.

On War #228

August 1, 2007

[America's Last Successful Mideast War](#)

William S. Lind

Americans who know any history – there may be a couple of dozen left – are all familiar with America's first Mideast war, that against Tripoli under President Jefferson. Far less well known is our war with Algiers in 1815. A nicely-written new book, *The End of Barbary Terror* (well, for a while, anyway) by Frederick C. Leiner fills the gap.

The most surprising aspect of this splendid little war – there were such things, once – is that the United States was able to wage it. In 1815 we had just gotten our pants pretty well kicked by the Brits, Washington was in ruins and the Treasury was empty. Nonetheless, in response to the seizure of one small trading vessel by Algiers, we declared war and dispatched not one but two powerful naval squadrons to the Mediterranean.

It turned out that the first squadron of three frigates, one sloop of war, four brigs and two schooners, under the command of one of America's most brilliant naval commanders of all time, Stephen Decatur, was enough to do the job. Despite their fearsome reputation, the Algerine warships proved to be sitting ducks. Decatur quickly took two of them, including the best of the lot, the frigate *Meshuda*, whose crew fled below and hid in the hold after two broadsides. In a preview of Arab state militaries of today, one U.S. officer "expressed amazement that the Algerine navy was 'a mere burlesque' with 'miserably contrived' equipment, poor gunnery and poorly disciplined crews." (In fairness, it should be noted that the shore defenses of Algiers were formidable and well-manned.) After its initial defeats at sea, Algiers quickly came to terms.

Beyond the doubtful quality of Arab navies, does our last successful Mideast war offer any lessons for our own time? In the face of our all-too-often wretched generalship in today's Mideast wars – perhaps now improving in Iraq, still rock-bottom in Afghanistan – Decatur's example certainly recommends itself. But behind what Decatur did stands something more: the selection of Decatur as commander of the first squadron.

Then as now, seniority played a great role in selecting men for top commands. Decatur was 36 years old in 1815. We had, of

course, a young navy, but five captains were senior to Decatur. The Secretary of the Navy, Benjamin W. Crowninshield, and President Madison, should, had they played the game as the system intended, have chosen someone more senior. They might have selected, for example, the most senior officer in the Navy, Alexander Murray. Mr. Leiner writes,

When he had last served in the Mediterranean a dozen years before, William Eaton, the United States consul at Tunis, had sneered that the United States "might as well send out Quaker meeting houses to float about the sea, as frigates with Murray in command." Murray was sixty years old in 1815, nearly deaf, and described by Commodore Rogers as "an amiable old gentleman...(whose) pretensions...as a navy officer are of a very limited description."

Or, they might have chosen Hugh Campbell, tellingly known as "Old Cork" in the service ...

Commodore Rodgers devastatingly described him as "a good old gentleman, but ... an enemy to everything that is likely to call the reflections of his mind into operation."

Any resemblance between such figures and senior American military leaders today must remain conjectural. It is historical fact, however, that Madison and Crowninshield cut through the system to find a leader in his mid-30s, rather than his 50s or 60s. It is perhaps as much to Crowninshield as to Decatur that we should look for a lesson for our own times.

A larger question at which Mr. Leiner is too good a historian to more than hint – and then perhaps at the desire of his publisher – is whether Decatur's slam-bam approach to dealing with Muslim "terrorists" tells us anything. Could a similar way of dealing avail us more today than the de-escalation Fourth Generation theorists usually recommend?

Here we quickly see the difference between yesterday's terrorists and today's. If there is one thing Old Osama has, it is legitimacy. The heads of government of Algiers and the other Barbary states, in contrast, had none. While nominal vassals of the Ottoman Sultan, they were in fact nothing more than gang leaders. They were chosen, kept in power and regularly removed from power and from the ranks of the living by small bands of Janissaries, who in turn ran the Barbary states. Those Janissaries were terrorists to Christian seamen and local Moslems alike. No one outside their ranks gave a fig what happened to them.

With essentially no base beyond their racket, Deys of Algiers were easy pickings. Take a frigate and a brig, and they had to deal. Osama, in vast contrast, has a base that numbers in the tens or hundreds of millions of people, in Algiers, Tunis and Tripoli, but equally in the suburbs of Paris, in Birmingham and in Detroit. It will take more than a squadron of frigates, or our whole Navy of iron ships and wooden men, to squeeze a deal out of him.

William S. Lind, expressing his own personal opinion, is Director for the Center for Cultural Conservatism for the Free Congress Foundation.

On War #227
July 23, 2007

[How to Win in Iraq](#)

William S. Lind

[The views expressed in this article are those of Mr. Lind, writing in his personal capacity. They do not reflect the opinions or policy positions of the Free Congress Foundation, its officers, board or employees, or those of Kettle Creek Corporation.]

For many years, critics of us critics have often said, "You are good at talking about what the American military does wrong. But what would you do instead?" In fact, some of us associated with the Military Reform Movement of the 1970s and 1980s have offered our solutions all along. Gary Hart and I offered a whole book of alternative policies in the 1980s, *America Can Win: The Case for Military Reform*.

The question occurs again now with reference to the war in Iraq. Had our advice been taken, America would never have attacked Iraq. But it did, and now our troops are bogged down in a hopeless quagmire. How can America get out other than by accepting defeat?

I offer what I hope is a constructive answer to that question in the July 30 issue of *The American Conservative*, in a piece modestly titled "How to Win in Iraq." The key is re-thinking what we mean by winning.

The Bush administration's maximalist strategic objectives are not attainable, and they never were. They are the product of fantasy, not strategy. But if, as President Bush repeatedly says, we are fighting to defeat al Qaeda and other "terrorists" — meaning the non-state forces of the Fourth Generation — then victory can realistically be defined as seeing the re-creation of a state in Iraq.

Our invasion and subsequent blunders, such as sending home the Iraqi army and civil service, destroyed the state in Iraq. Iraq currently has a government of sorts, cowering in the Green Zone, but it is a Potemkin government because there is no state. A stateless Mesopotamia is a huge win for Fourth Generation, non-state forces such as al Qaeda, because they flourish in such statelessness.

Conversely, were a state to be re-created in Iraq, they would lose. That is true almost regardless of the nature and orientation of a new Iraqi state. States do not like competition, and any real Iraqi state would quickly roll up the non-state forces on its territory. The fact that an Iraqi state would almost certainly be Shiite-dominated while al Qaeda is poisonously Salafist makes that all the more certain.

The central strategic question, then, is, how can a state be re-created in Iraq? There is no guaranteed answer; it may not be possible. What is guaranteed, however, is that the United States cannot do it. The problem is legitimacy. To be real, a future Iraqi state must be perceived by Iraqis as legitimate. But anything the United States, as a foreign invader and occupier, creates, endorses or assists automatically thereby loses its legitimacy.

What the U.S. must therefore do is get out of the way. When elements in Iraq move to re-create a state — and those elements must be independent of the current al-Maliki government, which, as an American creation, has no legitimacy — we have to let them try to succeed.

There is, in turn, only one way for us to get out of the way, and that is to get out of Iraq, as rapidly as we can. As the elephant in the parlor, our presence cannot be of no effect. If we work against proto-state elements in Iraq, we make their job all the harder and their success less likely. If we work for them, presto!, there goes their legitimacy out the window. To put it as plainly as possible, so long as we are present, no one has a chance of re-creating a state in Iraq, which is to say we have no chance of winning.

The icing on the cake here is that our withdrawal from Iraq, under the strategy I propose, is no longer the retreat of a beaten army. It is, precisely, a strategic withdrawal, a withdrawal required by our strategy as necessary to accomplishing our strategic goal.

In a short column, I cannot cover all that is in the article in *The American Conservative*; it includes, among other things, the matter of a "win" by Iran. The July 30 issue is on the magazine counters, and anyone intrigued by the idea that we might still win this miserable war can pick up a copy.

But if we define winning correctly, as defeating Islamic 4GW elements including al Qaeda, and if for once we can accept the fact that America's power is limited and we need an indirect approach, I think we might yet snatch a few chestnuts from the fire. After almost 4000 dead, tens of thousands of wounded and a couple trillion bucks down the drain, it would be nice to leave old Osama, like Snidely Whiplash, having to say, "Rats! Foiled Again!"

William S. Lind, expressing his own personal opinion, is Director for the Center for Cultural Conservatism for the Free Congress Foundation.

On War #226

July 16, 2007

[Tordenskjold Sails Again](#)

By William S. Lind

Last Friday's Boyd Conference at Quantico was the best-attended to date, and, thanks to a visitor from across the pond, one of

the most encouraging. That visitor was a delegation from the Royal Norwegian Naval Academy in Bergen, Norway, a handsome and historic town I have had the pleasure of visiting more than once.

I am sure I was not the only person surprised to find the Norwegian Navy manning the registration desk when the conference opened. It was a nice touch, and a commentary on the U.S. military's total lack of interest both in John Boyd's work and in Fourth Generation war, which was the focus of this conference. As usual at such events, almost all the U.S. military participants were Marine Corps captains, among whom the Boyidian flame still flickers.

In marked contrast, Boyd is Big Stuff in Norway, as is 4GW. The Norwegians made their presentation at an informal second session of the conference on Saturday, and it was the best news many of us have heard in a long time. Quite simply, the Norwegian Navy is completely recasting the curriculum of their Naval Academy based on Boyd's work.

At present, their efforts are focused on the cadets' first year, which is exactly correct: if the academy can develop the right mind-set at the beginning, when the cadets' minds are most open, they will have largely won the battle. The key to that, in turn, is to put cadets in situations full of ambiguity and uncertainty, situations for which they have not been prepared, then help them more or less as needed (the less, the better) to find their own ways out.

That is just what the academy is doing, in a wide variety of ways. Many of the practical exercises are done ashore, which is fine; mind-sets can be developed anywhere, not just at sea.

The Norwegians impressed all of us with a lesson they had learned inadvertently. At the beginning of their reform of the curriculum, they said, things got screwed up unintentionally more than once, as is inevitable with major change. The cadets had to unscrew it themselves. Doing so proved to be such a powerful learning experience that now the faculty creates deliberate screw-ups. We could hear John Boyd cackling his approval and delight; the faculty as well as the students had learned how to learn.

I shared with the Norwegians an idea I had come up with during a visit to the U.S. Naval Academy, where the education is as rigid as it is fluid in Norway. How about paintball at sea? Like all naval schools, the Norwegian Academy has small sailboats in which cadets learn basic seamanship. If a paintball gun were mounted on each broadside so the elevation could be changed but not the aim, the sailboat would become an 18th century warship. Naval paintball battles would require the cadets to rediscover and employ 18th century naval tactics, for both single ships and fleets. At least in Great Britain's Royal Navy, those tactics were highly fluid by century's end; maneuver warfare was actually developed at sea before it was born on land. The Norwegians loved the idea and said they would do it; at Annapolis, the midshipmen I suggested it to also loved it but said it would never happen, because they aren't supposed to have fun.

The Norwegians told us they faced a different challenge in extending their Boyd-based curriculum revisions into the academy's second and third years, where much of the instruction is in regular academic subjects such as ,mathematics and English. In teaching English, I suggested, there is one easy solution: have the cadets learn English by reading and writing about naval fiction that teaches maneuver warfare thinking, such as C. S. Forester's Horatio Hornblower series and C. Northcote Parkinson's excellent naval novels, both set in the age of sail. Could mathematics also be taught with reference to naval tactics, without becoming Jominian? It is a question someone more skilled in math than myself might want to consider.

I have no doubt that along with John Boyd, Norway's greatest naval commander, Tordenskjold, is looking down on the revolution underway at the Royal Norwegian Naval Academy and smiling. The Boyd-based curriculum the academy is implementing might end up producing lots of Tordenskjolds, a man noted for breaking the rules and thereby getting results. While Norway's navy is small compared to that of the United States, it is pioneering a path which the U.S. Navy would do well to follow.

William S. Lind, expressing his own personal opinion, is Director for the Center for Cultural Conservatism for the Free Congress Foundation.

On War #225
July 11, 2007

[Not Fourth Generation War](#)

By William S. Lind

On Friday, July 13, a Boyd Conference at the Quantico Marine Corps Base will devote a day to the subject of Fourth Generation war. As a panelist for one session of the conference, I have been asked to answer the question, "As one of the original authors and principal proponent of the 4GW concept, how well is it understood and acted upon by the West? By our adversaries?"

I will leave the second part of this question until Friday. As to how well the West grasps the concept of 4GW, the news, sadly, is bad on every level.

At the level of national governments, Western states not only do not grasp 4GW, they avert their eyes from it in horror, pretending it is not happening. In part they do so because they are the state, and the state does not want to admit that its own legitimacy has come into question. As Martin van Creveld said to me a decade or more ago, "Everyone can see it except the people in the capital cities."

In larger part, they ignore the reality of 4GW because it contradicts their ideology, commonly known as "multi-culturalism" but actually the cultural Marxism of the Frankfurt School. That ideology says that all the world's cultures are wonderful, happy, peaceful cultures except Western culture, which is oppressive and evil and must be destroyed. In fact, Western culture is one of only two cultures in human history that has succeeded over millennia (the other is Chinese). 4GW theory warns that we now face a world of cultures in conflict, that we must defend Western culture and that many, perhaps most, other cultures are threats, especially when they flood Western countries with immigrants. Cultural Marxism welcomes immigrants who will not acculturate precisely because they are threats to Western culture.

Western militaries are as blind to 4GW as are the governments that direct and fund them. They see themselves as knights in shining armor who exist to fight other knights like themselves, not low-born musketeer "terrorists." Conveniently, fighting other knights requires buying lots of armor, in the form of Aegis ships, "stealth" aircraft and "Future Combat Systems," all of which keep the bags of gold coming. 4GW is fought largely with weapons that can be made in somebody's garage. Garages offer few Board of Directors positions to retired generals.

Western military intellectuals also mostly misunderstand 4GW. Here, too, the reason is partly ideological. Some of those intellectuals are cultural Marxists, while others are simply afraid to defy cultural Marxism, knowing the penalty for doing so can be high.

Beyond ideology, intellectuals, like lesser beings, are prone to pour new wine into old bottles. It is comforting to say 4GW is nothing new (or so old as to have been forgotten). So we hear that 4GW is just insurgency, that all we have to do is re-learn stock counter-insurgency doctrine, dig out old "Small Wars" manuals, etc. Combine that with stiffening the backs of politicians so they "stay the course," and we can win Fourth Generation wars as surely as we won in Algeria and Vietnam.

As I have said before and will say many times again, Fourth Generation war is far larger than the insurgency/ counter-insurgency problem, as difficult as that problem is. Even for that relatively small aspect of the challenge (massive immigration of Third World people into Western countries is a far greater threat than anything we face in Iraq or Afghanistan), the old bottles will not hold the new wine. Counter-insurgency in a 4GW environment, with its ever-expanding multiplicity of players, is very different from counter-insurgency against a single enemy. As the students in my seminar at Quantico concluded early in our sessions last year, we now face many different models of insurgency, not just the Maoist model. That fact requires us to have many different models of counter-insurgency, most or all of which we may have to apply simultaneously in a single conflict. What might have worked against Mao or in Vietnam will not work in 4GW.

No, the West does not get 4GW, not in conflicts overseas and, much more dangerously, not on its own soil. To Hitler's question, "Brennt Paris?", 4GW answers "oui." And not only Paris, but London, Brussels, Amsterdam, Los Angeles and a host of other Western cities and lands as well.

William S. Lind, expressing his own personal opinion, is Director for the Center for Cultural Conservatism for the Free Congress Foundation.

On War #224
July 2, 2007

[The Death of the RMA](#)

By William S. Lind

In the 1989 *Marine Corps Gazette* article where I and four colleagues first laid out the Four Generations of Modern War, we foresaw two potential futures. One, the way the world has gone, was 4GW. The other, the direction the Pentagon has taken, became known as the Revolution in Military Affairs, or, more recently, Transformation. This vision of future war, a vision anchored in hi-tech, high-price "systems," is, I am happy to report, militarily dead.

While its corpse still twitches in Iraq and Afghanistan, its obituary was published in April, in Israel, when the Winograd Commission published its report (is Winograd, one wonders, the city in Galicia where old Polish generals go to die of cirrhosis?) On May 29, a summary of its findings by Haninah Levine was made available by the Center for Defense Information. The defense industry fat cats must have read it and wept.

The Winograd Commission was established to examine the Israeli debacle in Lebanon last summer. According to the Levine summary, its first lesson is, "Western militaries are in active state of denial concerning the limitations of precision weapons." Speaking of the then-IDF Chief of Staff General Dan Halutz — Israel's first and, I suspect, last Chief of Staff drawn from the Air Force — Levine writes:

Halutz encouraged the civilian leaders to believe that Israel could launch a precision air and artillery offensive without getting dragged into a broad ground offensive. ... the failure of Halutz and the General Staff to appraise the enemy's abilities: correctly at the outbreak of the war stemmed not from incorrect intelligence or analysis, but from a willed denial of the limitations of the IDF's precision weapons.

In how many valleys of Afghanistan is the same sad lesson being taught? In how many towns of Diyala province in Iraq, or streets in Sadr City?

Levine continues,

The Winograd Commission traces studiously the origins of the General Staff's error of judgment. The commission outlines the changes which took place in Israeli military doctrine over the preceding decade in response both to strategic developments...and to technological developments — the so called "revolution in military affairs," whose keystone is the advent of precision air-to-surface and surface-to-surface weapon systems...

The first lesson of the Second Lebanon War is... that wishful thinking concerning the capabilities of precision weapon systems overpowered the General Staff's analytical abilities.... Faith in advanced air and artillery systems as magical "game-changing" systems absolved the General Staff from the need to consider what capabilities (such as distributed and hardened facilities) the enemy possessed, and led the IDF into a strategic trap it had recognized in advance.

This lesson, I think, can be extrapolated in two useful ways in the American context. First, the strategic or more precisely doctrinal, trap set by the RMA has long been recognized. The trap, quite simply is that for the RMA to succeed, it had to contradict the nature of war.

The RMA reduces war to putting fires on targets. It promises to use new technology to make everything targetable. But this means it also promises to eliminate uncertainty, to make war transparent, to eliminate the quality that defines war, the independent hostile will of the enemy. In other words, it is bunk. The fact that it is bunk was evident to a great many people from the outset, even people in Washington.

Why, then, did it get as far as it did (it remains DOD policy even today)? Here we can extrapolate again from the Winograd Commission's finding: the RMA's hi-tech systems are indeed magically "game changing." But the game they change is the budget game, not war. The RMA has given the Pentagon such magical results as bomber aircraft that cost more per unit than the Navy's ships (the B-2), three fighters for one billion dollars (the F-22), and the most magical system of all, the Army's Future Contract System, a system no one can describe but costs more than any program in any other service. Boy, that's magic! Even the Wizard of Id must be jealous.

The fact is, Pentagon policy has nothing to do with war, which has a great deal to do with why we are losing two wars. The Pentagon is the last Soviet industry. It is not about producing a product, least of all a product that works. It is solely, entirely,

about acquiring and justifying resources. That the RMA does supremely well.

The defeat in Lebanon seems to have confronted the RMA in Israel with the unpleasant reality of the outside world. Will two defeats have the same effect on Washington? Perhaps, but don't bet on it. Half a trillion dollars a year can buy a great deal of political magic.

William S. Lind, expressing his own personal opinion, is Director for the Center for Cultural Conservatism for the Free Congress Foundation.

On War #223
June 25, 2007

[Legitimacy](#), [Toujours Legitimacy](#)

By William S. Lind

Over the past several weeks, another state has failed. In this case it was a proto-state, the Palestinian Authority. Following a Hamas coup in Gaza, the PA has been reduced to the West Bank, while a non-state, Fourth Generation entity now rules in Gaza. Here we see the setting for a head-on clash between states and a non-state force, Hamas. How it turns out may be an important indicator for the development of Fourth Generation War theory.

On the surface, the PA and its governing party, Fatah, seem to hold all the cards. Both Arab governments and the international community have rushed to support Fatah. Money, lots of it, will quickly flow into Fatah's coffers. The PA President, Mahmoud Abbas, is to meet today in a prestigious regional summit with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, King Abdullah of Jordan, and even Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert. It is clear what side states are on.

Hamas and Gaza, in contrast, are effectively under siege. People cannot get out of Gaza, and most goods, beyond a trickle of food and medicine supplied by NGOs, cannot get in. Fatah is moving to cut off the cash going to Hamas, by requiring all non-governmental groups in its territory to get new operating licenses. It is safe to say Hamas's application will get lost in the mail.

Steven Erlanger of the *New York Times* described the states' strategy in a piece printed in the June 17 *Cleveland Plain Dealer*:

The idea is to concentrate Western efforts and money on the occupied West Bank, which Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and his Fatah faction control, in an effort to make it the shining model of a new Palestine that somehow will bring Gaza, and the radical Islamic group Hamas, to terms.

To this grand ambition, Fourth Generation theory says, lots of luck.

It may work to some extent in the short term, if the people in the West Bank actually see some improvement in their conditions. Given the corruption of Fatah, that may or may not happen, however much money states pour in. But in the long run, 4GW theory is betting on Hamas. The reason, as always, is the core of the Fourth Generation phenomenon: legitimacy.

Nothing could do more to de-legitimize Fatah and PA President Abbas than open support from Israel and the United States. Such open support may have played a role in Fatah's defeat in Gaza. Some months ago, the U.S. publicly announced a major grant, in the millions of dollars, to Fatah's armed forces. That allowed Hamas to call those forces a "Jew-American army" during the fighting in Gaza. How many Gaza residents, one wonders, wanted to support an army paid by America?

The Bush administration, as usual, refuses to learn. It is now busy undermining Fatah's legitimacy in the West Bank. According to a piece in the June 20 *Plain Dealer* by *LA Times* reporter Paul Richter, describing Israeli Prime Minister's White House visit last week,

The leaders (Bush and Olmert), appearing before a White House meeting, praised Abbas as a moderate and a democratically elected leader (the last Palestinian election was actually won by Hamas), and said they will work with him against his rivals in the militant Hamas movement.

Bush...praised Salam Fayyad, chosen by the Palestinian president this week as prime minister, as a "good fella."

One can almost hear what is left of Fatah's legitimacy gurgle away into the sands of the desert.

Here we see displayed in all its naked glory what may be the main reason the state cannot stem its crisis of legitimacy: it refuses to perceive it. As Martin van Creveld said to me years ago, "Everyone sees it except the people in the capital cities." By rushing to embrace Abbas and Fatah, with money as well as praise, Bush and Olmert may help them at the physical level of war, but at the moral level, it is the kiss of Judas. The gnostic gospel of Judas suggests that he, too, saw himself as a saint.

Speaking of the course of the Fatah-Hamas struggle to date, Steven Erlanger wrote in the previously-mentioned piece,

Both the United States and Israel are reeling from the rapid and ignominious collapse of Fatah in Gaza in recent days, despite significant injections of U.S. political and military advice and aid.

Until Washington comprehends that Fatah's defeat was it least in part because of, not despite, that open advice and aid, we should expect to continue to reel, if not in the short term then certainly in the long.

PS: A reader, Markus Gruber, wrote to ask, "Could you recommend a book(s) on Light Infantry Warfare as per your latest FMFM1-A?" Far and away the best work on present-day light infantry is Steven Canby's *Classic Light Infantry and New Technology*, which was published in 1982 as a monograph done under DOD contract (and subsequently ignored by DOD). It should be posted sometime this summer on the U.S. Marine Corps' Expeditionary Warfare School website, which will also carry some of the work on 4GW done by the students in the school's Advanced Warfighting Seminar.

William S. Lind, expressing his own personal opinion, is Director for the Center for Cultural Conservatism for the Free Congress Foundation.

On War #222
June 17, 2007

[Some British Thoughts on Maneuver Warfare](#)

By William S. Lind

[The views expressed in this article are those of Mr. Lind, writing in his personal capacity. They do not reflect the opinions or policy positions of the Free Congress Foundation, its officers, board or employees, or those of Kettle Creek Corporation.]

I recently received a thoughtful letter from a British officer just back from commanding a company in Iraq. His subject was not 4GW but 3GW, maneuver warfare, and the British Army's attempts to institutionalize it as doctrine. Like the U.S. Marine Corps, the British Army formally adopted maneuver warfare as doctrine in the late 1980s (their usual term for it is Mission Command, one possible translation of the German term *Auftragstaktik*). As this British major notes, however, formal adoption of maneuver warfare doctrine and actual institutionalization of it are two different things. Let me quote some of his observations and offer some comments on them (I do not mention his name for his own protection; the British Army has a long and proud tradition of preferring its young officers not to have ideas).

Since moving to a staff job I have reflected on the business of low-level tactical command and especially how we, the British, 'do'" Mission Command...

I suppose that my major premise is that we think we understand Mission Command because it is now a common part of our lexicon, it has been with us now for around twenty years, and we understand the mechanisms of mission type orders. However, I also think that we are now too comfortable with what is a shallow understanding of what Mission Command is all about; the problem is that that shallow understanding is so widespread and common that it has become the perceived wisdom.

This is similar to the situation in the U.S. Marine Corps. The central maneuver warfare concepts are commonly used, but mostly as buzzwords. Young officers receive classes on the concepts, but when their training moves to the field, they quickly see that what is done is mostly top-down, rigid, 2GW. I cannot count how many U.S. Marines, junior officers and NCOs, have told me, 'What the Marine Corps says is great, but it is not what it does.'

The starkest manifestation of this is in UK Doctrine, which throughout discusses Mission Command as an activity delivered by the Commander and his staff. My problem with this is that at Company level there is no staff: ...

Here, it is helpful to return to the source, namely the German Army. Not only did World War II German companies have no staff, neither did German battalions. At more senior levels, staffs were very small; a Panzer division staff had about twelve officers. Looking at it from a German perspective, our problem today is not lack of staffs (quite the opposite!) but, too often, a failure to choose the right kind of people as commanders. The Germans understood that you need a different type of person as a commander from those you assign to staff our work. Commonly our commanders are, like our staff officers, "process men," and it is rarely possible to make sound military decisions by following some rote process.

Additionally, and here I think we are different from the US, we do not have the time-resource to train our young officers in Mission Command. Yes they learn the principles, they understand mission-type orders and. they can use them. But this is as part of a mechanistic process; it is instilled in him as a drill, rather than as a culture.

This is precisely the situation in the U.S. Marine Corps, which also takes about a year to develop an infantry lieutenant. Time is part of the problem -- in the old German Army, it took five years to become a lieutenant but what is done with the time is a larger factor. Little is spent in developing military judgment, most in learning techniques. Free-play exercises, tactical decision games, map problems, staff rides etc. made up most of the German curriculum, but not ours.

The last observation hits at the heart of the matter. Maneuver warfare is not just a change in tactics, it is a change in military culture, from the 2GW culture that is inward-focused on rules, processes, orders etc.; centralized; prefers obedience over initiative; and depends on imposed discipline to a 3GW culture that is outward focused; de-centralized; prefers initiative to obedience; and depends on self-discipline. The U.S. Marine Corps has not made this cultural transition -- nor have the other -- American services -- which means it also turns Mission Command into a drill, i.e., into its opposite.

My experience as (a company commander) therefore highlighted what I would describe as a number of misconceptions about Mission Command...

- It is a mechanism. It is not: it is a way of *thought* that requires a deep and common understanding...
- It allows Commanders to have a more 'hands-off' approach. Here I think I differ with your perspective a little. My view was that the ability of the young officer grew as he deepened his understanding of his profession and of Mission Command...As he increased inability I widened his boundaries and gave him more and more freedom of action...
- "Mission-type orders mean you can do whatever you want." Here I think we have a real problem in that one man's Mission Command is another's over-control; ...my perspective was that while failure in training is good for learning, I would control the scope by exercising control measures. I gave them the space within which to fail; but it was not boundless space...

I agree with all these observations. The most important is the first: maneuver warfare is a way of thinking, not a mechanism. Wherever it is reduced to mechanism, it is also reduced to 2GW, regardless of the buzzwords applied to the latter. A sheep in wolf's clothing remains a sheep.

As to the other two points, I refer again to the German example. German World War II commanders stressed that the degree to which they could use *Auftragstaktik* depended entirely on the degree to which their subordinates had been developed. As the war went on and the quality of replacements fell, they had to revert increasingly to *Befehlstaktik*. Mission Command is not a magic wand you can wave over a herd and presto! They become competent military decision-makers and leaders. The German officer selection and development process was rigorous because it takes rigor to find and develop leaders who can do it (see Martin van Creveld's book *Fighting Power* for how the Germans selected and developed leaders).

This British officer's thoughts are important because if the British or the American armed forces are ever to succeed in Fourth Generation war, they must first make the transition from the Second Generation to the Third. That requires a massive change in military culture. On this side of the pond, that cultural change has yet to occur. I wish the British Army better luck, though

given the historic rigidity of the British Army command system (see C. S. Foster's *The General*), I suspect the challenge is just as great.

William S. Lind, expressing his own personal opinion, is Director for the Center for Cultural Conservatism for the Free Congress Foundation.

On War #221
June 11, 2007

[The Perfect \(Sine\) Wave](#)

By William S. Lind

Looking idly at the front page of last Wednesday's *Washington Post Express* as I rode the Metro to work, I received a shock. It showed a railroad station in Iraq, recently destroyed by an American air strike. So now we are bombing the railroad stations in a country we occupy? What comes next, bombing Iraq's power plants and oil refineries? How about the Green Zone? If the Iraqi Parliament doesn't pass the legislation we want it to, we can always lay a couple of JDAMs on it.

It turns out the bombed railroad station was no fluke. An AP story by Charles J. Hanley, dated June 5, reported that

U.S. warplanes have again stepped up attacks in Iraq, dropping bombs at more than twice the rate of a year ago... And it appears to be accomplished by a rise in Iraqi civilian casualties.

In the first 4 1/2 months of 2007, American aircraft dropped 237 bombs and missiles in support of ground forces in Iraq, already surpassing the 229 expended in all of 2006, according to Air Force figures obtained by The Associated Press.

Nothing could testify more powerfully to the failure of U.S. efforts on the ground in Iraq than a ramp-up in airstrikes. Calling in air is the last, desperate, and usually futile action of an army that is losing. If anyone still wonders whether the "surge" is working, the increase in air strikes offers a definitive answer: it isn't.

Worse, the growing number of air strikes shows that, despite what the Marines have accomplished in Anbar province and General Petraeus's best efforts, our high command remains as incapable as ever of grasping Fourth Generation war. To put it bluntly, there is no surer or faster way to lose in 4GW than by calling in airstrikes. It is a disaster on every level. Physically, it inevitably kills far more civilians than enemies, enraging the population against us and driving them into the arms of our opponents. Mentally, it tells the insurgents we are cowards who only dare fight them from 20,000 feet in the air. Morally, it turns us into Goliath, a monster every real man has to fight. So negative are the results of air strikes in this kind of war that there is only one possible good number of them: zero (unless we are employing the "Hama model," which we are not).

What explains this military lunacy, beyond simple desperation? Part of the answer, I suspect, is Air Force generals. Jointness demands they get their share of command billets in Iraq, and with very few exceptions they are mere military technicians. They know how to put bombs on targets, but they know nothing else. So, they do what they know how to do, with no comprehension of the consequences.

In fact, the U.S. Air Force recently announced it is developing its own counter-insurgency doctrine, precisely because "some people" are suggesting air strikes are counterproductive in such conflicts. Well, yes, that is what anyone with any understanding of counter-insurgency would suggest. The Air Force, of course, cares not a whit about the realities of counter-insurgency. It cares only about protecting its bureaucratic turf, its myth of "winning through air power" and its high-performance fighter-bombers, which truly are its knights in shining armor, useful only for tournaments.

Once again, we see the U.S. military riding the perfect sine wave. It will seem as if it is beginning to get things right, only to ride the wave back down again into the depths of unknowing. It brings to mind one of my favorite Bob Newhart skits. Newhart is walking slowly behind a line of an infinite number of monkeys, seated at an infinite number of typewriters, trying to write the world's great books. Bob pauses behind one of the monkeys. "Uh, Fred, come here a minute. I think this one's got something. 'To be or not to be, that is the...gzrbnklap.' Forget about it, Fred."

In this case, the gzrgnklap is airstrikes in 4GW, and the monkey is wearing Air Force blue.

William S. Lind, expressing his own personal opinion, is Director for the Center for Cultural Conservatism for the Free Congress Foundation.

On War #220

June 4, 2007

[A Perspective on Anbar](#)

By William S. Lind

Good news continues to flow from a most unlikely place, namely Iraq's Anbar province, home ground of Iraq's Sunni insurgency. Al-Qaeda has blundered and continues to blunder, attacking and alienating the local Sunni population. Adapting, for once, more quickly than the insurgents, the U.S. military has made tactical alliances with some of the Sunni insurgent groups, helping them to fight al-Qaeda. Last Thursday, the same phenomenon spread to a Baghdad Sunni neighborhood, where the locals turned their guns and IEDs on al-Qaeda. According to the June 1 *Washington Post*, America's second-in-command in Iraq, General Raymond T. Odierno, has authorized his subordinates to make cease-fire agreements with insurgent groups wherever they can.

How real is all this good news, and what does it mean? Some of it, no doubt, is puffery; friends who have recently returned from Anbar province do not describe their time there as a picnic. In the American military chain-of-command, good news is magnified as it moves up the chain while bad news is minimized. The higher you go, the less real the picture.

But some of the good news does appear real. Al-Qaeda has made a classic insurgency blunder. It is attempting to enforce its locally unpopular, Salafist brand of Islam in Sunni regions before it has won the war and consolidated power. In so doing, it has alienated part of its base, an error that can prove fatal. Worse, it seems unable to change course and adopt a "broad front" strategy, perhaps because the Salafist fanaticism of its fighters will not allow it to.

Equally real is the American attempt to capitalize on al-Qaeda's blunder. General Odierno's order allowing local cease-fires shows genuine learning on our part. In Anbar, the Marine Corps seems to have done what successful counter-insurgency requires and adopted a policy of de-escalation, though one may wonder to what degree it is successful in getting the troops to do that.

At the same time, if we look at these developments through the lens of Fourth Generation theory, they may mean less than we would hope them to. In Fourth Generation war, there is not one opponent, but a vast kaleidoscope of players, whose relationships to each other change constantly. Each player may, at any given time, be at war with a number of other players, not just one. Alliances tend to be short-term and purely tactical. The fact that some Sunni groups are fighting al-Qaeda does not mean they accept our presence, much less our now-avowed intention to keep forces in Iraq for half a century as in Korea. The *Post* quoted the mayor of the Sunni Baghdad suburb that rose against al-Qaeda as saying, "But if the Americans interfere, it will blow up, because they are the enemy of us both, and we will unite against them and stop fighting each other."

More, the fact that some Sunni resistance groups may make cease-fires with American forces or even cooperate with them against al-Qaeda does not mean they accept the Shiite-dominated Iraqi government in the Green Zone. In judging the strategic implications of local cease-fires and alliances, we must remind ourselves that the strategic objective is re-creating an Iraqi state. Local cease-fires and alliances between U.S. forces and some Sunni resistance organizations do not necessarily move us toward that goal, however much they may benefit our forces on the ground or work against al-Qaeda. On the contrary, they may represent an acceptance on our part of the absence of an Iraqi state and our inability to create one. Such acceptance may be realistic and necessary, but it is also a recognition of strategic failure, whether or not we perceive it.

This points to a third important qualifier, one I have noted before: in this kind of war, as in many other kinds, strategic success cannot be attained merely by adding up tactical successes. That is Second Generation, attrition-warfare thinking. On the contrary, the strategic level has a logic of its own, and attaining strategic goals requires good strategy, not just successful tactics. It is not clear, at this point, that America has anything that can be called a strategy in Iraq.

Putting the good news from Anbar in this larger perspective is not intended to diminish what the Marines are accomplishing there. Splitting our opposition is certainly preferable to uniting it; local, tactical alliances are better than no alliances; and local

cease-fires do more for us than local fire-fights. Anything that furthers de-escalation is a plus. The fact that all of these may point to improving adaptability on the part of U.S. higher command levels is the best news of all. Rigidity at those levels, much of it no doubt driven by the rigidity of the Bush administration, has been both a cause and a sign of our despair.

But like German tactical successes on the Eastern Front in 1945, we ought not read too much into good news from Anbar. The bigger picture remains grim. Tactical successes, successes not in winning battles but in de-escalating the conflict, will only become meaningful if they are matched by changes of course at the strategic level, which is to say changes in policy. Any such changes would require the concurrence of a White House which, from all appearances, is millions of miles from earth.

William S. Lind, expressing his own personal opinion, is Director for the Center for Cultural Conservatism for the Free Congress Foundation.

On War #219

May 29, 2007

[The Folly of Maximalist Objectives](#)

By William S. Lind

As Clausewitz wrote, the goals or objectives of states at war tend to change over time. In 18th Century cabinet wars, princes who were losing wisely reduced their objectives to what was attainable, while those who were winning were usually sufficiently prudent not to want too much. Wise statesmen such as Prince Bismarck kept their governments' objectives in check even during successful wars in the 19th Century.

But the advent of total wars between peoples, first in the wars of the French Revolution and Napoleon and then the World Wars of the 20th Century, let loose the folly of maximalist objectives. Worse, leaders and states that were losing tended to inflate rather than trim their objectives, largely as sops to public opinion. This led to ruinous wars and equally ruinous peace treaties. As Napoleon's fortunes waned, he was repeatedly offered relatively generous peace terms by the Allies, all of which he rejected, hoping a last throw of the iron dice would recoup his losses. As World War I dragged on, both sides' war objectives expanded, preventing the compromise, reconstructive peace Europe needed and ending in the catastrophic *Diktat* of Versailles. The ultimate extension of maximalist objectives, the Allies' demand for unconditional surrender in World War II, turned half of Europe over to Communism for half a century.

Now, it seems, the Bush Administration insists on extending the folly of maximalist objectives from total war into cabinet wars, and moreover into cabinet wars it is losing (or more accurately has lost). In public, it blathers on about democracy for Iraq, a war objective that reaches beyond maximalism into pure fantasy. In private, its real objectives, unchanged since long before the war began, are no less disconnected from reality. It seeks an Iraq that is a willing American satellite, a bottomless source of oil for America's SUVs, a permanent site for vast U.S. military bases from which Washington can dominate the region, and an ally of Israel. The skies will be darkened by winged swine long before any of these objectives are attained.

At this point, for those who want to continue the Iraq war, only one objective makes any sense: restoring a state in Iraq before we leave, or more likely as we leave. A state, any kind of state, under any government; to try to specify anything more is, in the face of our military failure, maximalism and unreality.

The likelihood, unfortunately, is that no one can restore a state in Iraq. If anyone can, it is probably Muqtada al-Sadr. According to the May 26 *Birmingham (Alabama) News* (I spent the Memorial Day weekend in the Confederacy; whatever its failings, it never learned to cook as badly as Yankees can),

The influential Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr publicly emerged Friday for the first time in months, calling for U.S. forces to leave Iraq and vowing to defend Sunnis and Christians. His appearance, and remarks, seemed part of an ongoing tactical shift by al-Sadr to recast himself as a nationalist who can unify and lead a post-occupation Iraq.

This is less of a shift than it might seem. Al-Sadr has maintained communications, and perhaps more, with some Sunni resistance groups all along. I suspect he has had his eye on the brass ring, namely all of Iraq, from the beginning. He knows what the idiots in Washington seem not to know, namely that only a leader who has opposed the occupation and America can hope to have sufficient legitimacy to restore an Iraqi state.

What all this means, in concrete terms, is that America should facilitate al-Sadr's rise to national power. That does not mean embracing him; to do so would be to destroy his legitimacy. Nor is he fool enough to accept any such embrace. Rather, it means staying out of his way, avoiding fights with his Mahdi Army, selectively picking off challengers to him within his own movement (which in fact we may be doing, wittingly or not), and letting our hopeless, worthless puppet government in Baghdad's Green Zone fall into history's wastebasket when the time is right.

None of this will ensure al-Sadr can restore a state in Iraq. Again, the odds are that no one can. But he seems to be the last, best hope.

The White House, of course, will accept none of this. Bush's maximalism is part and parcel of his defining break with reality. But our commanders on scene, Admiral Fallon and General Petraeus, may see it. If they do, they have a moral responsibility to act on it, the White House be damned. At this point in a lost game, we must take whatever route might, just might, lead to restoring an Iraqi state. The alternative, a stateless Iraq, will represent such a vast victory for Islamic Fourth Generation forces that any real Iraqi government, however unfriendly to the United States, is infinitely preferable.

If the folly of maximalist objectives instead remains our guide, we will know soon enough. The U.S. will go to war with the Mahdi Army, do a Fallujah on Sadr City (for which the U.S. military has already drawn up plans) and try to capture or kill al-Sadr himself. At that point the war in Iraq will effectively have no strategic objective at all, beyond being a gift beyond price to old Osama.

William S. Lind, expressing his own personal opinion, is Director for the Center for Cultural Conservatism for the Free Congress Foundation.

On War #218
May 21, 2007

[Death by Multiculturalism](#)

By William S. Lind

[The views expressed in this article are those of Mr. Lind, writing in his personal capacity. They do not reflect the opinions or policy positions of the Free Congress Foundation, its officers, board or employees, or those of Kettle Creek Corporation.]

The May 9 *Washington Times* reported that

The six foreign-born Muslims accused of planning a shooting attack on the U.S. military base (Ft. Dix, New Jersey) included four ethnic Albanians, and U.S. officials say their arrests highlight how Islamic groups are using the Balkans region to help in recruiting and financing terrorism.

That flapping sound you hear is chickens coming home to roost. In the 1990s, the United States intervened militarily in the Balkans to create two new Islamic states, Bosnia and Kosovo. Both of those states—states by courtesy, since state institutions are weak in both—are now happy homes for Fourth Generation Islamic forces.

What led America to the strategic imbecility of replacing the Ottoman Empire as the protector of Balkan Moslems? Ideology, that worst of poisons loosed by the French Revolution. The specific ideology in question calls itself "multiculturalism," though in fact it is the cultural Marxism of the Frankfurt School. Officially, it proclaims that all cultures are equal, peaceful, happy, something to "celebrate," even if on the ground they resemble a dumpster too long unemptied. Unofficially, multiculturalism works tirelessly for the destruction of Western, Christian culture, which it seeks to wipe off the earth and out of history. Since Islam has the same objective, the two work in alliance, despite the fact that they are philosophical opposites.

Lest anyone think that multiculturalism in the Balkans was purely a product of the Clinton administration, the Bush administration has picked up exactly where Clinton's crowd left off. At present, the U.S. is working to ram independence for Kosovo through the U.N., stripping Christian Serbia, an American ally in both World Wars, of its ancestral homeland. From a policy standpoint, such an action is absurd, as it creates an irredenta that guarantees another Balkan war. Morally, it is obscene, both as an act of Western suicide and as a gift to the same culture that is killing American troops in Iraq and Afghanistan. Only ideologically does it make sense, assuming one is a multiculturalist. Among ideologues, fantasies trump reality every time.

I have touched on this point in earlier columns, but here I want to state it as plainly as I can: in a Fourth Generation world, multiculturalism is the death of states. We have two recent examples of this fact, the former Soviet Union and the former Yugoslavia. One of the characteristics of Fourth Generation war is that cultural loyalties supercede state loyalties. *Ipsa facto*, states that tolerate, or worse, encourage multiple cultural loyalties—as multiculturalism commands—become battlegrounds. Yes, there can be exceptions, as Switzerland illustrates. But the primary loyalty and level of government in Switzerland is the canton, not the federal state, and most cantons are monocultural. Switzerland's current very loose confederation is itself the product of a 19th century multicultural civil war.

It follows that the single most important aspect of national defense in the 21st century is immigration policy. States that want to survive will not admit immigrants from other cultures, and will give those who have already arrived a choice between adopting the state's existing culture or leaving. The alternative, again, is war, a very nasty sort of war. Europe has already heard the opening guns.

Overseas, the return to a world of cultures in violent conflict means cultural solidarity on the one hand—Serbia should be an ally, Moslem Albania not—and on the other hand a reluctance to intervene in regions dominated by other cultures. Iraq and Afghanistan both underline that point; the Western expeditionary forces sent to both places have been defeated and, sooner or later, will be forced to withdraw.

Like all ideologies, multiculturalism attempts to deal with these inconvenient facts by forbidding their mention. It is "politically incorrect" to talk about them, political correctness being another alias of cultural Marxism. In America, daring to say that multiculturalism is death gets you kicked out of the Establishment. In Europe, it can get you arrested. If that reminds you of another Marxism, it should.

William S. Lind, expressing his own personal opinion, is Director for the Center for Cultural Conservatism for the Free Congress Foundation.

On War #217
May 8 2007

[Review of *Brave New War*](#)

By William S. Lind

While the White House and the Pentagon continue their long vacation in *Wolkenkuckucksheim*, in the real world the literature on Fourth Generation war continues to grow. An important addition is John Robb's new book, *Brave New War: The Next Stage of Terrorism and the End of Globalization*. As the title implies, this book dares to question the inevitability of the Globalist future decreed by the internationalist elites, a one-world superstate where life is reduced to an administered satisfying of "wants." Robb perceives, rightly, that the Brave New War of the Fourth Generation will put an end to the Brave New World.

Following a useful and well-written introduction to Fourth Generation war, *Brave New War* offers four observations of strategic importance. The first is that the "global gorillas" of 4GW will use "systems disruption" to inflict massive damage on states at little cost to themselves. Modern states depend on the functioning of numerous overlaid networks --- fuel pipelines, electric grids, etc. - which have critical linkages that are subject to attack. Robb writes:

To global guerillas, the point of greatest emphasis is the systempunkt. It is a point in the system... that will collapse the target system if it is destroyed. Within an infrastructure system, this collapse takes the form of disrupted flows that result in financial loss or supply shortages. Within a market, the result is a destabilization of the psychology of the marketplace that will introduce severe inefficiencies and chaos.

Our problem is that the global guerillas we see in the long tail of this global insurgency are quickly learning how to detect and attack systempunkts.

Here, I think John Robb's Air Force Background may mislead him to an extent. Air Forces have long believed that the bombing of critical nodes in an enemy's military, communications or economic systems can win wars; American air raids on German ball-bearing plants in World War II are a famous example. In reality, it seldom works because the enemy's re-routing, redundancy and repair capabilities enable him to work around the destruction. Robb is right that such destruction can increase costs, but

wartime psychology can absorb higher costs. War trumps peacetime balance-sheets.

Robb's second strategic observation I think is wholly correct: 4GW forces gain enormous strength from operating on an open-source basis. Anyone can play, a shared vision replaces top-down control, and methods evolve rapidly through lateral communication.

A great description of the dynamics of OSW (Open Source Warfare) is a bazaar. People are trading, haggling, copying and sharing. To an outsider it can look chaotic. It's so different from the quiet intensity and strict order of the cathedral-like Pentagon. This dynamic may be why Arab groups were some of the first guerilla movements to pick up on this new method and apply it to warfare.

The combination of post-modern Open Source Warfare and pre-modern, non-state primary loyalties leads to the third observation, that 4GW turns globalization against itself.

My conclusion is that globalization is quickly layering new skill sets on ancient mind-sets. Warriors, in our current context of global guerillas, are not merely lazy and monosyllabic primitives. They are wired, educated, and globally mobile. They build complex supply chains, benefit from global money flows, travel globally, innovate with technology and attack shrewdly.

Finally, Robb correctly finds the antidote to 4GW not in Soviet-style state structures such as the Department of Homeland Security but in de-centralization. What Robb calls "dynamic decentralized resilience" means that, in concrete terms, security is again to be found close to home. Local police departments, local sources of energy such as roof top solar arrays – I would add local farms that use sustainable agricultural practices – are the key to dealing with system perturbations. To the extent we depend on large, globalist, centralized networks we are insecure. Robb foresees that as state structures fail,

Members of the middle class will (take) matters into their own hands by forming suburban collectives to share the costs of security --- as they do now with education – and shore up delivery of critical services. These "armored suburbs" will deploy and maintain backup generators and communications links; they will be patrolled by civilian police auxiliaries that have received corporate training and boost their own state-of-the-art emergency response systems.

If this all sounds a bit like what happened as the Roman Empire fell, it should. The empire in this case is not America or even the West, but the state system and the force that produced the state, the modern age. Modernity shot itself in the head in 1914. How much longer ought we expect the body to live?

William S. Lind, expressing his own personal opinion, is Director for the Center for Cultural Conservatism for the Free Congress Foundation.

On War #216
April 30, 2007

[General Incompetence](#)

By William S. Lind

Many years ago, a friend of mine who was an aide to the Marine Corps Commandant asked his boss how many Marine generals he thought could command competently in combat. The Commandant came up with six, out of about sixty.

That figure of ten percent should not surprise any historian. Militarily competent generals have always been in short supply. One need only think of either side in the American Civil War; as J.F.C. Fuller wrote, the main reason the Federals won is that they came up with two competent generals while the Confederacy had only one. Toward the end of that war, when Confederate President Jefferson Davis selected General Braxton Bragg to command the defense of the South's last remaining port, Wilmington, North Carolina, a Richmond newspaper's headline read, "Bragg sent to Wilmington; Good-bye, Wilmington."

Lt. Col. Paul Yingling's article in the latest Armed Forces Journal, "A failure in generalship," should therefore not surprise us. His argument that the failure in Iraq is due in part to bad generalship is valid. We have no reason to expect America's military to be

an exception to history's rule that bad generals are more common than good generals. Especially in peacetime, few officers make general because of their military abilities. A comfortable pair of knee pads and an unlimited supply of lip balm are far more useful for attaining flag rank than an ability to defeat an enemy.

More worrisome is Yingling's other observation, also valid, that American general officers pay no price for military failure. When he writes, "As matters now stand, a private who loses a rifle suffers far greater consequences than a general who loses a war," he is not exaggerating. Quite the opposite; our previous commander in Iraq, under whose command our situation there got steadily worse, paid the penalty of returning home to become his service's chief of staff. One suspects that, in the shades, Graziani is jealous.

The two central questions Lt. Col. Yingling's article raises are, 1) why do we promote so many military incompetents and 2) how can we alter the pattern? A thesis written by one of my former students, an Air Force captain, reveals part of the answer to the first. He found that the Air Force administers the Myer-Briggs Personality Inventory test at both the Air Force Academy and the War College levels. At the Academy, the bureaucratic personality type (ISTJ) is just one among many. But by the War College, ISTJs are completely dominant. Why? Because one of the characteristics of that type is that they will only promote others like themselves. As the old French saying goes, "The problem with the generals is that we select them from among the colonels."

As to altering the pattern, there is no single solution. Basing promotions at least in part on the results of free-play field exercises and war games would help. Perhaps the most helpful step would be to reduce greatly the number of generals (and colonels). That way we could pay more attention to the few we would select.

Let's take the Marine Corps as an example. It now has three divisions and seventy-some generals. What if, instead, we had a general to command each division (3), a Commandant and an Assistant Commandant (2), and one more to oversee the vast rabbit-warren at Quantico? What about the MEFs? Abolish them; no military benefits by having parallel chains of command. The air wings? The senior aviator rank should be colonel, with each division having one dual-hatted as wing commander and division air ops officer. Throw in one more general as general factotum; he could be stationed in Washington to attend cocktail parties. With just seven general officer slots to fill, it is not unreasonable to suppose the Marine Corps would be somewhat more careful as to the military ability of those seven. Civilian overseers, both in DOD and in Congress, could devote time to considering the record of each candidate. Hint: never promote anyone who does not have at least one bad fitness report.

If our new Secretary of Defense wants to show that he really is different, there is one action he could take that would speak volumes. Instead of sending Lt. Col. Yingling to Adak, he could put him in charge of a project to change the kind of people we promote, not just to general but to all ranks above the company grades. One of the project's goals might be to ensure we have no more ISTJs than we have billets for logisticians and adjutants.

William S. Lind, expressing his own personal opinion, is Director for the Center for Cultural Conservatism for the Free Congress Foundation.

On War #215
April 23, 2007

[Van Creveld's Latest](#)

By William S. Lind

Martin van Creveld drops books as often as Amish wives drop babies (an Amish friend of mine refers to the local midwife's office as the "Stop & Drop"). Unlike in Lake Woebegone, not all are above average. Van Creveld's latest book, *The Changing Face of War*, is what writers call a "toss-off." It is a good and useful book, a summary of "the lessons of combat from the Marne to Iraq" that would make an admirable text for an introductory course in military history. Unlike, say, *The Transformation of War*, it offers no Big New Idea that demands a book like some vast intestinal gas pocket demanding a belch. Those who write know whereof I speak.

Yet it is precisely as a summary that *The Changing Face of War* has value, and not just to undergraduates. Chapter Six, "The New World Disorder, 1991 to the Present" summarizes what a state needs to do to prevail over non-state forces. It does so most usefully in looking at the British Army's success in Northern Ireland, one of the few cases where the state's armed forces have won.

How did the British do it? Van Creveld puts it best:

First, unlike President Bush in 2001, the British did not declare war, which would have removed a whole series of legal constraints and put the entire conflict on a new footing. Instead, from beginning to end the problem was treated as a criminal one...

Note that, in contrast to what we hear from the Bush administration and the U.S. military, van Creveld sees the removal of restrictions on what troops can do as a disadvantage. He understands that in Fourth Generation war, the counter-intuitive is often correct.

Second, much of the day-to-day work was left to the RUC (Royal Ulster Constabulary). Its members, having been locally recruited and assigned lengthy stays at their posts, knew the area better than anyone else. Accordingly, they were often able to discriminate among the various factions inside the IRA as well as between terrorists and others...

Third, never again (after Bloody Sunday, January 30, 1972, when British troops fired into a crowd and killed thirteen people) did British troops fire indiscriminately into marching or rioting crowds

Fourth, and in marked contrast with most other counterinsurgents from the Germans in Yugoslavia to the Americans in Vietnam and elsewhere, not once in the entire struggle did the army bring in heavy weapons such as tanks, armored personnel carriers, artillery, or aircraft to repulse attacks and inflict retaliation...

Fifth, never once did the British inflict collective punishment such as curfews, the cutting off of electricity and water, demolishing houses, destroying entire neighborhoods. . . As far as humanly possible, the police and the army posed as the protectors of the population, not its tormentors. In this way they were able to prevent the uprising from spreading.

Sixth and most important of all, by and large both the RUC and the army stayed within the framework of the law. . . From (1972) on, the British refrained from arbitrary imprisonment, torture, and illegal killings...

The most important insight of all, though, (came) over dinner in Geneva in 1995. My partner on that occasion was a British colonel, regiment of paratroopers, who had done several tours of duty in Northern Ireland. What he said can be summed up as follows...

the struggle in Northern Ireland had cost the United Kingdom three thousand casualties in dead alone. Of the three thousand, about seventeen hundred were civilians...of the remaining, a thousand were British soldiers. No more than three hundred were terrorists, a ratio of three to one. Speaking very softly, he said: And that is why we are still there.

When the U.S. armed forces understand and accept this, there will be some hope in places such as Iraq and Afghanistan. Until then, there is none.

William S. Lind, expressing his own personal opinion, is Director for the Center for Cultural Conservatism for the Free Congress Foundation.

On War #214
April 16, 2007

[A Tactics Primer](#)

By William S. Lind

It occasionally happens that a reader's e-mail is translated into dots and dashes and sent to me over Mr. Morse's wonderful electric telegraph. The sounder on my desk, opposite the inkwell and under the flypaper scroll, recently tapped out the following, from Jim McDonnell of Baton Rouge, Louisiana:

Could you please explain what's meant by the remark about U.S. forces being unable to fight battles of encirclement? Is it that there are too few of them in Afghanistan or are you saying that our forces are

constitutionally incapable of that kind of operation? If the latter is the case, that would make a column all by itself.

It would, and it does. The problem is not numbers but tactical repertoire, or lack thereof. That deficiency, in turn, is a product—like so much else—of the American armed forces' failure to transition from the Second Generation to the Third.

Second Generation tactics, like those of the First Generation, are linear. In the attack, the object is to push a line forward, and in the defense it is to hold a line. As we saw in so many battles in and after World War I, the result is usually indecisive. One side or the other ends up holding the ground, but the loser retires in reasonably good order to fight again another day.

Usually, achieving a decision, which means taking the enemy unit permanently out of play, requires one of two things, or both in combination: ambush or encirclement. Modern, Third Generation tactics reflect an "ambush mentality," and also usually aim for encirclement. To that end, Third Generation tactics are sodomy tactics: the objective is to get in the other guy's rear.

On the defense, that is accomplished by inviting the enemy to attack, letting him penetrate, and then launching a counterattack designed to encircle him, not push him back out. This was the basis of the new, Third Generation German defensive tactics of 1917, and also the German Army's standard defense in World War II.

On the offense, the rule is not "close with and destroy" but "bypass and collapse." The goal is to penetrate deep into the enemy's rear, by stealth or by force (the Germans used a three, not two, element assault, and the largest element was the exploitation element), then roll up the enemy's forward units from the flank and rear while overrunning his artillery, headquarters and supply dumps. The same approach was used by the Panzer divisions on the operational level, leading to vast encirclements of hundreds of thousands of Soviet troops on the Eastern Front in 1941.

The U.S. military today knows little or nothing of this. It did attempt an operational encirclement of the Iraqi Republican Guard by 7th Corps in the First Gulf War, but that attempt failed because 7th Corps was too slow. On the tactical level, most American units have only one tactic: bump into the enemy and call for fire. The assumption is that America's vast firepower will then annihilate the opponent, but that seldom happens. Instead, he lives to fight again another day, like Osama and his al Qaeda at Tora Bora.

While the central problem here is conceptual—sheer ignorance of Third Generation tactics—there is a physical aspect to it as well. On foot, American soldiers are loaded down with everything except the kitchen sink, and they will probably be required to carry that too as soon as it is digitized. To use tactics of encirclement, you need to be at least as mobile as your enemy and preferably more so. The kind of light infantry fighters we find ourselves up against in places such as Iraq and Afghanistan are just that, light. They can move much faster on their feet than can our overburdened infantry. The result is that they ambush us, then escape to do it again, over and over. Flip-flops in the alley beat boots on the ground.

As the students in my seminar at Quantico discovered early in the year, the decisive break, both in tactics and in organizational culture, is not between the Third and Fourth Generations but between the Second and Third. It is little short of criminal that the American military remains stuck in the Second Generation. The Third Generation was fully developed in the German Army by 1918, almost a century ago. It costs little or nothing to make the transition. To those who understand how the Pentagon works, that may be the crux of the problem.

William S. Lind, expressing his own personal opinion, is Director for the Center for Cultural Conservatism for the Free Congress Foundation.

On War #213
April 10, 2007

[Horatio Hornblower's Worst Nightmare](#)

By William S. Lind

The tiff over maritime boundaries in the Shatt-al-Arab between Iran and Great Britain seems to be over, with the British sailors and Marines released and returned to the U.K. I continue to suspect a deal was made regarding the five Iranian Revolutionary Guard officers held by the U.S. in Iraq. If they go home in a few weeks or months, it will be a *quid pro quo*, regardless of how much Washington and London deny it.

For Britain, and especially for the Royal Navy and Royal Marines, the incident ended in utter disgrace. The initial surrender of the British boarding party to what appears to have been a much larger Iranian force is the only defensible British action in the whole sorry business. Even in Horatio Hornblower's Royal Navy, a British frigate captain was not disgraced if he struck to a French or Spanish ship of the line. *Force majeure* remains a valid excuse.

But everything else that was said or done would have given Hornblower or Jack Aubrey an apoplexy. The failure of *HMS Cornwall* to foresee such an event and be in a position to protect her people; the cowardice—there is no other word for it—of the boarding party (including two officers) once captured; their kissing the Iranian's backsides in return for their release; and perhaps most un-British, their selling their disgraceful stories to the British press for money on their return -- all this departs from Royal Navy traditions in ways that would have appalled the tars who fought at Trafalgar.

Yet that is not the worst of it. The worst of it is the reaction of the Navy's higher-ups. According to a story in the April 7 *Washington Times*, the Royal Navy's top commander, Admiral Jonathon Band, leapt to the boarding party's defense with virtually Jerry Springeresque words:

He told the British Broadcasting Corp. he believed the crew behaved with "considerable dignity and a lot of courage" during their 13 days in Iranian captivity.

He also said the so-called confessions made by some of them and their broadcast on Iranian state television appear to have been made under "a certain amount of psychological pressure."...

"I would not agree at all that it was not our finest hour. I think our people have reacted extremely well in some very difficult circumstances," he said.

Had the captives been 10-year old girls from Miss Marples' Finishing School, Admiral Band's words might make some sense. But these were supposed to be fighting men from the Royal Navy and Royal Marines! Yes, I meant men. What Politically Correct imbecile detailed a woman to a boarding party?

To understand just how bad the whole business is, one must first know a bit about Hornblower's navy. In the latter half of the 18th century, the Royal Navy developed and institutionalized what we now call maneuver warfare or Third Generation war. By the Napoleonic Wars, it was all there -- the outward focus, where results counted for more than following orders or the Fighting Instructions; de-centralization (Nelson was a master of mission-type orders); prizing initiative above obedience; and dependence on self-discipline (at least at the level of ship commanders and admirals) . It is often personified as the "Nelson Touch," but it typified a whole generation of officers, not just Nelson. In the 19th century, the Royal Navy lost it all and went rigid again, for reasons described in a wonderful book, Andrew Gordon's *The Rules of the Game*. But Hornblower's and Aubrey's navy was as fast-acting, fluid and flexible at sea as was the *Kaiserheer* on land.

I told Andrew Gordon that I would someday love to write the intellectual history of that first, maritime incarnation of maneuver warfare; he replied that the source material to do that may not exist, since Royal Navy officers of that time were not writing things down. He may be right, but I think one incident holds the key to much of it: the execution by firing squad, on his own poop deck, of Admiral John Byng.

In 1756, at the beginning of the Seven Year's War, the French took the island of Minorca in the Mediterranean from the British. Admiral Byng was sent out from London to relieve the island's garrison, then under siege. He arrived, fought a mismanaged battle with the attending French squadron, then retired to Gibraltar. Deprived of naval support, the garrison surrendered. Byng was court-martialed for his failure, found guilty, and shot.

The reason Byng's execution played a central role in the development of maneuver warfare in the Royal Navy is the main charge laid against him. The capital charge was "not doing his utmost" in the presence of the enemy. In other words, Byng was executed not for what he did, but for what he did not do. Nothing could have done more to spur initiative in the navy. As Voltaire famously wrote, "Sometimes the British shoot an admiral to encourage the others." Encourage the others to take initiative and get the result the situation demands is exactly what it did. Without Byng, I doubt there would have been a Nelson.

Byng's execution points directly to what went wrong in the Royal Navy in the Shatt. It is not so much what people did as what they did not do. Neither the fleet commander nor the commander of *HMS Cornwall* prepared for such a situation. When it happened, *Cornwall* did not react. The captured sailors and Marines did not think about anything except their own skins. The

Royal Navy, as represented by Admiral Band, seems decided to do nothing about its disgrace except pretend it did not happen.

William S. Lind, expressing his own personal opinion, is Director for the Center for Cultural Conservatism for the Free Congress Foundation.

On War #212
April 2, 2007

[Blinking Red Light](#)

By William S. Lind

On March 23, Iran seized 15 British sailors and Marines in the Shatt-al-Arab, accusing them of operating in Iranian waters. Normally, this sort of minor border incident would not be worth much thought. But given the strength of the war parties both in Washington and in Tehran, any incident is the equivalent of smoking in the powder magazine. So what is really going on here?

We probably will not know the answer to that question until British, American and Iranian archives are opened many years from now. But some careful thought may at least point us in the right direction.

The first possibility is that the whole thing is just what it seems to be, a border incident. The border between Iranian and Iraqi waters in the Shatt is vague at best, so both the British and the Iranians may think themselves in the right in their claims about the British boarding party's location. Or, one party or both may be attempting to stake a claim to some of those waters.

The Middle East being what it is, I suspect there is more to it. But we should soon know; if it is nothing more than a border dispute, Iran will accept Britain's promise to be more careful in future and let Her Majesty's sailors and Marines go.

A second possibility strikes me as more likely, namely that the Iranians grabbed some British hostages for a swap. The U.S. is holding five Iranians it took in a raid in northern Iraq in January. According to the Sunday *Washington Post*, "Iranian officials expected them to be released on the Iranian new year, March 21." Just two days after that release failed to occur, the Iranians grabbed the Brits. More, the Iranian forces who seized the British boarding party were Revolutionary Guard, not Iranian Navy; the Iranians held by the U.S. are also Revolutionary Guards, from the Guard's elite Quds Force.

What could be more Middle Eastern than setting up a trade?

Washington is saying "no deal," but the decision will likely be made in London, unless Bush is in a mood to boot Fifi the Poodle, aka Tony Blair, down the stairs.

A third question is, could Britain and the U.S. have set the whole thing up to create an incident justifying a strike on Iran? That seems unlikely, given that Britain is not keen on war with Iran.

But what about the reverse? Could Iran have grabbed some British hostages as a way of pre-empting an American attack planned for April? This is where things get interesting.

Rumors have circulated in Washington for months naming April as the likely time for a U.S. strike on Iran's nuclear facilities. Such rumors are common in wartime and usually prove wrong. But starting about two weeks ago, the Russians have pulled out the hundreds of people they had working on Iran's first nuclear power plant, now nearing completion. The official Russian explanation was a "contract dispute," but if you believe that I have a great bridge up in Brooklyn I'd love to sell you. If in fact Washington plans to hit Iran in April, it almost has to have tipped the Russians off so they could get their people out. Not doing so would have meant lots of dead Russians, killed by American bombs, with serious consequences in Europe and the U.N. as well as to American-Russian relations. The Russian pull-out, if not a direct leak from Moscow to Tehran, would have tipped off the Iranians. The question for them then would be, how to pre-empt?

Seizing just 15 British servicemen would hardly seem likely to pre-empt a major attack. But here is where the eastern way of war differs from the western. In the indirect, eastern way of war, it is often considered preferable to go after a strong enemy's weak allies rather than his main strength. Would the Blair government collapse if, in response to an American strike on Iran, the heads of those 15 Brits ended up on pikes outside the British Embassy in Tehran? Good chance of it. That would in turn leave the U.S. totally stripped of meaningful allies, not only against Iran but also in Iraq. Could that potential give the White House pause? It could. If an action by Bush brought down his most loyal ally, Blair, who else would ever ally with Bush?

Again, this is all speculative, as it must be without better sources in Tehran than I possess. But we can look for an indicator. If Tehran refuses all efforts to resolve the matter, even with a trade of prisoners, then Iran probably has some continued use for British hostages. Holding them means paying increasing political costs, especially in Iran's relationships with Europe, which are important to the Iranian regime. What is worth enough to pay those costs? Messing up American plans for an attack.

All of this, especially the Russians' pull-out from the Iranian reactor project, adds up to a blinking red light on the panel that monitors the risk of another war in the Middle East. With the dispatch of the aircraft carrier *Nimitz* to the Persian Gulf, which will put three carriers on station for a few weeks later in April, the whole panel should soon light up.

NB: As a follow-up to last week's column on Operation Anabasis, General Barry McCaffrey's report on his recent trip to Iraq states that:

... at division and brigade level these C3I command posts are not movable. They simply are not prepared to effectively fight a war of maneuver. (For example, against the Syrians or the Iranians.)

We are overly dependant on Kuwait for logistics.

If Iranian military action closed the Persian Gulf, the US combat force in Iraq would immediately begin to suffocate logistically.

All the pieces of a very ugly puzzle are falling into place.

William S. Lind, expressing his own personal opinion, is Director for the Center for Cultural Conservatism for the Free Congress Foundation.

On War #211
March 27, 2007

[Operation Anabasis](#)

By William S. Lind

While dilettantes believe the attack is the most difficult military art, most soldiers know better. Carrying out a successful retreat is usually far harder.

One of history's most successful retreats, and certainly its most famous, is the "Retreat of the 10,000." In 401 B.C., 10,000 Greek hoplites hired themselves out as mercenaries to a Persian prince, Cyrus the Younger, who was making a grab for the Peacock Throne. Inconveniently, after the Greeks were deep in Persia, Cyrus was killed. The hoplites' leader, Xenophon, the first gentleman of war, led his men on an epic retreat through Kurdish country to the coast and home. Surprisingly, most of them made it. Safely back in Athens, Xenophon wrote up his army's story, cleverly titling it the *Anabasis*, which means the advance. It was not the last retreat so labeled.

If the above scenario sounds familiar, it should. America now has an army, not of 10,000 but of more than 140,000, deep in Persia (which effectively includes Shiite Iraq, despite the ethnic difference). We are propping up a shaky local regime in a civil war. Our local allies are of dubious loyalty, and the surrounding population is not friendly. Our lines of communication, supply and retreat all run south, to Kuwait, through Shiite militia country. They then extend on through the Persian Gulf, which is called that for a reason. If those lines are cut, many of our troops have only one way out, the same way Xenophon took, up through Kurdish country and Asia Minor (now Turkey) to the coast.

What is the chance that could happen? Higher than anyone in Washington or the senior military seems to think. Two events, separately or combined, pose a credible threat of severing our forces lines of communication. The first is an American or Israeli attack on Iran (Iran has publicly announced that it will respond to an Israeli attack as if the U.S. were also involved). Iran potentially could cut our supply lines by encouraging Iraqi Shiite militias to attack them, by infiltration into southern Iraq of the Revolutionary Guards, by attacking with the regular Iranian Army or by blocking the Persian Gulf with mines, coastal batteries and naval forces. Regarding the first option, a British journalist asked Mr. al-Hakim, leader of SCIRI and the Badr Brigades and a recent White House guest, what his militia would do if America attacked Iran. "Then," he replied, "we would do our duty."

A second possible threat is a move to cut our lines of communication by the Shiite militias in response to events inside Iraq. At the moment, the Shiites are avoiding confrontations with American troops, not because they are afraid of them but because they are practicing good operational art. Their objective is to have the Americans fight the Sunnis for them. So long as we are doing that, it makes no sense to get into a dust-up with us.

However, loud voices in Washington want American forces in Iraq to start a two-front war, attacking the Shiite militias as well as the Sunni insurgents, on the grounds that both are threats to our puppet Iraqi government. Should those voices prevail, the Shiites would at some point have to respond, with Muqtada al-Sadr's Mahdi Militia probably in the lead. They would be foolish to fight us where we are strong, in and around Baghdad where the "surge" is focused. A far better target would be our vulnerable supply lines, which again run south through the Shiites' home turf. At the least, such an attack would draw many of our forces away from Baghdad, relieving the pressure on Sadr City. Potentially, it could leave our troops in Baghdad cut off and quickly running out of beans, bullets and POL, not to speak of bottled water. Anyone who thinks air transport could make up the difference should reference Hermann Goering and Stalingrad.

Both of these threats are sufficiently real that prudence, that old military virtue, suggests American forces in Iraq should have a plan for Operation Anabasis, a retreat north through Kurdish Iraq to Turkey. Higher headquarters are unlikely to develop such a plan, because if it leaked there would be political hell to pay in Washington. I would therefore strongly advise every American battalion and company in Iraq to have its own Operation Anabasis plan, a plan which relies only on its own resources and whatever it thinks it could scrounge locally. Do not, repeat, do not expect the Air Force to come in and pick you up.

What might such company and battalion plans entail? I asked that question of Dave Danelo, a former Marine captain who now edits U.S. Cavalry's "On Point" website. Dave was recently in Iraq with U.S. units as a journalist, so his knowledge is current. His suggestions include:

- Have a route plan. Know where the safe areas are and why they are safe. For the Marines in Al Anbar Province, this could be Al Asad or Al Taqaddum Air Base. For soldiers in Mosul, it's Kurdistan. For troops in Baghdad, it's either of the above, or possibly Tallil Air Base in the south. For British troops in Basrah, who knows?
- Apply the Joseph Principle. In the Bible, Joseph advised the Egyptians to store away their goods during the seven years of feast. When seven years of famine hit, they were ready. Husband large stashes of everything at the company/battalion levels: MREs, water, ammunition, and, most of all, fuel.
- Iraqis, American contractors and oil companies have each developed parallel and redundant distribution systems that push fuel outside the U.S. military umbrella. Depending on who controls what in which neighborhood, these systems might remain intact if military supply lines are cut. Be prepared to commandeer these resources.
- Learn the black market fuel system and exploit it. Although black market fuel is horrible on humvee engines, it will get your unit out of Baghdad and into a safe zone.

It is of course possible, perhaps probable, that American forces in Iraq may not have to repeat Xenophon's retreat. So much the better. Many contingency plans go unused, and all that is lost thereby is some time and effort spent in planning.

But when situations suddenly arise to which no thought has been given and for which no plans have been made, the result can be trouble. When the situation is a sudden loss of an army's lines of supply and retreat, the result can be loss of an army. However unfortunate a forced American retreat from Iraq would be, a successful retreat would be far less of a defeat than the encirclement and destruction of our army. Dunkirk was a British defeat, but it was not so serious a defeat as Yorktown.

It is time for American battalion commanders, S-3s, and company commanders in Iraq to get to know Xenophon. His *Anabasis* is still in print and readily available. Even if, as I fervently hope, we never have to put the plans for our own Operation Anabasis into effect, they will still have the pleasure of meeting the first gentleman of war.

On War #210
March 20, 2007

[Flickers of Light](#)

By William S. Lind

The March 14 *Los Angeles Times* contained that *rarissima avis*, good news from Ramadi:

The commander of U.S. troops in Iraq wanted some sweets, and nothing was going to stop him. Not even the fact that he was tramping through a neighborhood that only days ago had been teeming with snipers and Al Qaeda fighters who would love nothing better than to say they had just shot Gen. David H. Petraeus.

With soldiers casting anxious glances along the desolate dirt road, the four-star Army general made a beeline for a tiny shop and helped himself to a bite-sized, honey-coated pastry preferred by the owner.

"Tell him the next time I come back to Ramadi, we'll eat his chow," Petraeus said as he headed into the blistering sun.

As someone who navigates by bakeries, I would like to see this episode as a tale of a great man willing to venture all, even his life, in pursuit of the perfect éclair. The reality is less noble, but perhaps more useful. General Petraeus was showing by personal example that our forces in Iraq should put integration with the people before force protection.

This flicker of light was not alone in the darkness that is Iraq. In Anbar province, home base of the Sunni insurgency, the Marines report some progress. Turning al Qaeda in Iraq's excesses against it, they have formed working alliances with some Sunni sheiks, who in turn are going after al Qaeda. U.S. troops have moved into Sadr City in Baghdad with some care instead of kicking down doors and humiliating the locals.

The official reports undoubtedly overstate the good news, because that is what the U.S. military always does (for an example of the opposite, see Williamson Murray's superb article on the German response to victory in Poland). But the reason these points of light will not overcome the Iraqi darkness is more profound. All these improvements in American forces' performance are at the tactical level, and that is not where most wars are decided.

Two points of military theory are important here. First, a higher level dominates a lower. If you win on the tactical level but lose operationally, you lose. If you win on the tactical and operational levels but lose strategically—Germany's fate in both world wars—you still lose.

Second, in most wars, including Fourth Generation wars, success on higher levels is not merely additive. That is not to say, you cannot win operationally or strategically just by adding up tactical victories. We tried to do that in Vietnam, and the Second Generation U.S. military still does not understand why it didn't work. In Second Generation theory, it is supposed to work, which is why we are trying it again in Iraq and Afghanistan, and again not understanding why we are losing.

If we consider the operational and strategic situations in Iraq, we can easily see why no amount of tactical success can save us. Strategically, we are fighting to support a Shiite regime closely aligned with Iran, our most potent local opponent. Every tactical success merely moves us closer to giving Iran a new ally in the form of a restored Iraqi state under Shiite domination. The more tactical successes we win, the worse our strategic situation gets. This flows not from any tactical failure (though there have been plenty of those), but from botching the strategic level from the outset. Saddam's Iraq was the main regional counterweight to Iran, which means we should not have attacked it.

Operationally, we have been maneuvered by Iraq's Shiites into fighting their civil war for them, focusing our efforts against the Sunnis. As I have observed before, we are in effect the Shiites' unpaid Hessians. That is why Muqtada al-Sadr has ordered his Mahdi Army not to fight us in Sadr City. It is not that he is afraid of us; he is simply making a rational operational decision.

Our only other apparent option is to take a more even hand and fight the Shiite militias as well as the Sunnis, which is what some in Washington want our forces to do. But that would make our operational situation even worse, because the Shiites lie across our lines of communication. If we get into a fight with them, they can cut off our supplies, leaving us effectively encircled -- the essence of operational defeat.

It should be clear that no accumulation of tactical successes can retrieve either our operational or our strategic situations. Again, most wars are not simply additive.

That is not to say we could not repair our positions on the strategic or operational levels. On the strategic level, we could reach

a general settlement with Iran, something the Iranians have proposed, and on very generous terms.

This would be the equivalent of Nixon's rapprochement with China, which rendered our defeat in Vietnam irrelevant. Unfortunately, the Bush administration, with its usual myopia, has refused even to consider the Iranian offer.

Operationally, we could open negotiations with all our Sunni opponents other than al Qaeda in Iraq, attempting to reach a settlement that would isolate the latter. General Petraeus has dropped hints he would like to do this. We would have to assure the nationalist opposition that we do plan to leave, and the Baathists that they would be re-legalized and given some share of political power. It would require a delicate balancing act, since any arrangement with the Baathists would enrage the Shiites, who could threaten our supply lines. It might nonetheless be possible, except that the Bush White House would again almost certainly veto it. As General Petraeus has probably already discovered, there is no position more difficult than that of minister to an idiot king.

In desperation, General Petraeus will probably be driven to seek operational and strategic success by fighting smarter on the tactical level. He will comfort himself that fighting smarter is at least better than fighting dumb, as we largely have to date. But it won't work, because it can't. Operational and strategic failures must be dealt with on their own levels and in their own terms. Anything else is lighting candles in a hurricane.

William S. Lind, expressing his own personal opinion, is Director for the Center for Cultural Conservatism for the Free Congress Foundation.

On War #209
March 14, 2007

[Conversations](#)

By William S. Lind

A curious fact about the American military and American private industry in the early 21st century is their insistence on holding formal meetings. The practice is curious because these same institutions spend a great deal of time and effort studying "good management," which should recognize what most participants in such meetings see, namely that they are a waste of time. Good decisions are far more often a product of informal conversations than of any formal meeting, briefing or process.

History offers a useful illustration. In 1814, the Congress of Vienna, which faced the task of putting Europe back together after the catastrophic French Revolution and almost a quarter-century of subsequent wars, did what aristocrats usually do. It danced, it dined, it stayed up late playing cards for high stakes, it carried on affairs, usually not affairs of state. Through all its aristocratic amusements, it conversed. In the process, it put together a peace that gave Europe almost a century of security, with few wars and those limited.

In contrast, the conference of Versailles in 1919 was all business. Its dreary, interminable meetings (read Harold Nicolson for a devastating description) reflected the bottomless, plodding earnestness of the bourgeois and the Roundhead. Its product, the Treaty of Versailles, was so flawed that it spawned another great European war in just twenty years. As Kaiser Wilhelm II said from exile in Holland, the war to end war yielded a peace to end peace.

The U.S. military has carried the formal meeting's uselessness to a new height with its unique cultural totem, the PowerPoint brief. Almost all business in the American armed forces is now done through such briefings. An Exalted High Wingwang, usually a general or an admiral, formally leads the brief, playing the role of the pointy-haired boss in Dilbert. Grand Wazoos from various satrapies occupy the first rows of seats. Behind them sit rank upon rank of field-grade horse-holders, flower-strewers and bung-holders, desperately striving to keep their eyelids open through yet another iteration of what they have seen countless times before.

The briefing format was devised to use form to conceal a lack of substance. PowerPoint, by reducing everything to bullets, goes one better. It makes coherent thought impossible. Bulletizing effectively makes every point equal in importance, which prevents any train of logic from developing. Thoughts are presented like so many horse apples, spread randomly on the road. After several hundred PowerPoint slides, the brains of all in attendance are in any case reduced to mush. Those in the back rows quietly pray for a suicide bomber to provide some diversion and end their ordeal.

When General Greg Newbold, USMC, was J-3 on the Joint Staff, he prohibited briefings in matters that ended at his level (those above him, of course, still wanted their briefs). Instead, he asked for conversations with people who actually knew the material, regardless of their rank. Five or ten minutes of knowledgeable, informal conversation accomplished far more than hours of formal briefing.

Why does the American military so avoid informal conversations and require formal meetings and briefings? Because most of the time, the people who actually know the subject are of junior rank. Above them stands a vast pyramid of "managers," who know little or nothing about the topic but want their "face time" as they buck for promotion. The only way they can get their time in the sun without egg on their faces is by hiding behind a formal, scripted briefing. At the end, they still have to drag up some captain or sergeant from the horse-holder ranks if questions are asked.

The PowerPoint briefing is another reason America has a non-thinking military. The tendency toward useless, formal meetings is of course broader than the American military—again, the business world is full of it—but good leaders cut around it.

When General Hermann Balck was commanding 48th Panzer Korps on the Eastern Front with General F.W. von Mellinthin as his I-A, Mellinthin one day reproached Balck for wasting time by going out to eat with the troop units so often. Balck replied, "You think so? OK, tomorrow you come with me."

The next day, they arrived at a battalion a bit before lunchtime. They had a formal meeting, Balck asked some questions and got some answers. Then, they broke for lunch. During the informal conversation that usually accompanies meals, Balck asked the same questions and got completely different answers. On their way back to the headquarters, Balck turned to Mellinthin and said, "Now you see why I go out so often to eat with the troop units. It's not for the cuisine."

When Generals Balck and von Mellinthin visited Washington in 1980, John Boyd asked them to reflect on their leadership of 48th Panzer Korps and how they would have done it if they had possessed computers. Balck replied, "We couldn't have done it." Boyd didn't ask about PowerPoint, but I suspect General Balck's reply would have been equally to the point.

Despite the situation in Berlin, the Wehrmacht did know how to think.

Note: The idea for this column came from my old friend General Pat Garvey, USMCR, *ausser Dienst*. I suggest that anyone who takes umbrage at it contact him directly. Orange though I am, I do send an occasional St. Paddy's Day present.

William S. Lind, expressing his own personal opinion, is Director for the Center for Cultural Conservatism for the Free Congress Foundation.

On War #208
March 6, 2007

[The Washington Dodgers](#)

By William S. Lind

It's springtime for Congress, and the Washington Dodgers are batting 1.000 in the exhibition season. No, I'm not talking about baseball. I have just enough interest in sports to know that the Dodgers play in Brooklyn and Washington's baseball team is the Senators. The Dodgers I'm talking about are the Democratic majorities in the House and the Senate, for whom it is always exhibition season and dodging means not ending the war in Iraq.

Two examples show how in this game, no balls count as a home run. The Washington Post Express reported on March 2 that

Just hours after floating the idea of cutting \$20 billion from President Bush's \$142 billion request for military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan next year, Senate Budget Committee Chairman Kent Conrad was overruled by fellow Democrats Thursday.

"It's nothing that any of us are considering," Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev, told reporters.

Then, the lead story in today's Washington Post begins with this paragraph:

Senior House Democrats, seeking to placate members of their party from Republican-leaning districts, are pushing

a plan that would place restrictions on President Bush's ability to wage the war in Iraq but would allow him to waive them if he publicly justifies his position.

That's not pushing a plan, it is pushing on a rope, and the House Democratic leadership knows it. You can almost hear their giggles as they offer the anti-war voters who gave them their majority one of Washington's oldest dodges, "requirements" the Executive Branch can waive if it wants to.

The kabuki script currently goes like this. Congressional Democrats huff and puff about ending the war; the White House and Congressional Republicans accuse them of "not supporting the troops;" and the Democrats pretend to be stopped cold, plaintively mewling that "Well, we all agree we have to support the troops, don't we?"

"Supporting the troops" is just another dodge. The only way to support the troops when a war is lost is to end the war and bring them home. Nor is it a challenge to design legislative language that both ends the war and supports the troops. All the Democratic majorities in Congress have to do is condition the funding for the Iraq war with the words, "No funds may be obligated or expended except for the withdrawal of all American forces from Iraq, and for such force protection actions as may be necessary during that withdrawal." If Bush vetoes the bill, he vetoes continued funding for the war. If he signs the bill, ignores the legislative language and keeps fighting the war in the same old way, he sets himself up for impeachment. What's not to like?

For the Democrats, what's not to like is anything that might actually end the war before the 2008 elections. The Republicans have 21 Senate seats up in 2008, and if the Iraq war is still going on, they can count on losing most of them, along with the Presidency and maybe 100 more seats in the House. 2008 could be the new 1932, leaving the Republican Party a permanent minority for twenty years. From the standpoint of the Democratic Party's leadership, a few thousand more dead American troops is a small price to pay for so glowing a political victory.

Ironically, the people who should be most desperate to end the war are Congressional Republicans. Their heads are on the chopping block. But they remain so paralyzed by the White House that they cannot act even to save themselves. The March 2 Washington Times reported that

Republicans in Congress—including most who have defected from President Bush's plan to send reinforcements to Iraq—have closed ranks and are prepared to thwart the Democrats' continued efforts to undermine the war strategy...

All but one of the seven Senate Republicans that backed the anti-surge resolution in their chamber say they will not support any funding cuts.

The likely result of all this Washington dodging is that events on the ground in Iraq and elsewhere will outrun the political process. That in turn means a systemic crisis, the abandonment of both parties by their bases and a possible left-right grass roots alliance against the corrupt and incompetent center. In that possibility may lie the nation's best hope.

William S. Lind, expressing his own personal opinion, is Director for the Center for Cultural Conservatism for the Free Congress Foundation.

On War #207
February 26, 2007

[The Non-thinking Enemy](#)

By William S. Lind

One of the rituals attending the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, when our opponents score a goal, is for an American general to materialize before the press and announce, in his best miles glorious manner, that "we face a thinking enemy." Wow. Who ever would have imagined that the enemy might think and learn?

The latest example followed the insurgents' success in shooting down seven American helicopters in Iraq. According to the February 18 *New York Times*, Major General James E. Simmons, an Army aviator, told reporters, "We are engaged with a thinking enemy." General Simmons should know; the mujaheddin shot down his helicopter on January 25, fortunately with no

casualties.

One of the most basic phenomena of war is that the enemy thinks and learns. It doesn't always happen; an example of an enemy who did not think and learn was the Japanese submarine service in World War II. It kept on doing what it knew didn't work right through to the end. The result was about a 1:1 exchange ratio between Japanese submarines and their targets, a truly remarkable achievement in the annals of submarine warfare.

But it is so routine for an enemy to think and adapt that it is difficult to imagine one that did not. In fact, such an exercise might prove enlightening. What characteristics might a non-thinking enemy have?

First of all, such a military would have to be highly centralized. Decisions should be made as remotely from the battlefield as possible, with layers of middle and senior management given a veto over any new ideas or adaptations. Someone, in some headquarters, is bound to veto anything.

It would help if all headquarters were as large as possible. Not only would this maximize veto powers, it would also ensure that all decisions were made on a lowest-common-denominator basis. Usually, all large groups can agree on is maintaining the status quo.

Senior decision-makers should not be focused on the war. Their "real world" should be as disconnected as possible from battlefield results. Over-concern with bureaucratic empire-building, budget politics and personal career success are all useful tools for attaining this important disconnect.

A non-thinking military's feedback mechanisms should ensure that only good news is sent up the chain. The higher the level of command—including the nation's political leadership—the stronger the demand to suppress bad news should be. Messengers with bad news should routinely be shot, or at least exiled.

To maintain its opacity of mind, a non-thinking military should be insular. It should be careful not to look at the experiences of other militaries, historical or contemporary. A general spirit of false pride and bravado is always helpful in maintaining insularity. Past failures can be blamed on someone else.

An excellent means to ensure that thought is suppressed is to contract thinking out. Contractors could care less about truth; their measure of success is profits. Since the awarding of contracts is in the hands of senior officers whose desire to avoid adaptation is well known, contractors' unwillingness to suggest new ideas can be guaranteed. If most contractors are retired senior officers to whom any change would be an attack on their "legacies," so much the better. In the cause of not thinking, billions to contractors is money well spent.

Finally, a useful way to discourage thinking among junior leaders is to try to wage war by rote process. Those processes are developed and dictated downward by the same large headquarters whose inherent aversion to thought has already been noted. Better, those same headquarters control training; soldiers and junior leaders who have been trained in obsolete tactics will have more trouble adapting than people with no training.

Despite all these powerful institutional incentives to stifle thought, the regrettable fact remains that junior levels of command, up through company and sometimes battalion, will still want to think and adapt, because they want to stay alive and even to win. Every effort must therefore be made to ensure they have to fight the system each step of the way in order to change something. The old bureaucratic rule, "Delay is the surest form of denial," is helpful here. This brings us back to the importance of centralization and large headquarters.

Some may object that a military so carefully structured not to think is hard to imagine in the real world. That is true, since its fate would be so sure. What kind of government would be so corrupt, so unconcerned about the security of the state it leads and the vast sums it would be wasting as to tolerate such a military? Simple self-preservation would dictate sweeping military reform.

Of course, it would be anyone's dream to have a non-thinking military like the one I have described as an opponent. Any thinking military, even one with the most paltry of resources, could look forward to victory presented on a silver platter.

Who might have such exquisite good fortune and vast favor of the gods as to acquire a non-thinking military as their enemy? Anyone who fights us.

William S. Lind, expressing his own personal opinion, is Director for the Center for Cultural Conservatism for the Free Congress Foundation.

On War #206
February 20, 2007

[A Swedish Lesson](#)

By William S. Lind

[The views expressed in this article are those of Mr. Lind, writing in his personal capacity. They do not reflect the opinions or policy positions of the Free Congress Foundation, its officers, board or employees, or those of Kettle Creek Corporation.]

Sometimes, single words can say more than whole essays. The Swedish captain in the 4GW seminar I lead at Quantico recently introduced me to such a word. It is the Swedish word for military intelligence: *underrättelser*. The literal translation of *underrättelser* is "correction from below."

What a remarkably instructive term for military intelligence! The more I have thought about it, the more "correction from below" has seemed to capture the essence of what good military intelligence requires—and what American military intelligence too often lacks.

To understand why this is so, we must first remind ourselves of the two most important facts about military intelligence: one, it is always incomplete, and two, some of it is always wrong. It has become fashionable in Washington to regard military intelligence as "hard data." Nothing could be further from the truth. As "data," most military intelligence is as soft as the Pillsbury Doughboy.

The question facing any military is how to deal with the inevitable difference between what military intelligence thinks about the enemy and what is actually the case. Our approach, the wrong one, is to seek ever-increasing amounts of "information." That information is funneled into various intelligence "functions" and "fusion centers," almost all of them remote from the fight, where the intel weenies sit around in their purple robes embroidered with moons and stars, staring into their Palantirs. They wave their wands labeled "IPB," and presto!, out comes—well, for the most part, crap.

Regrettably, in this Second Generation model, the crap cannot be acknowledged as such. The motto is, "Garbage In, Gospel Out." So the crap runs downhill to the battalions, companies, platoons and squads, where the difference between what intel is telling them and what they are seeing with their own eyes becomes the "user's problem." Good commanders tell their guys to go with what they see. Bad commanders base their plans on the intel and issue orders that are doomed to failure.

Higher level commanders are even more victims of the current system than are their juniors. With sufficient guts, junior leaders can ignore the intel. Unless a senior commander is the sort who recognizes that his headquarters is a Black Hole and stays away from it as much as possible, he has no alternative to the virtual reality his G-2 presents to him. He is not only flying blind, he is flying blind while thinking he sees. Out of such double-blindness many great defeats have come.

What is missing here is precisely *underrättelser*, correction from below. Instead of dumping the errors on the users, the whole intel system should avidly seek correction from below to minimize them. Errors cannot be eliminated, because no matter how good the intel, it will be incomplete and some will be wrong. But correction from below, from the people who are directly encountering the enemy, is the only way to reduce them. By making "correction from below" literally their name for military intelligence, the Swedes have made the intel system's most necessary characteristic definitional. Intellectually, that is a remarkable achievement.

Defining military intelligence as "correction from below" also carries the culture of a Third Generation military over into the intelligence process. Just as another of those words that speak volumes, *Auftragstaktik*, builds tactics on the understanding that the levels of command nearest to the fight have the clearest tactical picture, so *underrättelser* builds military intelligence on the same understanding. The two work hand-in-glove: junior leaders act on the basis of what they see, not detailed orders from remote headquarters, and they simultaneously feed what they see into an intelligence process that is eager for their corrections. Neither action eliminates uncertainty in war, because nothing can, but both speed adaptation to it, which is the goal in maneuver warfare.

We could, of course, learn from the Swedes and make "correction from below" definitional to our intelligence process, just as we could learn from the Germans and adopt mission order tactics instead of issuing detailed, controlling orders. But when you are the self-proclaimed "greatest military in all of history," why should you learn from anyone else? Just as blindness leads to hubris, so hubris leads inevitably to blindness.

William S. Lind, expressing his own personal opinion, is Director for the Center for Cultural Conservatism for the Free Congress Foundation.

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[Distributed Ops or Dumb Ops?](#)

By William S. Lind

For some years, the U.S. Marine Corps has been playing with a concept called "Distributed Operations." On January 11, it issued a short paper over the signature of Lt. General J. F. Amos, the grandiloquently titled "Deputy Commandant for Combat Development and Integration" (I can remember when Marines would have choked on a title like that) which defines and explains the concept. Well, sort of.

To understand the paper, a bit of background helps. There are two potential definitions of distributed operations, one that could carry the Marine Corps forwards in important ways and another that is essentially a scam. In the first, distributed operations is just a new term for true light or Jaeger infantry. While both the Marine Corps-and the U. S. Army call their foot infantry "light," in terms of its tactics it is line infantry. True light infantry has always fought distributed, with small units operating beyond range of mutual support or supporting arms. Those small units have depended on their own weapons, lived largely off the land and fought very much like guerillas, with tactics based on an ambush mindset. Even 18th century light infantry used tactics we would consider modern; see J. F. C. Fuller's book *British Light Infantry in the 18th Century* or the fascinating diary of a Hessian Jaeger captain in the American Revolution, Johann Ewald.

If the Marine Corps adopted true light infantry tactics under the label "distributed operations," it would extend its maneuver warfare doctrine in a logical and useful way. It would also adapt its infantry to Fourth Generation war; as the FMFM-1A notes, what states need most to fight 4GW enemies is lots of light infantry.

But there is another definition of distributed operations lurking in dark corners at Quantico. This definition would use distributed ops as a new buzzword for Sea Dragon, a pseudo-concept the Marine Corps came up with in the 1990s to justify programs. Sea Dragon sent little teams of Marines wandering around the countryside essentially as forward observers, whose purpose was to call in remote, hi-tech fires.

Unlike light infantry, the teams could not depend on their own weapons, which meant that by the time the hi-tech fires got there, they would be dead. Sea Dragon represented the ultimate wet dream of the French Army of the 1930s, an army reduced to nothing but forward observers and artillery. It was bunk.

So which way does the January 11 paper go? Unfortunately, it is too muddled to tell. On the one hand, it includes a long quote from my oId friend Jeff Record on the importance of light infantry in small wars. On the other, it includes a long list of the usual big-bucks programs—"MRAP, EFV, JLTV, LAV, V-22, CH53K," L-70 class Zeppelins etc.—which distributed ops supposedly justifies. Oddly, successful light infantry like Hezbollah's doesn't have any of those *Wunderwaffe*. This kind of random program justification smells suspiciously like a disinterred Sea Dragon.

The paper gives a formal definition of distributed operations which clarifies nothing beyond continued intellectual confusion and Marines' inability to write:

Distributed operations is a technique applied to an appropriate situation wherein units are separated beyond the limits of mutual support. Distributed operations are practiced by general purpose forces, operating with deliberate dispersion, where necessary and tactically prudent, and decentralized decision-making consistent with commander's intent to achieve advantages over an enemy in time and space. Distributed operations relies on the ability and judgment of Marines at every level and is particularly enabled by excellence in leadership to ensure the

ability to understand and influence an expanded operational environment.

On the one hand, the reference to units operating beyond mutual support suggests true light infantry. On the other, nothing could be more wrong than the suggestion that anyone, i.e. "general purpose forces," can operate like light infantry. Jaeger tactics demand extensive training and a very high level of expertise. One wonders who wrote this definition, JAG?

In the end, the January 11 paper leaves distributed operations still balanced on a knife-edge between a major step forward in adapting to Fourth Generation war and a plunge into the worst sort of Madison Avenue program justification babble. If Quantico wants to move distributed ops in the direction it ought to go, it needs to take it away from the usual colonels, contractors and consultants and give it to a small group of company and battalion commanders just back from Afghanistan and Iraq, giving them in turn a pile of books on the history of light infantry.

General Amos, the ball is in your court.

William S. Lind, expressing his own personal opinion, is Director for the Center for Cultural Conservatism for the Free Congress Foundation.