

# LETTER

**To the Editor**—I very much appreciate the spirited debate within the U.S. Army engendered by Colonel Gian Gentile's writings, particularly "Let's Build an Army to Win All Wars" (*Joint Force Quarterly* 52, 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter 2009). Finding the appropriate balance between stability and combat operations is one of the most critical questions facing the U.S. Armed Forces, and Colonel Gentile has played an important role in that discussion. Unfortunately, he misrepresents my argument regarding the challenges facing the Armed Forces in one significant way. Colonel Gentile states that "John Nagl . . . is so cocksure of the efficacy of Army combat power that he believes it will have the ability not only to dominate land operations in general but to 'change entire societies'" (28).

Colonel Gentile selected the quoted material out of context from my review essay, published by the *Journal of the Royal United Services Institute* in April 2008, on Brian Macallister Linn's excellent book *The Echo of Battle*. In that review, I argue that:

*victory in the Long War requires the strengthening of literally dozens of governments afflicted by insurgents who are radicalized by hatred and inspired by fear. The soldiers who win these wars require not just an ability to dominate land operations, but to change entire societies—and not all of those soldiers will wear uniforms, or work for the Department of the Army. The most important warriors of the current century may work for the US Information Agency rather than the Department of Defense.*

Those familiar with this context will recognize the metaphorical use of the term *soldier* as part of an argument to build interagency capability to conduct counterinsurgency more effectively. Winning the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the longer war against radical Islamic extremism, will require significant changes in the societies that engendered them. Although I have enormous faith in the capability of the U.S. Army, I think it needs help to perform a task of this magnitude. Success in the Long War depends on an

effective counterinsurgency capability that can facilitate and coordinate the development of host nation security capacity, good governance, and economic growth under wartime conditions. Although the Army is currently performing all three of these tasks, they are more properly the purview of other agencies of the U.S. Government. Thus, I have advocated significant increases in the resources devoted to the Department of State, U.S. Agency for International Development, Treasury, Justice, and Agriculture, as well as the recreation of the United States Information Agency. A task force of these 21<sup>st</sup>-century warriors is required to win today's wars, and tomorrow's.

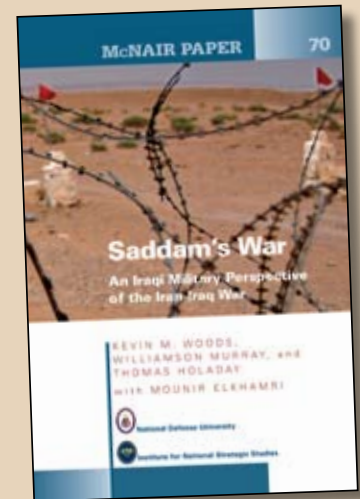
Some serious thinkers now suggest that the United States cannot afford to engage in nationbuilding or that it cannot succeed. I believe otherwise. Americans demonstrated in the Philippines at the turn of the last century, under General Creighton Abrams during the later years of the Vietnam conflict, and in our most recent operations in Iraq that we can help rebuild societies with some degree of success. The task is enormously difficult, but its completion will allow the United States and its allies to withdraw from Iraq and Afghanistan, leaving behind governments that are sovereign within their borders and do not provide a safe haven for terror. This mission is vital; as Secretary of Defense Robert Gates has noted, "the most likely catastrophic threats to our homeland—for example, an American city poisoned or reduced to rubble by a terrorist attack—are more likely to emanate from failing states than from aggressor states" (*JFQ* 52, 3).

The most important responsibility of a state is the protection of its citizens from harm. Our national security apparatus failed us on September 11, and our Army was unprepared for the kinds of wars that resulted. It is the responsibility of national security professionals to learn from those mistakes and vow never to allow our Army and our nation to be unprepared again.

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