Imagining the Next War

A Conference Sponsored by
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March 25-26, 2006
New York City

This is a report on the conference "Imagining the Next War," sponsored by the Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation and held in New York, March 25–26, 2006. The participants were Josiah Bunting III, Yael Danieli, Paul Fussell, Leslie Gill, Mary Habeck, John P. Jumper, Patrick Lang, William Lind, John J. Miller, Tom Reiss, Bernard Rostker, John R. Ryan, Allen Silver, J. David Singer, and P. W. Singer. The reporter asked some participants additional questions after the conference took place and relied on written works by them and others to pursue the questions posed at the conference. The views of the speakers do not necessarily represent those of the Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation or the reporter, Brian Francis Slattery.

The questions of war have never been far from the American imagination. In the mid- to late 1990s, as the world moved out of the dynamic of the Cold War, the United States appeared to be unchallenged, and the wars of the world seemed far away from American soil, even if the United States was involved in some of them. Yet military strategists were preparing for the United States' next prolonged conflict. Meanwhile, interest in, if not preoccupation with, large-scale conflict appeared in popular culture—the works of novelists and filmmakers—who dealt with wars in the past, present, and future. Some of these works captured widespread public attention.[1] Today, as new world tensions have risen to replace those of the Cold War, the possibility of large-scale conflict does not seem as fanciful. But the questions about what the United States' next war might look like, and how it might be fought—or, to burrow under the assumptions implicit in those questions, why we think about war the way we do— have not changed. They are questions of strategy and imagination, an amalgamation of past experience and prognostication, of military strategy, history, current events, and science fiction.

To examine these questions, the Harry Frank Guggenheim

Foundation staged a conference, "Imagining the Next War," which brought together members of the military and intelligence communities, academics, and researchers from think tanks.[2] The group found that exploring these questions led sometimes in circles and sometimes to contradictions but that the discussion nonetheless illuminated the conflicts that the United States has faced in the past, faces today, and may fight in the future.

Mary Habeck, of the School for Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins University, is a military historian with expertise in European, Soviet, Russian, and American military affairs. "Everybody begins by looking at the last war," she says, "but that's because it's not a bad predictor." After World War I, the danger of a second large-scale European war loomed in academic and diplomatic circles as well as the popular imagination.[3] Many, many people saw it coming, John Maynard Keynes as early as 1920.[4] The French government was concerned enough to build the Maginot Line, reflecting a belief that not only might another war with Germany be imminent (correct), but that it would be fought in much the same manner as the last one (not as correct). Public thinking mirrored that of diplomats and military strategists: As politicians optimistically attempted to construct the League of Nations to avert future conflict, a similar yearning for peace through unification appeared in war memorials "universal in their pathos" (Wintle 2002: 114) and a string of novels centering on or alluding to the idea of Europe becoming one nation to bring peace—though as Spierling (2002) points out, whether this Europe was united under democracy or Nazism depended on the writer. In recent U.S. history, the first Gulf War turned out to be a good predictor of where the United States would conduct its next large military operation, even though the contexts of those conflicts are quite different.

Obviously, though, the last war a country fights is no crystal ball. Habeck also cites "clear and present dangers"—such as the distinct possibility of nuclear war between the United States and Soviet Union from 1949 to 1989, despite their never having fought each other before—and "developing threats," which can be discerned by looking at "long-term, underlying issues." But which issues are important to look at?

Those who envision the next large U.S. conflict in more conventional terms often point to China, and have for several years. The U.S. military runs war games against an adversary that either is China or looks much like it. At the beginning of its first term, the George W. Bush administration saw China as "the great threat."[5] Ongoing efforts to reform the U.S. military, known as transformation, had China, among other foes, in mind. In the aftermath of a major diplomatic blunder, China and the United States could find themselves at war over Taiwanese independence.[6] According to P. W. Singer, Taiwan is "the last vestige of colonialism—the part they've never gotten back." The United States and China might also clash for economic reasons, such as if the United States were to default on the credit that China has extended.[7] China's economy is expanding at an astonishing pace for a country its size and still is widely believed to have only begun to tap its full potential; several projections suggest that China's gross domestic product (GDP) will reach that of the United States sometime in the 2020s. China and the United States are guarded with each other. China is worried about having the natural resources needed to compete economically and perhaps in other ways. Rather than relying entirely on the global energy market, China is vigorously seeking to become energy independent, while the United States seems keen on building up its naval presence, ostensibly as part of an anti-piracy crusade,[8] and has developed Guam as a place from which to launch operations against the Chinese mainland.[9] There is China's penchant for internal instability, an element of chaos that could disrupt the already wary diplomatic relations. And, finally, the ideology of China's governing elite, as in the Soviet Union, is quite differ-

ent from that of the United States.

If a war were to start tomorrow, however, a conflict with China seems more remote than other possibilities. China has so far supported, or at least not hindered, the U.S. administration's antiterrorist efforts, to which the United States has turned much of its military attention. The United States is not trying actively to unseat China's government and is well aware that Taiwan is a powder keg sitting under U.S.-China relations; as Habeck suggests, it is "common knowledge that the United States should not intervene if China occupies Taiwan."

But if not China, then where? An April 2006 *Atlantic* poll asked thirty-eight foreign policy experts, among them Madeleine Albright, former secretary of state, and Samuel R. Berger, former national security advisor to Bill Clinton, "which states will pose the greatest overall threats to U.S. security over the next decade, either directly or indirectly." Participants were given a list of seven countries and asked to rank four of them in order of their threat. Iran scored a runaway victory, with North Korea a distant second; Pakistan, China, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and Russia followed, with Egypt and Venezuela receiving write-in votes.[10] It is not hard to see why the *Atlantic* staff chose these seven countries for their list, nor is it particularly surprising that only two of the thirty-eight experts deviated from the choices they were given. It is the kind of list that anyone following current world politics might draw up, and it points to a possibly dangerous bias in thinking about what the next large-scale conflict might look like. With U.S. forces already fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan and diplomatic tension over Iran's nuclear weapons program, the war in front of us looms the largest, notwithstanding Habeck's call for looking at "developing threats"; current events can exert a tyranny over the imagination, both in the public at large and among policy makers. But even if the *Atlantic* and its thirty-eight experts are on the right track— that is, if a war in the Middle East is likely—by focusing on

conflict between states, the poll misses a broader and more chilling possibility: The next large-scale war that the United States engages in might not be with a particular Middle Eastern country, but with Islam in general[11]—making the current conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan just the beginning.

As horrible as a war with Islam is to contemplate, the scenario can guide one's thoughts as to what the United States' next large-scale conflict might look like, not only regarding who the adversary might be, but perhaps more important, how the war might be fought and what the consequences might be for the duration of the fighting: the damage done to both sides, and the effects on the military and the public. A war with Islam could be much longer, much more complex, and much more costly than any war the United States has fought in the past. Is the military prepared? Are the American people?

What Does War Look Like?

As the terrorist arm of fundamentalist Islam reaches across the world, debate within Western countries about how to understand Islam has grown acute. At issue, in essence, is whether the divisive forces within it are more powerful than the forces that seek to unite it. In his exhaustive *History of the Arab Peoples,* Albert Hourani, a historian with political experience in the Arab Office of the Office of the British Minister of State, tended to describe politics in the Middle East and North Africa as playing out the tension between unity and divisiveness, with the latter winning out in recent history. For Hourani—who died in 1993—the last time one could speak of a united Arab world and be more right than wrong was in the 1950s and 1960s, as North African and Middle Eastern countries moved out of colonialism. "Throughout the 1960s," Hourani wrote, "the public life of the Arab countries continued to be dominated by this idea of a socialist, neutralist, form of Arab nationalism, with [Egyptian head of state] 'Abd al-

Nasir as its leader and symbol" (1991: 407). Following the Arab forces' military defeats by Israel in 1967 and especially 1973, however, this "common front disintegrated almost at once … and although attempts at union between two or more Arab states were still discussed and announced from time to time, the general impression which the Arab states gave their peoples and the world by the end of the 1970s was one of weakness and disunity" (1991: 426–27). Hourani tended to describe the Arab world from 1973 until the early 1990s, in contrast to the period that preceded it, as one of "disunity," riven by ethnic differences between Arabs and non-Arabs (e.g., Kurds in Iraq, Berbers in Algeria, Christians in Lebanon and Sudan); religious differences between Sunni and Shi'i populations (in Iraq, Kuwait, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Lebanon); differences between rich and poor; and growing pressure from women asserting greater rights for themselves. Similarly, within Islam, debate continued between those who argued that "social institutions … should be wholly separate from religion and based upon 'humanistic' principles" and those who believed that "Islamic heritage by itself could provide the basis for life in the present, and that it alone could do so" (1991: 444, 445).

Today, however, the balance in the Arab world seems to be tipping toward unity again, this time under Islamic fundamentalism. An April 2006 *Economist* article observes that "Afghanistan's jarring mix of Western-style secular and Islamic laws" impedes reforms there today: "On one hand, the brave new constitution … promises freedoms of speech and religion, and sexual equality. On the other, conservative mullah judges cite an article declaring that in Afghanistan, 'no law can be contrary to the beliefs and provisions of the sacred religion of Islam.'"[12] According to Said T. Jawad, Afghanistan's ambassador to the United States, the insurgent Taliban is getting "support from sources outside of Afghanistan," including weapons and training from camps in Pakistan; Jawad intimated that

Pakistan could dismantle the camps if it wanted to but was not doing so.[13] Pakistan has been linked to numerous instances of abetting militant Islamic efforts, some of them possibly nuclear.[14] In April 2006, when the United States and European Union pulled funding to Hamas following Palestinian elections, Iran interceded with $50 million in aid.[15] Iran has also boasted about the weapons it sent to Hezbollah for its battles with Israel in the summer of 2006.[16] Al-Qaeda supported the Islamist rebels recently routed in Somalia.[17]

Patrick Lang is a former chief analyst for the Middle East at the Defense Intelligence Agency and is now president of Global Resources Group, a consulting firm. He nods to Islam's liberalizing and Westernizing forces—Qatar, Yemen, and Indonesia—but argues that they are ultimately peripheral to the fundamentalist core of the Islamic world: "Fukuyama's vision of the end of history is nearly the complete opposite of the Muslim viewpoint: For them, history came to an end with Mohammed, and the rest is an anticlimax." For him, Islam as a faith has simply not had the kind of upheaval and infusion of more liberal ideas that Christianity experienced throughout its history; it remains a fundamentalist religion, with an emphasis on the literal interpretation of the Qu'ran. "The word for 'innovation' and for 'heresy' is the same," Lang points out, "and it is a crime under Islamic law." As Arab leadership hews closely to this faith, many Arab states resist Westernization at every turn. In Afghanistan, Lang argues, "Muslims don't think of themselves as being Westernized, but as inheritors of a mighty culture." The Western inability to grasp that concept, and to understand the threat that those at the center of the Islamic world feel that the West represents, could fuel a large-scale and long-term conflict.

In short, the war with Islam would not be a war between states, but between, in Lang's words, "ideas and idea systems, and their identities." Though such a conflict might be fought on the soil of Iraq, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, or Egypt, it

would not necessarily be against that state as a state, but as a part of the Islamic world. The war with Islam could thus be unconventional in two senses of the word, at least under the terms with which the current international system understands war. It would be against an ideology and fought asymmetrically against much more informal warfighters. But what does that mean in practice? What might this war look like to those who see it?

Peter W. Singer, a senior fellow in foreign policy studies and director of the Brookings Institution's project on U.S. relations with the Islamic world, argues that the common image of a combatant—the young man in the green uniform—has been joined by an unruly cast of characters. In a change from the wars of the mid-twentieth century, today's conflicts are fought among men, women, children, and machines, involve national armies, insurgents, drug cartels, and corporations, and are motivated by a wide variety of ends. Singer cites three major changes in the face of warfare: the rising use of private military firms (PMFs), robots, and children.

Corporations have a long history of engaging in military efforts; before there were states, hired soldiers were common. Even with the rise of the state system in the 1700s, charter companies such as the Dutch and English East India Companies exercised military force to protect their business ventures (Singer 2003). However, in the twentieth century, while developing countries commonly engaged private militias, among the larger powers, governments held, in Max Weber's famous phrase, a "monopoly on violence"; in the view of states, the use of physical force was only legitimate when it was conducted by state agents. Violence exercised by private parties could be, and usually still is, considered criminal.

However, Singer has noticed a trend since the early 1990s toward using private firms for military activities that were considered the sole province of the government not long ago. Support firms provide logistic and technical support and intel-

ligence and manage supply chains and transportation issues. Consulting firms offer military training and organization analysis. Other companies run actual combat operations (Singer 2003). Today, according to Singer, there are more than 25,000 private military contractors in Iraq, doing work for the United States that, in previous wars, would have been done by soldiers. Aside from a variety of support roles, they manage weapons systems, interrogate prisoners, and escort convoys along some of Iraq's more dangerous highways. The implications are many. On one hand, they are a boon to the military. If those 25,000 contractors were not available, who would do that work? Also, because they are not officially part of the armed forces, they do not have to be (and generally are not) reported among the casualties. On the other hand, as Singer puts it, "you have elements in your force that are not part of your force"—people who are bound to service by nothing more than an at-will employment contract, meaning that they could leave at any time, for any reason. That the contractors are free agents also suggests that anyone can access their military capabilities for the right price. And their legal status as private employees working on the battlefield is unclear. As civilians, they cannot be court-martialed, but working in the context of a battlefield, neither are they subject to typical domestic laws. Some of those implicated in the Abu Ghraib scandal were private employees. What court can they be tried in? Under what laws?

The use of robots and unmanned craft is a much newer phenomenon but is seen with increasing frequency. According to Singer, thirty-two countries use unmanned systems for their military, and the United States employs them for a variety of purposes. An unmanned aircraft, piloted from an office elsewhere, conducted surveillance during the attack on Uday and Qusay Hussein. Bombing runs are conducted in Afghanistan from cubicles in Northern California. In 2005, the United States suffered its first robot casualty, a machine manufactured

by Massachusetts company iRobot (a nod to Isaac Asimov's book of short stories). The Department of Defense accordingly sent iRobot a letter of condolence, adding that it was grateful that the letter was not going to an actual set of parents.

As with civilian contractors, the use of robots has an ambiguous relationship with the laws of war and military culture. Who is responsible for the decisions that a computer system might make? Who is accountable in a court-martial? How might warriors that fight from cubicles change military culture? As Singer puts it, "Eisenhower and Patton are probably spinning in their graves at this. H.G. Wells probably isn't."

As corporations and the governments of developed countries become more technically advanced, other combatants and non-state actors are moving the other way. The rise of the child soldier is the counterpoint to "the display of high technology and clean, distant precision used by U.S. forces in Afghanistan and Iraq" (Singer 2005: 6). Children were used in combat in the past—Confederate boys at the battle of New Market in 1864, the Hitler Youth in the spring of 1945—but "a general norm held against child soldiers across the last four millennia of warfare" (Singer 2005: 15). No more. In total, more than 300,000 children are fighting in three-fourths of the world's conflicts. If children are considered as under eighteen, the average child soldier is just over twelve; the youngest reported child soldier, however, was five (Singer 2005). The United States' first casualty in Afghanistan was a U.S. Marine shot by a 14-year-old sniper.

The implications here are sobering. Because children, especially in impoverished places, are easy to "recruit" (many are kidnapped) and train, it has become easier to build an army and rebuild its ranks after soldiers are lost. Children can be made to fight for causes that most adults would probably not support. The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in Uganda is headed by Joseph Kony, whom Singer describes as a "David Koresh-like figure." Kony's army has generally been made up

almost entirely of child soldiers, and he has used it to wage war against the Ugandan government since 1987. Using child soldiers has led to greater atrocities on the battlefield, not only for the very fact that child soldiers are being used but because "the younger the child soldiers are, the more vicious they tend to be" (Singer 2005: 106). In the Middle East, Iran used child soldiers in its war with Iraq in the 1980s, and Iraq responded in kind. Children are part of rebel forces across the Islamic world (Singer 2005).

The idea of governments, corporations, and robots fighting children may sound like science fiction, yet it has already happened and continues to occur. In Sierra Leone in 1995, soldiers employed by Executive Outcomes, a private South African firm, fought off the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), composed significantly of children, preventing the RUF from seizing the capital of Freetown. Executive Outcomes intervened at the behest of the government but was paid by Branch-Heritage, a diamond-mining company with holdings in Sierra Leone (Singer 2003; 2005). As part of Plan Colombia, the United States' and Colombia's joint effort to destroy coca production and trade, reports have suggested that DynCorp, a private military firm, has been "actively involved" in military operations against the FARC (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia),[18] which uses children as combatants. In Iraq, U.S. armed forces, supported by corporations, robots, and unmanned craft, have fought child soldiers in Nasiriya, Karbala, and Kirkuk. (Singer 2005). The hypothetical war with Islam could look like the war in Iraq, only much larger, longer, and more complex—a far cry from the wars that the United States fought sixty years ago.

Finally, the possibility of a war with Islam involving nuclear weapons is not as remote as we would like to believe.[19] Iran and Libya have tried to develop nuclear weapons, and Pakistan has succeeded. Iran's and Pakistan's flaunting of nuclear weapons programs may be saber-rattling. To the

extent that Pakistan's nuclear efforts are directed, they are almost certainly focused more on India than on the United States. And given that the United States has made no secret of its desire to unseat the current Iranian regime since 1979, and that a large portion of its army is now in Iraq, Iran's loud voice about its nuclear weapons may be no more than a form of deterrence. Because the United States could easily answer a nuclear attack from Iran or Pakistan, the same logic applies to them that applied in the Cold War. Neither Iran nor Pakistan is interested in ceasing to exist, and as states, neither is necessarily interested in killing masses of civilians.

The same deterrents, however, do not apply to a terrorist organization that may possess nuclear weapons. Thus, the "no return address" (Allison 2004: 2) problem: A terrorist could walk a suitcase bomb into Times Square and incinerate much of New York City, and the U.S. government would not know where to strike back. Even at war, many states try to minimize the number of civilian casualties, but the possibility of mass civilian death is appealing to some terrorists—even a stated goal. After the attacks of September 11, 2001, Suleiman Abu Gheith, whom Graham Allison calls "Osama bin Laden's official press spokesman," declared that "we have the right to kill 4 million Americans—2 million of them children—and to exile twice as many and wound and cripple hundreds of thousands" (Allison 2004: 12). At his sentencing trial for involvement in the September 11 attacks, Zacarias Moussaoui told of his pleasure in hearing witnesses talk about their grief in losing family members that day. "It make my day," Moussaoui said, since that had been the point of the attacks. "We want to inflict pain on your country," he said. Responding to a witness at the trial who had escaped the attack on the Pentagon, Moussaoui said that he was "sorry that he survived."[20]

Along with terrorists' willingness to kill comes their willingness to die. At his sentencing trial, Moussaoui testified that he was to have flown a plane into the White House on September 11. "You'd do it again tomorrow, wouldn't you?" Robert A. Spencer, the chief prosecutor, asked. "Today," Moussaoui said.[21] Suicide bombers are common enough that "suicide bomber" has become a phrase, and many commentators, from academics and journalists to novelists, filmmakers, and even songwriters, have commented on it.[22] One of the more compact and clear-headed observations comes from Don DeLillo, a novelist, playwright, and sometime essayist, writing in *Harper's* in December 2001:

> We are rich, privileged and strong, but they are willing to die. This is the edge they have, the fire of aggrieved belief. We live in a wide world, routinely filled with exchange of every sort, an open circuit of work, talk, family and expressible feeling. The terrorist, planted in a Florida town, pushing his supermarket trolley, nodding to his neighbor, lives in a far narrower format.… Does the sight of a woman pushing a stroller soften the man to her humanity and vulnerability, and her child as well, and all the people he is here to kill? This is his edge, that he does not see her.[23]

DeLillo was describing terrorists of the type that organized and carried out the attacks of September 11, but someone of this mindset could also become a head of state in a country that already possesses nuclear weapons. "We still haven't had any true believers"—on the order of Osama bin Laden—"in charge of an Islamic state," says Habeck. "But what will happen when we do?"

Are We Ready?

Much of the discussion of a hypothetical war with Islam is little more than an extrapolation from wars that we have already seen, or are seeing today. But if such a conflict were to occur, it would be different from anything the United States has fought—like World War II, but much fuzzier; like

Vietnam, but much bigger. And, it is possible, fought in part on American soil. How prepared is the military to fight such a war? How prepared is the public?

William Lind, director for the Center of Cultural Conservatism at the Free Congress Foundation, a think tank, has written extensively on military history, strategy, and reform, and was a legislative aide for armed services to two senators from 1973 to 1986. Ask him how the military prepares for the next war, and his answer is "they don't." According to Lind, the military is still preparing, in essence, for World War I. The military tends to believe that "they've done all right in the past," and they fear that "innovation can lead to failure." The structure of the military is also "highly bureaucratic"; with precious little "lateral entry," innovative ideas do not tend to enter into higher levels of the military. Finally, the ideology of the military itself is resistant to change. Many who join the military are "a bunch of jocks"—Lind quotes a Marine captain as saying that "being a Marine officer is being in a locker room 24/7"—yet these same people are very good at "internalizing rules." Meanwhile, high-ranking officers tend to be "aristocrats only." Perhaps most important to the question of preparedness for a war unlike one that the United States has fought before, Lind stresses that the military does not tend to look outside of its ranks for ideas. "The real world for the military services is the internal world," Lind argues, and while technology and strategy may have changed, that inward-turning military culture has not. In Lind's terminology, the U.S. armed forces are still "second-generation" fighting forces: They have reached the level of tactics and strategy of World War I, but have not yet absorbed the lessons of war from the second half of the twentieth century; their cultures are still inwardly focused.

By contrast, third-generation warfare "focuses outward, on the situation, the enemy, and the result the situation requires, not inward on process and method." It is based "not on fire-power and attrition but speed, surprise, and mental as well as physical dislocation."[24] German forces, particularly at the beginning of World War II, were more decentralized and accepting of officer initiative; these two characteristics carry over into fourth-generation warfare, the concept that Lind uses to describe the guerrilla, decentralized wars of the last half of the twentieth century to the present:

> In Fourth Generation war, the state loses its monopoly on war. All over the world, state militaries find themselves fighting non-state opponents such as al Qaeda, Hamas, Hezbollah, and the FARC. Almost everywhere, the state is losing.… Fourth Generation war is also marked by a return to a world of cultures, not merely states, in conflict … [It] is not novel but a return, specifically a return to the way war worked before the rise of the state. I suggest that the war we have seen thus far [in Iraq] is merely a powder train leading to the magazine. The magazine is Fourth Generation war by a wide variety of Islamic non-state actors, directed at America and Americans (and local governments friendly to America) everywhere. The longer America occupies Iraq, the greater the chance that the magazine will explode. If it does, God help us all.[25]

Compared to such an enemy—in Lind's understanding, both pre-Westphalian and thoroughly modern—our current armed forces are "very expensive and lavishly equipped military museums."

Bernard Rostker disagrees. Rostker is a senior fellow at RAND who has held numerous high-level positions within the Department of Defense and the armed forces. Before his current post at RAND, he was undersecretary of defense for personnel and readiness from 2000 to 2001. In direct contrast to Lind, Rostker depicts the military as a dynamic, ever-changing organization. "There is arguably no institution that spends as much time preparing for the future" and "reinventing itself" as the military, he says. Thanks to an acute aware-

ness of the need for innovation—and of the high costs of fail-ure—the military undergoes a continual process of trial and error and "competition of ideas," which is one of the reasons that it has survived over time. Certainly, forces within the military argue for little or cautious change—as Rostker puts it, it remains a "conservative institution"—yet "pluralism and innovation is constant," and history has shown that, in the end, changes occur. Between World War I and World War II, powerful forces within the military argued that there was no need to adopt new technologies. Yet by the eve of World War II, military systems far advanced from those of World War I were in place, and one of them—carriers and carrier-based air-craft—proved to be an important part of securing victory in the Pacific. Today, every branch of the armed forces has its own multimillion-dollar research and development wing, while the DOD has its Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) constantly developing new technologies for military use. In its tactical thinking, the military adopts a hedging strategy; the idea is to prepare the military for as many different scenarios as possible.

Lind's and Rostker's opinions could not be more divergent, yet both could be right. In the last few years, the DOD has been trying to turn the armed forces into a lighter, faster, more reactive military force—an army for the information age rather than the industrial age. On June 21, 2001, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee, anticipating the publication of the DOD's Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR).[26] At the time, Rumsfeld's aim was to "extend this period of peace and prosperity" and "prepare now for the new and different threats we will face in the decades ahead—not wait until they fully emerge."

> Our challenge in doing so is complicated by the fact that we cannot know precisely who will threaten us in the decades ahead. As I discussed with the defense ministers

at NATO, the only thing we know for certain is that it is unlikely that any of us knows what is likely.

Rumsfeld continued with a long list of unexpected turns in history within his lifetime. Among them: In the mid-1930s, the defense department was assuming that there would be "no war for ten years"; in the mid-1970s, Iran was an important U.S. ally in the Middle East and a "regional power," but by the early 1980s, its Islamic Revolution had taken place. "That recent history should make us humble," Rumsfeld observed. He then turned his argument, suggesting that it was "less difficult to anticipate how we will be threatened." To his credit, the threat of terrorism topped his list, followed by "cyber-attack" on computer networks, the threat of enemies acquiring "advanced conventional weapons," and finally, the threat of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons of mass destruction, upon which Rumsfeld expounded at length. His answer to this multiplicity of threats was to

> explore enhancing the capabilities of our forward deployed forces in different regions to defeat an adversary's military efforts with only minimal reinforcement. We believe this would pose a stronger deterrent in peacetime, allow us to tailor forces for each region and provide capability to engage and defeat adversaries' military objectives wherever and whenever they might challenge the interests of the U.S. and its friends and allies.

This capability enhancement has become known as transformation, a set of elaborate concepts that stretches across the armed forces and the DOD. The idea of transformation emerged in the late 1990s; that it happened as Internet use became widespread is probably not a coincidence. "There has been a fundamental shift in sources of power from industry to information," a DOD Office of Force Transformation report noted (DOD 2005: 15). In describing a hallmark of transfor-

mation, network-centric warfare (NCW), it continued:

> The metrics of NCW seek to describe the relative ability to create an information advantage and turn it into a military advantage. These metrics are generally output measures like speed, rates of change, operational and tactical innovation, how fast one side can couple events together and act on the information, and achieve political outcomes. Where Industrial Age warfare revolved around efforts to obtain overwhelming force and attrition, NCW revolves around information superiority and precision violence to dismantle an opposing force. (DOD 2005: 16)

In general, this means that warfighters are arrayed with a variety of high-tech gear designed to help them coordinate with all other warfighters, not only in their unit or even within their own armed service, but across an entire military campaign:

> The full application of [NCW] principles will accelerate the decision cycle by linking sensors, communications networks, and weapons systems via an interconnected grid, thereby enhancing our ability to achieve information and decision superiority over an adversary during the conduct of military operations. (DOD 2005: 18)

The concepts of transformation, however, are "more than just acquiring new equipment and embracing new technology," argues another DOD report.

> It is rather the all encompassing process of thinking creatively in order to work better together with other parts of the Department and other agencies within the U.S. government....Transformation should be thought of as a process, not an end state. (DOD 2004: 2)

This new, flexible mentality is to extend to coordinating with allies and to how the DOD "does business" generally

(DOD 2004). The language of the report suggests that the DOD—or at least the Office of Force Transformation—is intent on reform. But is transformation more than words? And how deep does the innovation go?

Rumsfeld's attitude, at least in his testimony to Congress, does not evince the sort of inert navel-gazing that Lind ascribes to the U.S. armed forces. And using the strategies of transformation, the United States occupied Baghdad in three weeks with minimal casualties and subdued Taliban forces quickly in Afghanistan. These are stunning results, at least in the short run; they involved the same kind of methods to achieve the same kind of results that the Germans saw at the beginning of World War II—Lind's model for a third-generation fighting force. Yet even the DOD reports, which are designed to promote transformation, suggest that "there is room for much improvement in networking operations at the tactical level" (DOD 2004: 38). And an October 2003 Office of Force Transformation workshop to assess the progress of transformation yielded disheartening conclusions. Among the workshop's key findings were that "no consensus about what constitutes transformation exists"; that the "little agreement about current or desired cultural attributes" is a "barrier to change"; and that "transformation is not viewed as an essential component of future organizational effectiveness" (Johnson 2004: ES-2). On one hand, the comments should be commended, as these blunt criticisms come from within the DOD itself, and are thus a sign that the organization is more like the dynamic institution Rostker depicts. On the other hand, the workshop offers no concrete solutions to deal with these problems, beyond promoting strong leadership and more training.

For Rostker, some of the problems lie within transformation. "Transformation's problem is hubris," he says. For all its talk of flexibility, it was "not flexible enough"; Rumsfeld was "too enthusiastic," and there was "a failure to understand what was needed in Iraq." He points out that the 2006 QDR was

about "rebalancing the force" and getting "more boots on the ground"—a return to older strategies of having a larger, more overpowering force, yet seasoned with a greater attention to civil affairs and psychological operations units, which is perhaps what Rumsfeld meant when he talked about winning "hearts and minds." For Lind and Lang, the problem is much deeper. "Things changed on paper but not in reality," Lind says. Lang agrees; in his experience at the Army War College, "it was extremely orthodox—the strategies were orthodox—though the process of how to obtain resources from Congress was studied for six weeks."

Innovation does appear in the armed forces to some extent; the question, as Habeck puts it, is "what happens to people with ideas in the armed forces." The military's critics argue that creativity is anathema to military culture. Lind admits that there are "islands of innovation," built around specific staff who take a broader, more creative view of things, but in time, they dissipate. Overall, the military tends to breed bureaucrats; the DOD, Lind says, is like "a bank." Lang again echoes the sentiment, opining that the War College is "70 percent bureaucrats." Rostker cannot agree. "New technologies are adopted all the time. Doctrinal changes also," he argues. To Lang's point about the military's preoccupation with securing funds from Congress, Rostker shrugs. Of course the military seeks resources, he argues, and perhaps those who seek to reform the military must first figure out how to capture the funds to do so.

The opposed views of the military remain as opposed as ever. Yet a few seek to split the difference. General John P. Jumper is a former chief of staff of the U.S. Air Force who has advised the secretary of defense, the National Security Council, and the president. He flew two tours of duty over Southeast Asia and has served in many other military operations. In the course of his career, he has seen the armed forces change focus several times. Had the Air Force stayed in the 1980s, when the United States' prominent economic rival looked to be Japan, "we would have ended up with P-51s again." The Air Force has undergone numerous technological changes that allow it to be more agile and exert the same force with fewer personnel, and it has often done so without upgrading its hardware. "We're not going to throw away all our equipment and start over as the QDR would have us believe," Jumper says. But it is precisely this situation that fosters creativity. The innovation that Jumper has seen does not emerge from high concepts; it happens when those in the military put new and old equipment together in new ways. "Sometimes it's a question of redesignating resources through a simple rearranging of rules," he says. Jumper hints at a more subtle and spontaneous version of military innovation that generally does not come about through directives from on high (such as transformation), but through individuals within the military—be they soldiers or support—facing problems for which, in a way, they have the wrong tools. Adapting the tools to fit the problems leads to novel solutions. Some of these solutions, one imagines, are not ideal and do not flourish; others could become new doctrines as repeated experience proves their effectiveness.

The military constantly tests the ability of its soldiers and equipment to adapt to a variety of situations, symmetric and asymmetric. Some of these tests are flesh-and-blood exercise. Some are computer simulations against a wide variety of opponents, from large, armored regular forces to scattered, irregular ones. Others become more speculative yet—and in doing so, sometimes literally cross the line into science fiction.

The connection between government and military planning and speculative fiction is stronger than at first seems plausible. Tom Reiss relates that in 1871, George Tomkyns Chesney, a lieutenant colonel in the British army, published a story called "The Battle of Dorking" in a popular magazine about a future Prussian invasion of the United Kingdom. He

had intended to alert the British public to the dangers of Prussia's growing might; instead, he "accidentally invented the thriller."[27] In their 1972 novel *Footfall*, science fiction authors Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle posited a weapon in which rods of metal were dropped from the stratosphere onto targets below. The resultant kinetic energy would do the damage of a small nuclear weapon, without the radiation. Pournelle, also an aerospace engineer, conceived of the weapon under the name Project Thor in 1964. The United States Air Force has been seeking funding for just such a project, dubbed "rods from God," for years.

Another current science fiction novelist, Karl Schroeder, consults for several agencies of the Canadian government, including the military, in "foresight studies." Two years ago, the Canadian army's Directorate of Land Strategic Concepts commissioned him to dramatize the way that the modern Canadian fighting force might intervene in a conflict in Africa. The result was *Crisis in Zefra,* an account of an action by the Canadian military in a fictional African state.[28]

"I'm told the U.S. Marines are fans," Schroeder says. "In general, the fact that I'm an SF writer is considered an asset by my clients. They value both the imagination that I can bring to foresight studies, and the dramatic abilities that I can apply to 'pepping up' otherwise dry reportage. Since I can pick the brains of people at the forefront of research, this works for both of us."[29]

In *Old Man's War, The Ghost Brigades,* and *The Last Colony,* another science fiction novelist, John Scalzi, follows a military that fights creatures of vastly different species and technologies—a premise that may seem too far-fetched to be useful. However, Scalzi, who also has a background in journalism, grounds his books in a great deal of research. He reads military history and combs through available sources about military innovations and internal changes as well as military psychology. His ability to capture military culture in what the military itself perceives to be an accurate and unbiased way has led to the cultivation of a network of people within the military or who have been in the military or worked with it, off of which he bounces the ideas for his books. Says Scalzi, "I think they see that there's an attempt to portray the military realistically, as people that, no matter what the political situation, have a job to do. So these folks have the desire—which I really appreciate—to get that military gestalt correct. Though, of course, some of them are just science fiction readers."[30]

In short, before writing, Scalzi does the kind of work that a military historian or a political scientist might do, except that the result is a novel rather than a work of scholarship. With this mix of information and imagination, Scalzi explores scenario after scenario of asymmetric warfare.

> The setup is that you have humans versus aliens, and all the aliens are completely different—every tactic in dealing with them is completely different—so with every encounter with the enemy, you have to think on the fly, you have to think of new tactics, you have to think of a new way to win. The experience you had before is not necessarily going to help you this time…[t]his is the military changing, adapting, getting the job done in a variety of circumstances and proving that it is capable.

Among Scalzi's ideas that have drawn attention from his contacts is a weapon that, through nanotechnology—what Scalzi calls a "cheat"—can become a rifle or flamethrower or other type of weapon according to the needs of the user. Scalzi has also gotten a lot of attention from an episode in which the enemy is one inch tall:

> The battle is totally asymmetrical—but it's not a given that the tiny people are at a disadvantage because their ships are so small that it makes them difficult to target. So on balance, the struggle is more or less equal. That was really interesting to people because, as we all know, the

United States has over the last couple of wars fought asymmetrically. So the question is how you take this established hierarchy of command and tools and people and face a completely alien situation. For me, it's one-inch-tall people. For soldiers in Iraq right now, it's dealing with an insurgency that is not centralized and can fade into the background.… In the book, the way to fight the asymmetrical war was just to step on them; but more generally, it was to get yourself in a position where you can utilize your own skills, your own advantages—and also to bring the war to a place where the enemy is at a disadvantage. You find a way to not fight the battle on the enemy's terms, but on yours—and you make sure that when he does try to fight it on his terms, it costs him. Of course, this tactical message is not news to any military planner. It goes back to the Battle of Agincourt.

In the universe of Scalzi's books, the ultimate advantage goes to the one who is more adaptable and flexible. His army is, in some ways, the concept of transformation taken to the extreme. So what does he make of transformation, and of the differences in opinion of the military, as either an ossified dinosaur or a dynamic, ever-changing institution?

> In my own observations—which may or may not be accurate—there are two things going on. Any bureaucracy is self-preserving, and people don't want to give up their jobs, so things are going to move slowly. At the same time, there's no doubt that the American forces are highly adaptable and very intelligent. It's an all-volunteer force, which matters immensely. So on the individual level, in tactics, in getting things done, they are innovative, they are finding solutions, because they're on the ground, they have to think, and they don't want to die. And they still want to get the job done. The question is not "are we flexible enough, or are we too ossified?" We have the individual flexibility, and we have the stability of the bureaucracy, and there are advantages to both. The question is, how do we utilize both to get the best result? And that comes down to the leadership, at all levels of the bureaucracy.

The argument about the preparedness of the military, however, takes place in the context of wider public preparedness to fight, and the public's willingness to abide a prolonged and costly conflict. The idea that a war cannot be sustained without some degree of public enthusiasm for it is cherished to the point where it seems like fact.

How difficult is it to create public enthusiasm for war? J. David Singer, a professor at the University of Michigan, has worked since 1964 on the Correlates of War project, which involves the compilation and analysis of a large database to discern change and continuity in the patterns of war from 1816 to 2001. He believes that the public can be mobilized for war "easily." First, humans generally appear to have a "fantastic capability" to be recruited to kill, maim, and suffer serious injury, to such an extent that it may be innate. Second, many cultures program their people to be able to fight wars, and "Americans are more programmed than many" because of the way that we understand war in the context of our history. Add to the first and second elements a "psychic numbing" to violence—a term borrowed from Robert Jay Lifton—and the "psychic distance" that the technology of war increasingly allows between the perpetrator of violence and his victim, and the prospect of mobilizing the public to support a war does not seem so difficult.

According to Allen Silver, however, mobilizing the public may not even be necessary. Silver has noted what he calls "an emerging formula that sustains and constrains" the way that the United States has fought wars since 1945. While World War II was a "perfect war"—defined by the 1800 Supreme Court case of *Miller v. The Ship Resolution* as "that which destroys the national peace and tranquility, and lays the foun-

dation of every possible act of hostility"—since 1945, the United States has increasingly fought "imperfect" wars, which "do not entirely destroy public tranquility, but interrupt it only in some particulars." Such imperfect wars do not require the president to seek congressional permission or public support to fight them. Instead of mobilization, they require only passivity. When Truman dispatched troops to Korea without congressional approval—for which he was sharply criticized at the time—that war required public mobilization, wage and price controls, declarations of emergency, intense propaganda, a draft, and ideological passion. The war in Vietnam did away with serious declarations and wage and price controls. Today's war in Iraq uses an all-volunteer force and no economic policies. As Silver puts it, "it is as though it is only the armed forces that are at war," while society is left undisturbed. In the context of the U.S. administration's antiterrorist efforts, the "routine maintenance of civil society" is considered an objective. But with no formal declaration of war, no hardships or even changes of routine imposed on the public, how does one know when a war has started—and more important, how does one know when it is over?

"Preventing future attacks, the stated objective of the Congressional authorization of September 2001," Silver observes, "implies that the powers of commanders-in-chief to make discretionary war extend into an indefinite future" (2005: 16). As the United States has increasingly fought wars, while expressly working to keep public life undisturbed, "the very distinction between offense and defense has eroded" (2005: 20). More broadly, the same effort "diminishes [the distinction] between war and peace." (2005: 21).

Silver's points about the blurring of the definitions of the words we use to describe conflict resonate with the current situation in Iraq. Are U.S. troops trying to quell an "insurgency," as supporters of the war claim, or are American soldiers at this point caught in the crossfire of a "civil war," as some antiwar

commentators suggest? Is Iraq headed for peace, or on the brink of all-out war, or somewhere in between? It is disturbing that this debate is as much political as factual: Whether one calls something a "war" or refuses to depends at least in part on what political gains can be made from doing so.

But we are getting ahead of ourselves. To pick up at the end of Silver's comments: Is America already fighting its next (post-Iraq) war? And, if not, how will we know it when we see it? This question has two parts to it. One involves information, the other imagination.

How Do We Know?

The importance of abundant, high-quality intelligence to national security is generally not lost on the U.S. government. The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), Department of State, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), National Security Agency (NSA), National Reconnaisance Office (NRO), and various other agencies and parts of agencies may comprise the largest and most expensive intelligence-gathering network in the world. But knowing about the next conflict may depend on intelligence at the level of detail at which anthropologists and psychologists are most adept at working.

Yael Danieli is a clinical psychologist and director of the Group Project for Holocaust Survivors and their children. She has also been a consultant to the International Criminal Court, South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and the Rwandan government. "Psychologists don't spend a lot of time on 'the last war,'" she says, because when people who have been involved in wars talk about them, they talk in terms of hundreds of years, spanning generations, and the trauma of war imposed on one generation can be handed down to the next. After the conflicts of the early 1990s, Danieli says, people in the Balkans "were ready for the next war every Sunday in church."

Psychologists who work with those who have been in wars

are not necessarily fatalistic, however; armed with the knowledge of how trauma can be passed down, they believe, it is possible to mitigate its violent effects. This can mean breaking what Danieli calls "the conspiracy of silence": the ways in which people involved in conflict may not unburden themselves of their trauma, or are tacitly encouraged by others not to do so, making it all the more likely that the trauma persists, potentially to be conveyed to the next generation. Airing of grief by perpetrators and victims directly afterward, psychologists hope, can roll back the dehumanization of the enemy that makes war possible. Whether these efforts are successful or not remains to be seen. South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission was possibly the most extensive effort to date to put the ideas Danieli talks about into action, and so far South Africa seems to have avoided the wholesale breakdown in social order that many feared at the end of apartheid. But there is not yet a "next generation" to examine. From a national security standpoint, however, the more deeply the United States can understand the nature of the grievances against it, particularly in the developing world, the better it can anticipate conflict, and perhaps alleviate the grievances that fuel it before the fighting starts.

But being ready for the next conflict is also about imagining, and preparing for, what is unlikely—the developments we cannot see, or what Rumsfeld called the "unknowable unknowns." The ideas that led to a discussion of the possibility of a war with Islam and an inquiry into the preparedness of the U.S. military and public are built on several assumptions about the nature of the United States and its place in the world that are easy to take for granted because they are likely to remain valid for the near future. But what if they do not? To see around or through these larger questions requires employing the kind of imagination that we usually only ask of our artists, and usually only for our entertainment. Yet such imagination can and should be applied to consideration of

America's next large conflict, because it can help us better understand the possible threats before us. "War's inhumanity is captured best by poets and novelists, for their imaginations reach into the afflicted soul beyond the reporting of the facts," writes James Hillman (2004: 48), a psychologist who studied under Carl Jung in the 1950s and has written widely on religion and culture. The musician Frank Zappa tweaked an observation by Einstein into a more ominous form: "The mind is like a parachute; it doesn't work unless it's open."

Let us return to the two questions that structured this paper: Who will America's next major conflict be with, and how will it be fought? The usual answers to the first question these days are either China or Islamic fundamentalists, and this essay has addressed the latter possibility at perhaps too great a length. But why are we, both experts and general public alike, so quick to jump to these conclusions? As grim as either conflict sounds, both are in another sense comfortable and familiar; they arise from the tensions of the world as it is defined today. They do not require envisioning major shifts in power, or radical changes in economic, political, or cultural systems, for us to grasp them as possibilities. Yet the Cold War arose from two such cataclysmic shifts—the rise of communism and the collapse of imperialism—and our current, more unstable position was spawned from communism's demise. Today, the possibility of the end of capitalism is entertained only by those at the extreme ends of the political spectrum; to bring it up with a straight face is to exempt yourself from serious political discussions. Yet at the height of the East India Company's power, when it exerted control in the world economy in a way that today's corporations can only dream of, mercantilism as an economic system may have seemed as immutable. The Soviet Union did not expect that its experiment with a command economy would end within decades.

The general consensus among economists today is that the world's capitalist economy, in terms of interconnectedness and

the flow of goods and capital, is perhaps just matching the peak it reached around 1910, before the outbreak of World War I and communism's intervention. In hindsight, Joseph Conrad was among the keenest observers of the economic and political systems of that time. *Heart of Darkness* (1902) has risen to become a classic look at the rot that was then creeping across colonialism,[31] and *The Secret Agent* (1907) dwelt on terrorists and suicide bombers when the perceived threat was from anarchists rather than fundamentalists. *Nostromo* (1904) contains a startling passage on capitalism and America's place in it, as an American investor considers a silver mine in the fictional Latin American country of Costaguana.

> What is Costaguana? It is the bottomless pit of 10 percent loans and other fool investments. European capital had been flung into it with both hands for years. Not ours, though. We in this country know just about enough to keep indoors when it rains. We can sit and watch. Of course, some day we shall step in. We are bound to. But there's no hurry. Time itself has got to wait on the greatest country in the whole of God's Universe. We shall be giving the word for everything: industry, trade, law, journalism, art, politics, and religion, from Cape Horn clear over to Smith's Sound, and beyond, too, if anything worth taking hold of turns up at the North Pole. And then we shall have the leisure to take in hand the outlying islands and continents of the earth. We shall run the world's business whether the world likes it or not. The world can't help it—and neither can we, I guess. (Conrad 1904: 77)

Conrad being Conrad, the rest of the book puts the lie to this prescient piece of writing. The investor invests, and the rest of the book chronicles a revolution that ends his hope of fortune, and many lives. The warning about capitalism's ability to breed instability, and its ability to self-destruct, is worth hearing out, for commentary similar to that of Conrad's

investor is made today, by capitalism's supporters and its critics.

Even the passage's messianic tone may not be so out of place today. The neoconservative agenda—of which the war in Iraq is a part—argues for an aggressive foreign policy in support of the twin concepts of democracy and free trade; it is routinely lambasted for being more ideology than strategy, and the religious overtones, as they pertain to the United States and its propensity for conflict, ring deeply to some observers.

James Hillman argues that monotheism, and Christianity in particular, is given to war in ways that previous religions were not. On its surface, this claim has shades of Samuel Huntington's clash of civilizations, but Hillman probes the fundamental question of the effect of religion a bit more than Huntington does. For Hillman, though Christianity has always been militant, the United States represents perhaps the purest form of this amalgam:

> I am bearing down on American Christianity in particular because the United States wields the most military power and is at the same time the most Christian of nations.… Free-ranging violence and religious sectarianism ride side by side through United States history and manifest its destiny since the earliest colonials. (Hillman 2004: 196)

This echoes J. David Singer's argument, but Hillman posits further that culture, which is usually conceived of as mitigating violence, fails to do so in the United States:

> American imagination in dance and writing, in music and painting, receives worldwide recognition, but the penetration of this culture into the popularism of the American political mind arrives only in the armored car of money delivery. The civilizing influence of aesthetic never makes it to the mall. It is as if the nation as a whole

is immune to culture, protected against it as something freak, unnatural, a disease of decadence, a corrupting of what Americans live by and for: their religious beliefs in God and America, forward marching under the flag and the gun-toting Minuteman into a bright future against all enemies, against all: enemies. (Hillman 2004: 177)

Hillman's generalizations about American culture are broad ones, even for a Jungian, but one does not have to believe them for them to be useful; his strident remarks color the questions of this paper. Why do we think that a next war is worth pondering? Is a future large-scale conflict as inevitable as the question implies? Even though we stand unchallenged in political, economic, and military power, might we be the ones who start the next large conflict?[32] How does that possibility affect the list of possible adversaries and the way that we prepare?

These questions disturb the central assumptions beneath the speculations as to who the United States may next fight. If we admit the possibility that we might start the next war, then the range of potential adversaries widens. What if the current U.S. "global war on terror," with its already unmoored definition as to what terror is, were broadened? The United States has already invaded Iraq in the name of defeating terrorism. What if future leaders did the same in North Korea, Cuba, or Venezuela? Or in the case of a war over resources—oil, or water—what about a war against the European Union? It is almost inconceivable now, given that, despite Europe's objection to the invasion of Iraq, it is still much more a U.S. ally than not. Yet allies can become enemies (and vice versa) in the span of a few years, especially in the wake of fundamental shifts such as those that produced the Cold War. Consider the U.S. relationship with the Soviet Union and Japan in 1940, and again in 1960. Consider how the U.S. relationship with Iran changed after the Islamic revolution.

It is not a pleasant notion to contemplate ourselves as the instigators of violence, but such a role is not out of the realm of possibility. Preparing for such a broad array of conflicts, however, is overwhelming. Perhaps one of the ways to "prepare" for the next conflict could be to avoid the doctrine of preemption that the current administration seeks to codify—or, to invoke Silver's argument, to reinstate the distinction between preemption and prevention—and thus cut down on the number of possible wars that the United States might fight.

The second question, about how the next war might be fought, has assumed either that the United States will fight a conventional, more or less symmetric war with a large foe, or an unconventional, asymmetric war with a host of smaller foes. Why do we take our technological and military superiority for granted? The easy answer, of course, is that both are today unquestioned among policy makers, politicians, and much of the public, within the United States and abroad. But the assumption should be questioned. What, exactly, constitutes asymmetry? As novelist Scalzi points out, and as many soldiers know, advanced technology does not always translate to tactical advantage; though the term "asymmetry" as applied to warfare has come to connote technological superiority and inferiority, perhaps the values should be stripped away so that the term suggests simple difference—allowing the United States to see its technological achievements as both a strength and a burden.

It should also not be inconceivable for the United States to find itself on the other end of an asymmetrical battle, and for that, science fiction is once again useful for opening the mind. "Maybe technology is our next enemy," Tom Reiss suggests—invoking a trope so common in science fiction that Daniel H. Wilson, a robotics researcher at Carnegie Mellon, lampooned it in a 2005 book, *How to Survive a Robot Uprising*. That book imagines a future in which robots, by then even more of a per-

vasive part of life than they are now, try to exterminate humans. Typical advice in the book involves how to survive a car chase with an unmanned ground vehicle (e.g., "escape at right angles"), and how to spot a robot mimicking a human (e.g., "Does your friend smell like a brand new soccer ball?") (Wilson 2005: 32, 82). Yet even Wilson takes his premise seriously enough:

> Every scenario discussed in these pages is either possible or already being realized. Behind every bit of advice exists an area of real research with genuine answers that have been culled from extensive interviews with robotics experts. Watch the line disappear between science fiction and science fact.... You probably found *How to Survive a Robot Uprising* in the humor section. Let's just hope that is where it belongs. (Wilson 2005: 11)

There is also the possibility that by the time the next large-scale conflict arrives, the United States may not be the economic and military colossus that it is today. The economic collapse of the United States is a common enough theme among economists that many have developed arguments about when (not if) it will happen and what the critical factor will be. The same thought seems to occur to journalists and nonfiction writers occasionally. Rashes of articles in popular magazines worrying about our out-of-control national debt come and go, and in *The Long Emergency,* journalist James Howard Kunstler saw fit to write an extended meditation on what the United States might look like once there is not enough oil to go around; with some exceptions, he imagines an America brought back somewhat to the level of development that existed around the end of the nineteenth century, albeit with some newer devices grafted on. Scenarios of technological regression are also a preoccupation of novelists. During the Cold War, many science fiction books dealt with not only how a nuclear war might play out but also its after-

math. Those that did not posit an end to the world imagined one in which technology regresses, sometimes to almost Neolithic proportions (Newman and Unsworth 1984). The idea of technological regression has persisted in fiction, even as the United States has emerged as the world's great power. Neal Stephenson's (1995) *The Diamond Age* is set comfortably in a future in which the great economic and political struggle on the horizon is between China and India; though Stephenson refers to the United States only in passing (one senses that it is not very interesting to him), it appears that America has collapsed under its own weight.

It is easy to dismiss the idea of a serious decline in U.S. power as fanciful and fatalistic. But it is shortsighted to assume that the trajectory of history always points forward—that the United States will always remain ahead of its competition and cannot be overtaken, that its technological development is incapable of suffering setbacks. The coming protracted conflict, if it arrives, could be the engine of that change. Not for nothing have the World Bank and others referred to war as "development in reverse."[33]

Future Tense

Until the next U.S. war arrives—if it arrives—the questions about what it might look like, who it will be fought against, and how it will be fought remain questions. To truly prepare, however, the military must look far beyond current events and behind the dynamics that shape the world today. It must ask why it asks about the next war, even if doing so seems too much like philosophy and not enough like military planning. Asking the questions beneath the questions, however—imagining not the next war, but a host of possible wars, including against ourselves—can help us to appreciate how balances of power shift, economic and political systems warp and change, and the boundaries of what is possible and what is expected can widen or narrow, in an instant. The world has

changed too much in the last twenty years for us not to have an open mind about it; if we close ours, our national security, and the security of many abroad, may be among the first casualties.

Notes

1. See, e.g., *Saving Private Ryan* (1998), dir. Steven Spielberg, about the invasion of Normandy during World War II; *The Thin Red Line* (1998), dir. Terrence Malick, about the battle at Guadalcanal; *The Matrix* (1999), dir. Andy and Larry Wachowski, about a war in the future between men and machines.

2. Quotes from conference participants not attributed to other sources are taken from lectures and discussions held at the Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation conference "Imagining the Next War," New York, March 25–26, 2006.

3. See Spierling and Wintle (2002).

4. See Keynes (1920).

5. Comments of Patrick Lang.

6. Comments of William Lind.

7. Comments of Bernard Rostker.

8. Comments of P. W. Singer.

9. Comments of William Lind.

10. "States of Insecurity," *Atlantic Monthly* 297, no. 3 (April 2006), 38.

11. The idea of "militant Islam" is not new, but it is not typically applied to large-scale conflict either. In the past, it has referred to terrorist organizations and other fringe groups and to smaller-scale conflict at the most. One might wonder if this smaller operational definition of the phrase impedes conceiving of a large-scale violent ideological conflict such as the one discussed at the conference.

12. *The Economist,* "Bleak Courthouse," April 15–21, 2006, p. 44.

13. CNN interview with Said T. Jawad, May 13, 2006.

14. See Allison (2004); William Langewiesche, "The Wrath of Khan," *Atlantic Monthly,* November 2005; William Langewiesche, "The Point of No Return," *Atlantic Monthly,* January/February 2006.

15. See, e.g., "Hamas Thanks Iran for Palestinian Financial Aid," *EU Business,* April 16, 2006 (www.eubusiness.com); "Iran Pledges Aid to Palestinians," Al-Jazeera, April 17, 2006 (english.aljazeera.net).

16. *The Economist,* "Nasrallah Wins the War," August 19–25, 2006, p. 9.

17. *The Economist,* "The Path to Ruin," August 12–18, 2006, p. 20.

18. See, e.g., Daniel Burton-Rose and Wayne Madsen, "Corporate Soldiers: The U.S. Government Privatizes the Use of Force," *Multinational Monitor* 20, no. 3 (March 1999) (www.multinational-monitor.org).

19. Many thanks to Stacy Feldman for structuring my thinking in this section.

20. See Neil A. Lewis, "Moussaoui, Testifying Again, Voices Glee Over Witnesses' Accounts of Sept. 11 Grief," *New York Times,* April 14, 2006 (www.nytimes.com).

21. Neil A. Lewis, "Moussaoui, Testifying Again, Voices Glee Over Witnesses' Accounts of Sept. 11 Grief."

22. In film: *Paradise Now* (2005), *Syriana* (2005). In song: Camper Van Beethoven, "Hey Brother," *New Roman Times* (2004); Steve Earle, "John Walker's Blues," *Jerusalem* (2002).

23. Don DeLillo, "In the Ruins of the Future," *Harper's Magazine,* December, 2001. Reprinted in *The Guardian,* December 22, 2001 (www.guardian.co.uk).

24. William S. Lind, "Understanding Fourth Generation War," *Antiwar.com,* January 15, 2004 (antiwar.com).

25. William S. Lind, "Understanding Fourth Generation War."

26. See Prepared Testimony of U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld before the Senate Armed Services Committee, Thursday, June 21, 2001.

27. Tom Reiss, "Imagining the Worst," *The New Yorker,* November 28, 2005, 106.

28. *Crisis in Zefra* is available at http://www.army.forces-.gc.ca/zefra/main.asp?lng=e

29. Email with Karl Schroeder, July 10, 2006.

30. All quotes from John Scalzi taken from an interview with him, Madison, Wisconsin, May 27, 2006.

31. In *King Leopold's Ghost,* Adam Hochschild wrote of *Heart of Darkness,* "Whatever the rich levels of meaning the book has as literature, for our purposes what is notable is how precise and detailed

a description it is of 'the actual facts of the case': King Leopold's Congo in 1890, just as the exploitation of the territory was getting under way in earnest" (1999: 143).

32. The United States typically casts itself as a defensive country, attacking only after being attacked. The Bush Doctrine, however, seeks to legitimize the concept of preemptive strikes against threats from terrorists or rogue states, which George W. Bush employed to invade Iraq. See The White House, *The National Security Strategy of the United States 2002,* http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.html. It can be seen as an outgrowth of Bill Clinton's doctrine of justifying military intervention for humanitarian causes, as Clinton did in the former Yugoslavia.

33. The origin of the phrase appears to be Paul Collier, *Breaking the Conflict Trap: Civil War and Development Policy* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 2003). Since then, however, it has been popularized in development and conflict resolution literature.

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