provoking commentators on contemporary American defense and security issues. A West Point graduate, Vietnam veteran, cavalry regiment commander during the Persian Gulf War, and currently a professor of international relations at Boston University, Bacevich has long been a straight shooter when targeting the folly of military and political leadership. His first book, *The Pentomic Era* (NDU Press, 1986, 1995), took aim at the Army of the 1950s for its ill-conceived pursuit of relevance as part of President Dwight Eisenhower's nuclear-tipped, fiscally austere "New Look" strategy. As aggressive as he is eloquent, Bacevich continued his critique of American foreign and military policy in *American Empire: The Realities and Consequences of U.S. Diplomacy* (Harvard, 2002) and *The New American Militarism: How Americans Are Seduced by War* (Oxford, 2005).

In *The Limits of Power*, Bacevich examines the American cultural, economic, political, and military performance of the last 50 years and finds the Nation's citizens, political leaders, and soldiers wanting. He contends that the American reinterpretation of freedom, especially since the 1960s, "has had a transformative impact on our society and culture." The reader is asked to consider a series of seemingly simple, yet deceptively complex, questions: "What is freedom today? What is its content? What costs does the exercise of freedom impose? And who pays?" (p. 8). In his analysis, Bacevich believes American appetites for and expectations of "freedom" have grown exponentially and today far outstrip the ability of our domestic political economy to satisfy them. This situation has led a generation of self-selected "power elite" to pursue a foreign policy of exceptionalism and expansionism that in its execution looks, feels, and behaves a lot like the creation of an American empire—an empire whose maintenance, Bacevich offers, is antithetical to our traditional concept of freedom and now imperils the Nation.

Bacevich details with devastating effect the decline of American power since the end of the Cold War and the simultaneous rise of hubris governing the exercise of that power. He holds that quite paradoxically, in the early 1990s, during its self-coronation as the world's sole remaining superpower, America ended what some historians called the "Long Peace" and embarked on an incoherent series of military interventions that presaged the "Long War" to protect and preserve our self-indulgent concept of freedom. Along the way, he suggests, the Nation drank its own Kool-aid, became punch-drunk on its apparent success, and accelerated its descent toward domestic and international calamity.

Central to Bacevich's thesis are three self-induced, interlocking crises confronting America: an economic and cultural crisis (what he terms the "crisis of profligacy"), a political one, and a military one. In discussing these crises, Bacevich relies heavily on the works of theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, whom he describes as "the most clear-eyed of American prophets." As a potential model against which future historians might analyze current U.S. security policy, Bacevich offers Niebuhr's judgment that every civilization is most pretentious, cocksure, and convinced of its own immortality at the moment it begins to decline.

For Bacevich, the crisis of American profligacy is all too obvious. Be it land, wealth, or material goods, he contends that the accumulation of *more* has characterized our national identity more than most Americans understand or are willing to admit. From the Louisiana Purchase to the current war in Iraq, Bacevich argues that Presidents have adhered almost universally to the American desire for *more* while failing to demand of the people a commensurate level of sacrifice. Citing America's transition over the last 40 years from being the world's leading producer and creditor to being its leading consumer and debtor, he indicts the American people for their undisciplined pursuit of material "happiness." For Bacevich, the current "great recession" is proof of the "instant gratification" attitude that has paupered the Nation and taught a generation of obese schoolchildren (and adults) that hard work, self-sacrifice, and even the national defense is someone else's responsibility.

Bacevich is equally critical of America's political performance since the Great Depression. He argues that the Federal republic, as established by the Constitution with limited and specific powers, no longer exists. It has been replaced by a vast centralization of power at the Federal level and specifically within the executive branch. Members of Congress, more focused on getting reelected than balancing power, abetted this centralization. Equally guilty are the unseen courtiers who derive their livelihood from this centralization—the press, pundits, and "power elite" who cover, pontificate about, and populate the Federal Government. To Bacevich, none of this would matter if the Federal Government were not grossly incompetent.

The military crisis involves injurious attempts to "reinvent" war, enlarge the size of the Armed Forces, and continue the doctrine of "preventive war." Bacevich defends the troops, attacks their civilian and military leadership, and argues effectively that the failure to articulate and implement a coherent post–Cold War grand strategy further exacerbates our problems. He offers that a generation of leaders has replaced the need for a better appreciation for war's limited effectiveness with derivative strategies based either on specious ideology or military operations completely removed from their larger geostrategic context. Bacevich correctly concludes that the proponents of "shock and awe" or "net-centricity" confuse the enduring *nature* of war with temporary, often technologically determined, changes in the *conduct* of war. Bacevich, however, saves particular scorn for General Tommy Franks, offering withering analysis of Franks' campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq and asking rhetorically, "Does knowing Doug Feith is stupid make Tommy Franks smart?"—a reference to Franks' now-famous characterization of the former Undersecretary of Defense as the "stupidest . . . guy on the planet."

Bacevich has written an aggressive and provocative yet eloquent book. Blogs, newspapers, and professional journals are full of opinions and judgments, but none approach *The Limits of Power* in their confident conceptualization and organization of knowledge. Military and civilian defense professionals will find much to consider in this small volume. The crises that Bacevich cites are not intractable, but they will be extremely difficult both to confront and to solve. **JFQ**

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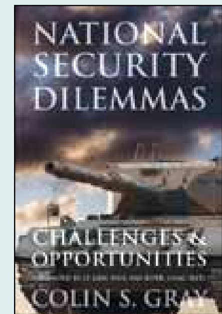

National Security Dilemmas: Challenges and Opportunities
by Colin S. Gray
Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2009
333 pp. $29.95
ISBN: 978–1–59797–263–5

Reviewed by
DOUGLAS PEIFER

Colin Gray has analyzed a wide array of strategic challenges in the course of his distinguished career,

publishing over 20 books and dozens of articles, and serving on myriad committees, commissions, and panels addressing British and American national security issues. One constant pervades his voluminous scholarly output: Clausewitz's enduring relevance. True to form, in *National Security Dilemmas: Challenges and Opportunities*, Gray hammers home several Clausewitzean themes that he has been emphasizing for years. War is a means to a political end, and one cannot analyze warfare in isolation from policy and politics. Uncertainty, chance, and friction are inherent characteristics of war, and while technology may solve certain problems and challenges, new difficulties surely will arise. War is a duel of wills, and strategists must analyze it in its wider context, to include its social, cultural, and, above all, political dimensions.

These themes will strike Gray's admirers as familiar—indeed, even a bit stale. And as a good Clausewitzean, Gray would be the first to admit that these persistent themes offer no radically new interpretations of the fundamental relationship between warfare, politics, and strategy. Yet where Gray earns his reputation for keen, perceptive thinking is in his elaboration of how these verities continue to assist in understanding the current security environment. In eight chapters, Gray analyzes topics such as defining decisive victory, maintaining effective deterrence, understanding revolutionary change in warfare, and understanding the implications of preemptive and preventive strategies. In each essay, Gray combines general, enduring insights and analysis with specific, contemporary recommendations.

Gray's opening chapter, written in the fall of 2008, seeks to avoid assigning blame for the "arguable train wreck that is American national security" while conveying realist disappointment over the serious, occasionally "truly gratuitous" mistakes made since 9/11. Rather than dwelling on the past, Gray provides six lessons that may be useful in the future. First, personality, individual judgment, and personal relations are vital ingredients to policy and strategy. Gray cautions that the George W. Bush administration was filled with hugely experienced individuals who nonetheless "suspended their critical intelligence" and based strategy on hopes and dreams. Second, Gray cautions that U.S. leaders must subordinate their proclivity to crusade for democracy, freedom, and open markets, and instead devise strategies that "fit" foreign cultures. Third and fourth, Gray advances the rather unremarkable insights that the U.S. military was not prepared for counterinsurgency operations and that stabilization proved more difficult than anticipated. In the future, the U.S. military must show more flexibility and adaptability, be prepared to combat irregular opponents, and train and equip for stability operations. Fifth, Gray sounds a warning that interstate conflict will not disappear so long as power and influence shape the international environment. Writing from a realist perspective, Gray believes that balance of power concerns will not fade within our lifetimes. Gray's final point is perhaps the most provocative: the shift to capabilities-led defense planning, while laudatory in the absence of a dominant threat, was profoundly astrategic, resulting in the waste of billions of dollars.

Chapters 2 through 7 are revisions of U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute essays originally published from 2002 to 2007, and while the pressing debates of the day flavor a number of these essays, most have withstood the test of time, and all contain nuggets of wisdom. Among the best are Gray's chapters on "the implications of preemptive versus preventive war doctrines," "recognizing and understanding revolutionary changes in warfare," and "irregular warfare and the American way of war." Less tightly reasoned and fully developed are his essays on "defining and achieving decisive victory" and "transformation and strategic surprise."

Gray's essay on preemptive versus preventive war doctrines should be required reading for those who persist in using these terms interchangeably. As Gray points out, preemption is uncontroversial, sanctioned by just war theory and generally conceded under international law. Preemption is based on the knowledge that an enemy is about to strike or, as formulated by Daniel Webster in 1837, is restricted to those cases where "the necessity of self-defense is instant, overwhelming, leaving no choice of means, and no moment of deliberation." Prevention, on the other hand, pertains to military action against gathering threats or potential enemy actions. These definitions are well known, but Gray's genius is that he moves beyond the liberal-realist-neorealist debates of 2002–2003 and instead assesses preventive war on its own merits as a grand strategy. He notes that those advocating preventive war too often simply assume it is more reliable than deterrence without recognizing that it is nonetheless war, with all the uncertainty, unpredictability, and friction Clausewitz ascribed to it. As a realist, Gray refuses to rule out preventive war in all cases, but as a strategist and Clausewitzean, he asserts that "military prevention is not, and cannot be, a doctrine, let alone the dominant national security doctrine."

A good many military officers, defense analysts, and planners may be tempted to skip Gray's chapter on revolutionary changes in warfare, content to let the concepts of revolutions in military affairs (RMA) and its offspring, transformation, retire into oblivion. Yet this would be ill advised. Gray provides a superb overview of how the concept of RMA emerged, and more importantly, situates it within its political, strategic, economic, technological, and geographical contexts. Thoughtful, engaging, and supporting his points with ample historical and contemporary examples, Gray is at his best in showing how and why context is important in assessing military revolution, transformation, and other concepts.

Even the best writers fall short at times, and the chapter on "defining and achieving decisive victory" leaves one with a nagging sense that Gray has set up a scarecrow only to soundly demolish it. He attacks the pacifist refrain that wars never accomplish anything. Wars decided whether Wilhelmine and Nazi Germany would control the European continent, whether South Vietnam would survive as an independent, noncommunist country, and whether the Taliban would continue to rule Afghanistan. Yet the more interesting question of defining decisive victory against insurgents, terrorists, and others is barely touched. Indeed, from the perspective of 2009, the decisive defeat of the Taliban in 2001 seems less definitive. Eager to refute misguided mantras that war is always useless, Gray momentarily overemphasizes war's political utility and neglects Clausewitz' insight that subordination to policy jostles with violence, hatred, and enmity on one hand, and the element of chance on the other, thereby making war both political and unpredictable.

National Security Dilemmas brings together eight thought-provoking essays by one of today's leading scholar-strategists. This eclectic collection offers a Clausewitzean, realist examination of security dilemmas from deterrence to irregular warfare, combining broad macro-analysis with specific recommendations and critiques. This collection should prove

most useful for those unfamiliar with Gray's work or in search of a convenient, single-volume collection of his contributions to the Strategic Studies Institute over the past 7 years. **JFQ**

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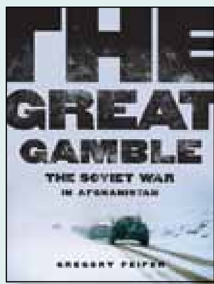

The Great Gamble: The Soviet War in Afghanistan
by Gregory Feifer
New York: Harper, 2009
336 pp. $27.99
ISBN–13: 978–0061143182

Reviewed by
JAMES THOMAS SNYDER

Gregory Feifer, a National Public Radio correspondent in Moscow, returns to the Soviet trauma in Afghanistan, just as that country replaces Iraq in the public debate. Once thought won and relegated to the status of a secondary front in the war on terror, Afghanistan—"the crossroad of empires," Feifer reminds us—has again attracted the attention of the United States, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and the broader international community.

The problems now confronted in Afghanistan exist in large part due to events set in motion by the sudden rise of a communist government in Kabul in 1978. Moscow was unprepared for the putsch that brought Hafizullah Amin to power, and his cabal appeared to the Soviets even less prepared to exercise control.

The motives behind the Soviet invasion have long been a matter of mystery and speculation. At the time, it was seen as a naked land grab, the first step through India, Iran, or Pakistan toward the open sea. But the Soviets probably never sought so far-fetched a notion as a year-round port on the Indian Ocean. Steve Coll in *Ghost Wars* wrote that the invasion intended to shore up a friendly but weak communist regime in a country whose ethnic and religious politics the Politburo did not understand, a viewpoint that Feifer shares. Feifer also notes that mutinies by the Afghan army, plus a nascent revolt in Herat, alarmed Soviet authorities enough to warrant an increased stream of weapons, materiel, and advisors.

But at least as important in Afghanistan for the Soviet mind was American regional influence. The Islamic Revolution in Iran, if anything, increased Politburo concern. After the fall of the shah, they reasoned, the Americans would certainly search for other geopolitical points of entry in Central Asia to hem in the Soviet Union.

Intriguingly, Feifer argues that the Soviets did not intend to invade and occupy Afghanistan at all. The historical record, such as exists in the occasionally murky Soviet archives, reveals nothing resembling a direct invasion order. There is simply one page of handwritten notes from a Politburo meeting of December 12, 1979, where the critical decision took place.

The document, written by Konstantin Chernenko—who was not yet General Secretary—notes only that certain "measures" be taken. Defense Minister Dmitri Ustinov, a consummate apparatchik without military experience who was abetted by a diffuse Soviet bureaucracy, in effect executed an invasion without an invasion order.

This may be difficult to believe, given the scale of the "limited contingent" that followed: elements of the 40th Army, including the 108th Motorized Rifle Division (MRD), 5th MRD, 345th Separate Paratroop Regiment, 860th Separate Motorized Rifle Regiment, 56th Separate Air Assault Brigade, 2d Air Defense Brigade, and 34th Composite Aviation Corps. On December 27, 1979, Soviet forces assaulted Herat, Bagram, Kabul, and Kandahar.

Special forces and KGB units had set up in the capital with orders to decapitate the Amin regime and install a replacement, Mohammad Taraki. The operation was badly coordinated. The KGB's botched attempt to poison Amin was discovered when a Soviet embassy doctor in Kabul intervened. No sooner had Amin recovered than Soviet *spetsnaz* units stormed the Taj-Bek Palace outside Kabul, killing Amin in front of the doctor who had aided him and his family.

Given daily experience during the following decade, the unintended nature of the Soviet adventure becomes more comprehensible. Soldiers lived in appalling conditions, fought with substandard gear, and hunted an enemy they did not understand. Local markets were well stocked with fresh fruits and vegetables, modern electronics, and warm clothes they could not find at home. This imbalance—a bizarre inequity for young soldiers of a superpower to experience in so poor a country—quickly corrupted the occupation forces. What began as an exchange of World War II–era rations for fresh produce escalated to the sale of weapons and equipment, theft, looting, and murder. The systemic inadequacies of the Soviet political and economic system compounded the immense violence wreaked by Soviet forces as they seeded the country with land mines, carpet bombed, and destroyed whole villages. With such benefactors, it becomes clear Kabul could never survive.

If the mystery surrounding the invasion remains impenetrable, Feifer unfortunately casts little light on the fateful decision to withdraw. Mikhail Gorbachev advocated a pullout long before he ascended as General Secretary. His agenda seems clear in retrospect, of course, but Feifer only infers that Afghanistan was a distraction from his larger vision. He does not explore how Gorbachev linked Afghanistan to the larger problems he faced.

Given such treatment, it may be easy to forget the scale of the commitment: 620,000 Soviets served in Afghanistan from 1979–1989, even though no more than 150,000 were deployed at a time. The official death count was 12,833, but Feifer reports that number may be closer to 75,000. A staggering 469,685 became ill or wounded, in large measure due to entirely preventable dysentery, hepatitis, and typhus. The Soviets lost 118 jets, 333 helicopters, 147 tanks, 1,314 armored vehicles, and 11,369 trucks.

It would be interesting to explore the historical context of the commitment. The Soviet military consumed 25 percent of the gross domestic product. Soviet military personnel numbered in the millions, armed with thousands of combat aircraft, helicopters, and tanks. Given the experience of the Great Patriotic War, during which 6.3 million Soviet soldiers perished, the Soviet Union could have fought indefinitely in Afghanistan.

But Feifer only hints at such context here. Afghanistan was the Soviet Vietnam, we remember from the time, and Feifer insinuates that Iraq is America's Afghanistan. Then what is the American Afghanistan? Feifer most intriguingly evokes, on the very last page, the wreckage of European imperialism on the shoals of the 1956 Suez Canal adventure. But as with this and other historical analogies, Feifer does not provide enough depth for a proper comparison. **JFQ**

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