

John Warden and the Renaissance of American Air Power
by John Andreas Olsen

Dulles, VA: Potomac Books, 2007
349 pp. \$32.95
ISBN: 978-1-59797-084-6

Reviewed by

JOHN DARRELL SHERWOOD

Colonel John A. Warden III, USAF (Ret.), played a critical role in planning the first Gulf War air campaign and is widely regarded as the primary architect of effects-based warfare. If Warden did inspire a “renaissance of American air power” in the 1990s, we may now be living through an “air power Reformation,” with some even calling for the abolition of the Air Force, given its inability to effect change on the ground in the current insurgency in Iraq. Before Service leaders decide to launch an Inquisition against their critics, they might be prudent to read John Andreas Olsen’s tale of John Warden, one of their greatest Jesuits.

Warden graduated from the Air Force Academy in 1965 and flew 265 missions as a forward air control pilot over Vietnam in 1969. He then worked his way up the Air Force ladder, serving in a variety of operational and staff assignments in the 1970s and 1980s. From 1986 to 1988, he commanded the 36th Tactical Fighter Wing at Bitburg Air

Force Base in Germany, one of the Air Force’s premier Cold War units. Unfortunately for Warden, his personality did not mesh well with wing command. As an ideas man, Warden tried to enact too many changes too quickly at Bitburg, and his introverted nature made it difficult for him to socialize and market his reforms effectively. Uncomfortable with Warden “rocking the boat,” General William L. Kirk, commander of U.S. Air Forces Europe, removed him from command in 1988, effectively ending Warden’s chance to become a general.

What Warden failed to achieve as an operator, he made up for as an intellectual. While a student in the National War College’s senior-level program during the 1985–1986 academic year, he wrote *The Air Campaign: Planning for Combat*, which laid out the basic tenets of his philosophy of airpower. These principles were later expanded and revised when the colonel became a planner in the Pentagon in 1988. Warden’s basic premise is that airpower could become a commander’s *primary* means of achieving both political and military ends. In short, he challenged the prevailing notion that the primary purpose of war was the defeat of an enemy army. Airpower, he reasoned, allowed commanders to directly target an enemy regime, thereby avoiding combat with its army. This was a far cry from the AirLand Battle Doctrine of the period, which employed airpower in support of ground troops to destroy interdiction targets, such as follow-on forces and supply trains.

Airpower’s decisiveness, argued Warden, derived from its ability to directly strike centers of gravity. Using a five-ring model, he defined these centers as command and control, critical war industry,

transportation infrastructure, population and agriculture, and fielded military forces. Airpower enjoyed its greatest *effect* when used against leadership (the bull’s eye of his five-ring model) and diminished in impact against other rings, especially the outermost two (population and fielded military forces).

Many of Warden’s ideas came from earlier prophets of airpower, namely Giulio Douhet and Billy Mitchell, and were not new. Instead, he mainly repackaged certain useful theories and married them to modern airpower technology. In future wars, precision-guided munitions would allow the Air Force to focus less on destroying targets and more on achieving desirable political outcomes with discrete applications of force.

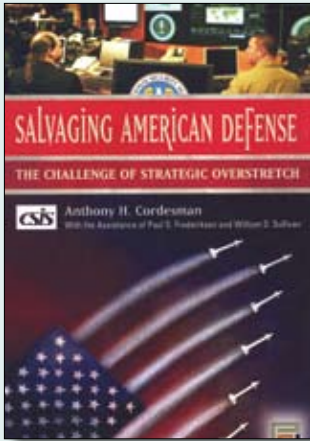
During the first Gulf War, Warden’s planning team, Checkmate, developed *Instant Thunder*, the prototype for the war’s air campaign. *Instant Thunder* sought to target the Iraqi regime by striking command and control facilities, air defenses, essential war industries, and logistics targets as opposed to ground forces or population areas. Very shortly into the planning process, Warden fell into disfavor with General Charles Horner, the U.S. Central Command air component commander. Horner resented Warden’s meddling and also vehemently disagreed with him about the relative importance of hitting Iraqi ground forces, especially the Republican Guard. Warden’s initial plan minimized attacks on these forces because he believed that a ground campaign would not be necessary to liberate Kuwait and that intact Iraqi forces would be necessary for internal security after the war. The compromise air campaign would strike most of the targets identified in *Instant Thunder* but would also place heavy emphasis on

destroying Iraqi forces on the ground in Kuwait.

John Andreas Olsen, the director of the Norwegian Defense Command and Staff College and a Royal Norwegian Air Force officer, points out that while Horner ultimately sent Warden back to Washington, the general did continue to rely on Warden’s staff for planning and intelligence support throughout the war. As a consequence, Warden managed to leave an indelible mark on the air campaign. Like Kirk before him, Horner appreciated neither Warden’s personality nor his willingness to argue passionately with his chain of command when it came to ideas and strategy. Unlike Kirk, Horner tolerated Warden at a distance, picking and choosing the ideas most suitable to his conception of the air campaign.

While airpower alone did not win the first Gulf War, it contributed mightily to the eventual outcome. More significantly, effects-based warfare was employed with great success in the Balkans and in Operation *Enduring Freedom*. By focusing on the role of a single individual, Olsen offers a comfortable vehicle for understanding the evolution of airpower doctrine in the 1990s. His book also explores anti-intellectualism in the Air Force, and how the Service could be unaccommodating to internal critics in its ranks. Iconoclasts may not make the best company at the Officers’ Club, but their ideas and potential influence are critical to our nation’s survival. They bridge the gap between the world of ideas and war and may ultimately help the Air Force reform itself and better adapt to the current war on terror. **JFQ**

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**Salvaging American Defense:
The Challenge of Strategic
Overstretch**

by Anthony H. Cordesman with
Paul S. Frederiksen and
William D. Sullivan
Washington, DC:

Center for Strategic and
International Studies, 2007
488 pp. \$29.95
ISBN-13: 978-0892064953

Reviewed by
SHAWN BRIMLEY

Salvaging American Defense could not have been published at a more critically important time. Ongoing operations have strained the military, and the contours of the future security environment are growing increasingly complex. Anthony Cordesman of the Center for Strategic and International Studies has released a wide-ranging and detailed assessment of American defense policy that is—and will remain for some time—the single best source on the subject. *Salvaging American Defense* is both an admonishment of the defense establishment and a plea to current and future leaders to better align ends, ways, and means.

Cordesman is not averse to offering blunt and incisive criticism, which begins in the first chapter and does not abate. Current operations in Iraq are an early target: “The idea that a deeply divided and primitive Iraq would become an instant shining example that transformed the Middle East always bordered

on the theater of the absurd” (p. 35). Rejecting the notion that a rapid withdrawal would improve America’s strategic position, Cordesman argues that “the U.S. bull is seen throughout the world as having broken the Iraqi china shop it claimed to rescue. It must now live with the political and strategic consequences” (p. 380).

Beyond current operations, Cordesman describes how a “massive failure” to predict the actual cost, development time, and effectiveness of almost every major defense investment has committed America to a “fundamentally unaffordable mix of research, development, and procurement programs” (p. 36). He paints a stark picture of an American military suffering from “strategic overstretch”: perpetually unrealistic force and manpower plans stretching back to the end of the Cold War, combined with illusions of lifting the fog of war through a so-called revolution in military affairs and exacerbated by a strategy development process that allows decisionmakers to be derelict in their duty to make hard choices. Put simply, America’s leaders are unable to make good on their strategic commitments with the current defense budget.

Many readers will find Cordesman’s exploration of the defense budget and various force transformation programs valuable. No major platform escapes examination. After questioning the wisdom of the Army’s investment in the Future Combat System, describing the “cost-escalation nightmare” of the Air Force’s F-22A Raptor program, and arguing that constant schedule delays and expense escalation have cost the Navy “the ability to plan its fleet,” Cordesman concludes that contractors, the military Services, program managers, and the Office of the Secretary of Defense have largely become “advocates and competitors rather than planners and managers.” He argues that the “level of failure in today’s programs represents a basic failure to make hard choices at the level of the Secretary of Defense, Deputy Secretary,

Service Secretaries, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, and Service Chiefs of Staff” (p. 326). Cordesman rejects the notion that new studies or bureaucratic patches are needed to fix a system in which “failure to make difficult and timely decisions is not only tolerated but encouraged. . . . [T]here will never be an effective system until failure is punished from the top down” (p. 328).

Cordesman is direct in criticizing various attempts at defense reviews, including the Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR): “The Department of Defense currently wastes tens of thousands of man hours on a process that at best can be described as a triumph of hope over experience” (p. 278). In his view, the QDR process is a microcosm of a wider failure to bridge the gap between theory and practice, perpetuating the chasm between strategy and resources. Cordesman is equally critical of strategic concepts advanced by the Joint Chiefs and the various military Services, calling many of them “wish lists” rather than meaningful plans.

Salvaging American Defense provides an excellent foundation for the tough conceptual and budget battles that lie ahead. Wartime budgets that allowed the various players to have their cake and eat it too are certain to contract in the years to come. Vital questions regarding whether and how to adapt to a future security environment that will demand a robust supply of military capability geared toward preventive training and advising of foreign security forces must be clearly answered. Moreover, the question of how to institutionalize adaptation, while retaining and resetting forces capable of dominating along the full spectrum of warfighting, will constitute a core challenge for the next administration.

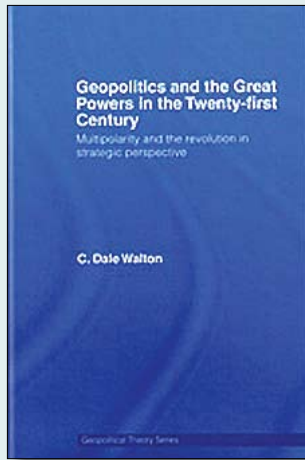
The military Services realize what is coming and are consolidating around their various positions regarding force size and shape, posturing for what will likely be the most important QDR yet. Years of missed opportunities

to make clear choices and a long period of war in which budgets were loose and fiscal discipline eroded will demand strategic decisions that will decisively influence plans, programs, and budgets. However, Cordesman cautions against trying to divine a “critical minimum” or a “just enough” solution to force size or shape. “The United States cannot succeed by focusing on finding ways of doing more and more with less and less,” Cordesman concludes, “particularly if this unconsciously ends in trying to do absolutely everything with absolutely nothing” (p. 439).

Salvaging American Defense has a wide topical aperture. In 450 pages, Cordesman explores the entire spectrum of defense policy and strategy, from ongoing operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, to the challenges inherent in formulating strategy, force posture, resource allocation, procurement, personnel management, and the need for larger and more effective civilian capabilities. In addition to problems in U.S. military strategy and resources, Cordesman covers challenges relating to the Intelligence Community, homeland security, interagency reform, public diplomacy, and relations with international partners and alliances. While the book might have benefited from a slightly narrower scope, Cordesman’s command of the material and his no-holds-barred approach is worth the journey.

This book is a tough read; the topic is dense and complicated, and Cordesman assumes his audience will have a high degree of familiarity with the subject matter. This is perhaps for the best, as *Salvaging American Defense* is a serious book on an important topic. For defense professionals tasked with shepherding the Department of Defense through what is and will surely continue to be an incredibly difficult period, *Salvaging American Defense* may well prove indispensable. **JFQ**

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Geopolitics and the Great Powers in the Twenty-first Century: Multipolarity and the Revolution in Strategic Perspective

by C. Dale Walton

London: Routledge, 2007
141 pp. \$125.00
ISBN-13: 978-0415358538

Reviewed by
THOMAS M. KANE

Despite the provocative title of Francis Fukuyama's 1992 work, history does not appear to have ended. Neither, scholar and strategic analyst C. Dale Walton reminds us, has geography. In *Geopolitics and the Great Powers*, Walton returns to the work of geopolitical thinkers Halford MacKinder and Nicholas Spykman to offer a compelling account of the factors likely to shape grand strategy in upcoming decades. Like MacKinder and Spykman themselves, Walton emphasizes the interplay between ancient geographical realities and new strategic possibilities afforded by emerging technology. In so doing, Walton updates such influential studies of military and political trends as Samuel Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations* and Alvin and Heidi Toffler's *War and Anti-War*, not to mention a considerable fraction of the more technical literature on the strategic implications of the so-called

revolution in military affairs (RMA).

Walton's revival of MacKinder focuses on the earlier thinker's proposition that the centuries during which European countries pushed their influence throughout the world constituted a Columbian epoch, in which a country's destiny depended primarily on its maritime capabilities and powerful nations could satisfy any inclinations toward expansion by seeking colonies in what today would be called the less developed world. MacKinder believed that this epoch ended with the 19th century. Walton disagrees only about the date. The maritime nations, he tells us, extended their period of supremacy by embracing technology that MacKinder could not have anticipated and by making state policy more astutely than MacKinder dared to hope for. Nevertheless, Walton notes, the termination of the Cold War has once again created the conditions for the Columbian epoch to end. Once again, the world has become what Walton and MacKinder call a "closed system" in which the great powers must interact in everything they do. If any of them wish to improve their strategic position, they must do so at the direct expense of others.

Meanwhile, Walton argues, developments in such fields as biotechnology and crewless fighting vehicles call for "technological exuberance." Although he wisely avoids speculation about the details of future military technology, he both affirms that the United States has recently initiated an RMA through its use of information technology and predicts more RMAs to come. Future RMAs, he notes, will coincide with the period in which the great powers feel the consequences of living in a post-Columbian epoch. This, *Geopolitics and*

the Great Powers argues, will produce a revolution in strategic perspective, combining new ways of fighting with new ideas about who is to wage war upon whom. The United States, Walton notes, could increasingly find itself on the sidelines. Although this will allow America to lay down some of its current "burdens," Americans risk paying a steep price if they permit a hostile "great power axis" to emerge (pp. 11, 46–47).

Walton's analysis addresses the role of terrorists, transnational nongovernmental organizations, and other "Lilliputians" in the post-Columbian epoch (p. 77). Some (Walton cites Rajan Menon, a fellow at the New America Foundation) have claimed that these actors reduce the significance of geography—and, thus, of geopolitics—in the contemporary world. *Geopolitics and the Great Powers* counters that ethnic groups, adherents of particular religions, and members of other groups that commonly involve themselves in strategy "without a license" tend to be concentrated in specific regions (p. 73). Although these groups transcend state boundaries, they seldom transcend geography. Moreover, Walton notes, their effects on international politics are most profound when they act alongside traditional nation-states (pp. 82–85). Future "great powers," he concludes, "have a practical choice to make—whether to show restraint in the support of violent non-state actors . . . or take their chances 'riding the tiger.'"

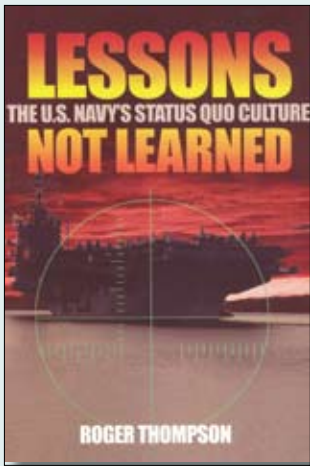
In exploring these issues, Walton focuses on the policy implications of his arguments. This approach forces him to curtail his discussion of related theoretical issues. Although *Geopolitics and the Great Powers* identifies the People's Republic of China as "one of the most potent players in the struggle for

preeminence in Eastern Eurasia," Walton does not specifically respond to Alfred Thayer Mahan's similar arguments in *The Problem of Asia*. Although Walton finds Spykman's arguments about the relative importance of sea-power and land power more appropriate to 21st-century political circumstances than those of MacKinder, he offers only a few sentences contrasting these authors' positions.

Readers who are primarily interested in the practical side of strategy are unlikely to miss such theoretical excursions. Walton uses geopolitical theory selectively, but the concepts he selects allow him to advance a plausible guide to the driving trends in contemporary statecraft. By integrating the effects of emerging technology, narrowly operational RMAs, and the activities of so-called Lilliputians into this argument, Walton advances an equally plausible guide to the ways in which these contemporary concerns may—and may not—shape longer-term developments. Throughout this project, Walton keeps sight of the reasons why strategy is worth studying. American policymakers, he notes, may soon lose the "very generous margin of error" that they have come to assume as a birthright (p. 107). They, like their counterparts in other states throughout the world, must adopt a strategic perspective appropriate to the new century, or "suffer accordingly" (p. 107).

JFQ

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**Lessons Not Learned:
The U.S. Navy's
Status Quo Culture**
by Roger Thompson

Annapolis, MD:
Naval Institute Press, 2007
252 pp. \$34.95
ISBN-10: 1-59114-865-0

Reviewed by
CHRISTOPHER R. DAVIS

Roger Thompson sets out to provide a deliberately provocative critique of the U.S. Navy, and he does not disappoint. His juxtaposition of facts and informative narrative with occasionally inflammatory conjecture makes for a spirited book. *Lessons Not Learned* ponders whether “the U.S. Navy is truly the most capable navy in the world, or is it closer to an overrated paper tiger” (p. 5). At a time when America is investing heavily in countering a land-based insurgency and preparing to release a new maritime strategy, this polemic serves as a valuable cautionary tale.

Thompson draws on his background in sociology to interpret the motives of U.S. Navy leaders, which he attributes largely to parochial interests and arrogance. Admittedly, confident statements by senior Navy leadership can appear partisan or border on hubris, but arrogance or pride should not be the default assump-

tion. While it is difficult to divine underlying motives, the U.S. Navy well understands the threats that Thompson outlines. In this regard, the author is slightly behind the times. There is little doubt, for example, that antisubmarine warfare skills have atrophied since the fall of the Berlin Wall, but reversing this decline is a top priority today—which calls into question the author’s contention that the U.S. Navy fails to learn from past mistakes or has institutionalized underachievement.

While plowing over old themes, unfortunately, Thompson leaves fertile new ground untouched. He correctly castigates the Navy for lax pre-9/11 security, for example, but evokes the USS *Cole* incident without touching upon the emergent asymmetric threat posed by suicidal or swarming small craft. In fact, the most contemporary portion of the book is the afterword penned by Colonel Douglas Macgregor, USA (Ret.). *Lessons Not Learned* may have been topical a decade or so ago, but today it is a dated rehashing of old themes with few new insights.

While Thompson impressively catalogues the outcomes of tactical engagements, he makes no attempt to analyze the results in terms of operational or strategic objectives. Rather, he implies that success at the tactical level is the only thing that matters. The author should have placed more attention on analyzing the U.S. Navy force structure, and the choices made about it, in light of existing political and military strategies. Thompson does not address, for example, the critical issue of whether the current all-nuclear submarine fleet or carrier-centric battle force is correct given our current naval strategy (or lack thereof), or if a blend of nuclear and conventional submarines or a “high-low”

warship mix, for instance, would better achieve American national security objectives.

The author’s key unexamined underlying assumption is that the U.S. Navy must be dominant and preeminent in all aspects; he fails to scrutinize the Navy’s order of battle in light of existing national security policy and joint doctrine. In the chapters covering the Cold War period, for example, there is no mention of the maritime strategy that drove force planning and acquisition decisions at the time, much less any critical examination of competing naval strategies. In light of the 1,000-ship Navy initiative, readers would benefit from a comparative analysis—for example, should the United States rely on cooperative operations with foreign navies or go it alone? Furthermore, Thompson attributes U.S. Navy dominance primarily to the mistakes of former adversaries, calling to mind the old adage that one need only be faster than his fellow camper to avoid wild bear attacks—an excellent, albeit low, metric of effectiveness and efficiency.

Thompson touches upon several critical issues regarding the use of nuclear propulsion at a time when Congress is pushing to expand its use in surface combatants. But he lacks a critical eye for discerning the costs or benefits of conventional versus nuclear propulsion. While he excoriates Navy leadership for adopting the latter, he fails to analyze the strategic context of this decision. Did our Cold War maritime strategy, for example, require a submarine force dependent on nuclear power to achieve both the requisite speed for fast-attack sorties capable of bottling up the Soviets and the stamina needed for boomers to disappear into the abyss? Or were other options possible?

Thompson is at his best detailing the challenges diesel

submarines pose for the U.S. Navy. While it is difficult in an unclassified forum to discern the result of exercises, much less operations, the author reaches some thought-provoking conclusions based on second-hand sources and private comments. The portrait that emerges is not flattering and plants seeds of doubt over the value of the Navy and the caliber of its leadership. Still, it is hard to comprehend how senior leadership overlooked vulnerabilities to the degree that Thompson postulates. It is also difficult to grasp how our allies’ prowess, the forces against which the author judges our combat effectiveness, threatens America.

Thompson’s intentionally provocative perspective is valuable in questioning current reality, and in so doing, *Lessons Not Learned* is a catalyst for avoiding past mistakes. On the whole, Thompson offers context to the continuing debate surrounding naval relevance in the war on terror. U.S. Navy leadership would do well to consider his conclusions thoughtfully, although the author should have provided them as more than an afterthought in the final two-page chapter. It is up to the reader, nonetheless, to determine if the author proves his thesis—keeping in mind that doubt, as Voltaire observed, is not a pleasant condition, but certainty is absurd. **JFQ**

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