

Editor's Corner

by Mackubin T. Owens

As Ash Carter observes in his article here, President Barack Obama will face an unsettled world and a multitude of unresolved national security issues. In light of these challenges, this winter edition of *Orbis* offers reflections on grand strategy, future defense policy, and the lessons of Iraq. In addition, this journal addresses the reemergence of Indonesia as a player in the international arena, U.S. diplomacy in East Asia, the meaning of the new U.S. Africa Command, and the information confrontation with radical Islam. We also offer a short “security note” by President Bush’s Secretary of Homeland Security that looks at personal identity from the standpoint of national security.

A country’s grand strategy seeks to “shape” the security environment in a way that conforms to that country’s interests. For a variety of reasons, the United States has pursued a grand strategy of “primacy” since the end of World War II. Accordingly, as David McDonough argues, those who believe that the so-called “Bush Doctrine” is a temporary grand strategy aberration will be disappointed. This is because

a bipartisan consensus exists in supporting primacy as the grand strategy of the United States.

In my own piece, I attempt to place the debate over the Bush Doctrine in historical context. I argue that the dominant narrative concerning the Bush Doctrine—that it is a dangerous innovation, an anomaly that violates the principles of sound policy as articulated by the Founders—is wrong. The Bush Doctrine is, in fact, well within the mainstream of U.S. foreign policy and very much in keeping with the vision of America’s founding generation and the practice of the statesmen of the Early Republic. The Bush Doctrine is only the latest manifestation of the reality that U.S. national interests have always extended beyond simple security.

Ash Carter argues that President Obama’s secretary of defense will face three broad challenges. First, the leadership of the Department of Defense will confront the demands of ongoing military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan and against Islamist extremism, as well as potential threats arising from unpredictable but near-certain new crises that will arise in Africa, the Middle East, or elsewhere. Second,

these immediate operational challenges will take place at a time when the United States is attempting to “reset” its global leadership by repairing frayed alliances and security partnerships. Carter focuses on the third category of challenges: managing investment in the U.S. national security future—budgets, programs, and the match—or more accurately, the current mismatch—between resources and strategy.

Bing West, author of the recent book, *The Strongest Tribe: War, Politics and the Endgame in Iraq*, provides an assessment of the Iraq War based on his sixteen trips to that country. West argues that although no two conflicts are exactly the same, some of these observations may have implications for future U.S. foreign policy.

Anne Marie Murphy argues that Indonesia has returned to the international arena, a turn of events that is good news for the United States, given Indonesia's status as a Muslim democracy, its traditional role as a mediator and its good working relations with the United States. Nonetheless, she warns, the United States needs to handle its relations with Indonesia with care if the latter is to be a potentially important international partner on a wide range of issues. John Kelley and Sarah Graham examine the mechanism of “track two” diplomacy—an informal approach that can supplement official diplomatic channels—and assess the prospects for the use of this tool to improve U.S.-China relations.

Thomas McCabe, who wrote “The Muslim Middle East: Is There a

Democratic Option?” for the summer 2007 issue of *Orbis*, returns with an examination of the critical, indeed potentially decisive “information war” with both violent and non-violent radical Islam. Carmel Davis looks at the newest U.S. unified combatant command, U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM), arguing that its real purpose is to combat terrorism, counter Chinese influence, and maintain U.S. access to oil.

In a short “security note,” Michael Chertoff, the U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security, raises an issue that gets to the heart of the tension between privacy as a manifestation of personal liberty, on the one hand, and security, on the other. Making an argument sure to offend many civil libertarians, the secretary contends that the problem of identity fraud constitutes a serious homeland security issue and that the United States needs to develop a system that combines personal identification numbers, identification devices, and biometrics.

Finally, we have book reviews by James Kurth looking at Prussia's demise, and Karl Schaffenburg on Irish identity.

Impromptus and Asides: Why Presidents Are Obligated To ‘Meddle’ in Military Affairs

As Bing West observes in his article, President Bush remained largely detached from decisions concerning the conduct of the Iraq War. In West's words, “President Bush presided more than decided, acting like the chairman of the board rather than the chief executive. He waited

for his staff to produce consensus options. Once he selected an option, he considered his job done.”

His style adhered to what Eliot Cohen has called in his book, *Supreme Command*, the “normal” theory of civil-military relations, an approach that most U.S. presidents since Vietnam have followed. The normal theory of civil-military relations calls for a clear line of demarcation between civilians who determine the goals of the war and the uniformed military who then conduct operations in support of war aims.

Several scholars of U.S. civil-military relations have argued that the problems the military faced in Iraq were the result of civilians’ ignoring the line between policy, on the one hand, and strategy, operations, and tactics, on the other. But as I have argued elsewhere, civilian leaders cannot simply leave the military to its own devices during a conflict because war is an iterative process involving the interplay of active wills. What appears to be the case at the outset of the war may change as the war continues, modifying the relationship between political goals and military means. The fact remains that wars are not fought for their own purposes but to achieve policy goals set by the political leadership of the state.

Like his predecessors, President Bush originally bought in to the normal theory of civil-military relations and adhered to its strictures, only abandoning it in January 2007 when he announced the Iraq War “surge.” Bob Woodward’s book *The*

War Within: A Secret White House History 2006-2008, reveals that many senior military leaders, most notably Gen. George Casey, the overall commander in Iraq (now Army chief of staff) did not buy into the surge. Woodward essentially argues that in adopting the new approach in Iraq, Bush ignored the sober advice of his generals.

Of course, the failure to listen to military advice regarding Iraq has been frequently attributed to the Bush administration. This charge is based on two principles: first, that soldiers have the right to a voice in making policy regarding the use of the military instrument, that indeed they have the right to *insist* that their views be adopted; second, that the judgment of soldiers is inherently superior to that of civilians when it comes to military affairs. Both are at odds with the American practice of civil-military relations and the historical record.

First, under the American system of civilian control, the uniformed military advises the civilian authorities but has no right to insist that its views be adopted. Of course, uniformed officers have an obligation to stand up to civilian leaders if they think a policy is flawed. They must convey their concerns to civilian policymakers forcefully and truthfully. But once a policy decision is made, soldiers are obligated to carry it out to the best of their ability, whether their advice is heeded or not.

Second, even when it comes to strictly military affairs, soldiers are not necessarily more prescient than civilian policy makers. This is

confirmed by the historical record. Historians have long recognized that Abraham Lincoln's judgment concerning the conduct of the Civil War was vastly superior to that of George McClellan. They have recognized that George Marshall, the greatest soldier-statesman since Washington, was wrong to oppose arms shipments to Great Britain in 1940 and argue for a cross-channel invasion during the early years of World War II before the United States was ready. They have pointed out that the U.S. operational approach that contributed to the U.S. defeat in Vietnam was the creature of the uniformed military. They have observed that the original—unimaginative—CENTCOM plan for Operation Desert Storm was rejected by the civilian leadership, which ordered a return to the drawing board. The revised plan was far more imaginative and effective.

And so it was with Iraq. The fact is that the approach favored by the uniformed leadership was failing. As the insurgency metastasized in 2005, the military had three viable alternatives: continue offensive operations along the lines of those in Anbar province after Fallujah; adopt a counterinsurgency approach; or emphasize the training of Iraqi troops in order to transition to Iraqi control of military operations. Gen. John Abizaid, commander of the U.S. Central Command, and Casey, supported by Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and Joint Chiefs chairman, Gen. Richard Myers, chose the third option.

But while transitioning to Iraqi control was a logical option for the long run, it did little to solve the proximate problem of the insurgency, which had now generated sectarian violence. Based on the belief by many senior commanders, especially Abizaid, that U.S. troops were an "antibody" to Iraqi culture, the Americans consolidated their forces on large "forward operating bases" (FOBs), maintaining a presence only by means of motorized patrols that were particularly vulnerable to attacks by improvised explosive devices (IEDs). In so doing, they conceded large swaths of territory and population alike to the insurgents. Violence spiked.

So in late 2006, George Bush abandoned the normal theory of civil-military relations. Like Lincoln in 1862, he adopted a new approach to the war, replacing the uniformed and civilian leaders who were adherents of the failed operational approach with others who shared his commitment to victory rather than "playing for a tie."

The wisdom or folly of the surge notwithstanding, the most troubling aspect of Woodward's book is that it reveals the continuation of a disturbing pattern of recent civil-military relations: public resistance by the uniformed military to civilian foreign and defense policy. The most obvious manifestation of this public second guessing of civilian policy makers, including the president, was the so-called revolt of the generals in 2006, during which six retired Army and Marine generals publicly called for the resignation

of Secretary Rumsfeld. Much of the language they used was intemperate, and some was downright contemptuous. But other examples have included “foot dragging,” “slow-rolling,” and leaks to the press designed to undercut policy or individual policy-makers.

The danger to the health of the civil-military balance should be obvious. Right now the American people hold the U.S. military in high esteem. But the highly public animosity that has characterized the civil-military nexus since 9/11 may

well result in the public's loss of confidence and trust in the military institution. This high regard may dissipate if the public comes to view the military as just another special-interest group vying for more resources as it seeks to restrict how the civilian authorities use the military instrument or if soldiers, retired or active, are perceived to be no different than the sort of political appointee who, having just left the administration, is now peddling a “tell all” book intended to settle scores with adversaries.

