

Marines with 7th Marine Regiment scout for avenues of approach and egress points at al-Asad Air Base, Iraq, October 2015 (U.S. Marine Corps/Akeel Austin)



Errors in Strategic Thinking

Anti-Politics and the Macro Bias

By Celestino Perez, Jr.

Simply the application of force rarely produces and, in fact, maybe never produces the outcome we seek.

—GENERAL MARTIN E. DEMPSEY
18th Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff
August 14, 2013

How can military professionals improve U.S. strategic performance? If General Martin Dempsey, who served as President Barack Obama's principal military advisor, is correct, American strategic

performance too often surprises and disappoints. Strategic discontent, which arises from the failure to conjoin strategic intent and actual outcomes, may well be the default expectation, whereas strategic satisfaction is the rare surprise.

American participation in the 2011 North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO's) intervention in Libya exemplifies the inefficacy that induces strategic discontent. Soon after Operation *Unified Protector*, U.S. policymakers, military leaders, and public intellectuals assessed the toppling of Muammar Qadhafi's regime to be a success. For example, in the

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spring of 2012, Ivo Daalder and Admiral James Stavridis, USN, published an article in *Foreign Affairs* optimistically titled “NATO’s Victory in Libya.”¹

Yet satisfaction with the Libya operation was short lived. Two years after Daalder and Stavridis’s glowing report, Daveed Gartenstein-Ross wrote “The Consequences of NATO’s Good War in Libya,” which included a dismal assessment: “NATO’s intervention was thus executed nearly flawlessly, yet appears to be a strategic mistake.” To wit, “the intervention in Libya left behind a country beset by instability, and has had a destabilizing effect on Libya’s neighbors. Taking these consequences into account, it is not clear that lives were saved on the whole by NATO’s intervention.”² The downstream consequences of Operation *Unified Protector*, including increased regional instability and loss of life, reinforce Dempsey’s claim about American strategic inefficacy.

This article, which presumes that military professionals share with policymakers an obligation to improve strategic performance, posits that two intellectual errors contribute to strategic discontent. The first error, anti-politics, indicates the Servicemember’s tendency to discount the military importance of ground-level politics. The second error, which aggravates the anti-politics error, is the macro bias in strategic thinking. This bias leads strategists and military professionals to neglect the importance of local knowledge and bottom-up dynamics. This error eclipses crucial strategies to mitigate violence through local solutions.

I argue that there is a strategic imperative for military professionals to study how lethal force and politics are causally interdependent, all the way down to the sandy-boots level. The macro bias in strategy formulation and military planning inhibits a satisfactory understanding of the environment, especially its sociopolitical dynamics; therefore, the integration of cutting-edge political science in military education would mitigate the foregoing errors and thereby improve the prospects for strategic satisfaction.

I first show how several top foreign policy thinkers and practitioners agree

that something is amiss in U.S. strategic performance. These thinkers converge regarding a principal source of strategic discontent: the persistent failure to understand the sociopolitical aspects of those places wherein American Servicemembers apply lethal and nonlethal power. More specifically, policymakers and military professionals too often intervene without understanding how military operations affect ground-level politics and, in turn, how ground-level politics affects military and strategic performance.

Note that the term *ground level* as used here is not a synonym for *tactical*. The term describes all interactions that make a physical difference in the world, whether the interaction occurs in the Oval Office (as when the President issues an order) or in Anbar Province (as when indigenous leaders gather for a meeting). Both interactions shape the landscape on which military professionals do their work.

Politics, in this article, encompasses formal and informal governance, economics, civil society, and culture insofar as these systems influence (in Harold Lasswell’s well-known formulation) “who gets what, when, how” among persons living in a community.³ Politics emerges from a constellation of causal elements, including:

- (relatively) nonmanipulable or structural elements (for example, geography, the global economic system, and the distribution of natural resources)
- intentionally manmade or institutional elements (rules, policies, regulations, strategies, and organizations)
- meaning-infused or ideational elements (such as communal norms, values, beliefs, practices, varieties of religiosity and secularity, and narratives)
- hard-wired or psychological elements (cognitive processes, heuristics, and biases).⁴

These four types of elements exert causal force, albeit in different ways, on human behavior. Structural and institutional elements compose a material obstacle course that people must negotiate. Ideational and psychological

elements frame how people perceive and interpret the world.⁵ The elements also operate simultaneously and vary over time. In the aggregate, they compose—via causal interactions between them—a population’s “politics.” If military professionals are to serve as politically attuned agents, they should acquire causal literacy in how political outcomes emerge—especially in the wake of violence and conflict.

Military interventions should help attain—at the very least—minimally acceptable political outcomes. Army doctrine mandates that ground forces exist “to create the conditions for favorable conflict resolution.”⁶ The conditions Servicemembers must create are, as Lieutenant General H.R. McMaster, USA, instructs, fundamentally political. He reminds military professionals that “war is political,” a fact he reinforces by quoting the 2014 U.S. Army Operating Concept: “Army forces are prepared to do more than fight and defeat enemies; they must possess the capability to translate military objectives into enduring political outcomes.”⁷

If military interventions often fail to achieve satisfactory political outcomes, they do—with much greater reliability—effect a tornadic reordering of those very political elements whose fortunate confluence is necessary for “favorable conflict resolution.” It follows that the military professional should study how best to nudge into reality, in cooperation with an international array of military and civilian partners, satisfactory political outcomes.

Macro bias is evident to observant professors and students in mid- and senior-level military education. Teachers often reinforce this bias with the admonition to “avoid getting in the weeds” during planning exercises or seminar discussions about strategy. The macro bias also appears on classroom white boards, which often betray a wave-top approach to understanding a conflict’s environment. At times, students (too) neatly arrange the elements composing “the operational environment” in an orderly matrix with columns labeled *political*, *military*, *economics*, *social*, *information*, and *infrastructure*. On other occasions, white boards provide little



Secretary Kerry and Saudi Arabian Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir at French Foreign Ministry in Paris before multinational meeting to discuss future of Syria, December 2015 (State Department)

more than a listing of abstract terms, such as *transnational crime organizations, drug-trafficking, corruption, and murder/kidnapping/robbery*. Sometimes only a scatter plot of country names, connected by solid, dashed, or colored lines appears.

The macro bias is most noticeable by what is absent. First, nothing in the classroom suggests that military students are performing scientifically informed causal analysis. Dog-eared articles from, for instance, the *Journal of Conflict Resolution* or *PRISM* do not appear on desks during planning sessions, and white boards do not reflect tightly specified causal arguments about current and future conditions. Second, students in military classrooms do not engage in sustained study of real-world contemporary crises—comprising actual populations, political dynamics, and armed actors—with the detail and skill necessary for adequate

intelligence analysis, military planning, or strategy formulation.

Reforming military education would be a way to account for ground-level politics and mitigate the macro bias. The integration of the social sciences (especially political science) in the military classroom could instill the very modes of critical analysis and creativity senior leaders desire. This reformation is feasible, especially for a subset of the student populations in mid- and senior-level education.⁸

The proposal to integrate social and political science in military education is consistent with the aims of the Department of Defense (DOD) and joint community. The Minerva Initiative is a “university-based social science research initiative,” whose principal goal is “to improve DOD’s basic understanding of the social, cultural, behavioral, and political forces that shape regions of

the world of strategic importance to the [United States].”⁹ Similarly, in 2013, General Raymond Odierno, USA, General James Amos, USMC, and Admiral William McRaven, USN, of U.S. Special Operations Command called upon the American profession of arms to “expand the dialogue around the ‘social sciences’ of warfare” as a way to reverse poor strategic performance.¹⁰ Finally, in January 2015, the U.S. Army War College convened an assembly of social scientists to produce a framework for understanding the “human elements” in the operational environment. The workshop’s sponsors included U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, U.S. Special Operations Command, and U.S. Marine Corps.

Efforts to mitigate anti-politics and the macro bias via educational reform will be difficult. One challenge is the potential for senior leaders to limit their efforts at

strategic reform to rhetoric and exhortation as opposed to closely monitored educational reform and talent management. A second challenge is a “bailiwick approach” among educators regarding what military expertise and advice entail; that is, the flawed idea that the military’s expertise, or bailiwick, concerns solely the unidirectional delivery of ordnance, whereas the reciprocal causal connections between war’s destructive and constructive elements are someone else’s (perhaps a diplomat’s) bailiwick.

Politics, Anti-Politics, and the Military Professional

Prominent thinkers and practitioners observe that the American polity suffers from recurrent bouts of strategic discontent. Henry Kissinger, in the *Washington Post* in March 2014, remarked, “In my life, I have seen four wars begun with great enthusiasm and public support, all of which we did not know how to end and from three of which we withdrew unilaterally.”¹¹ In his book *How Wars End*, Gideon Rose attributes the country’s war termination troubles to strategic leaders—both civilian and military—who fixate on war’s destructive dimension while failing to apply “due diligence” to its constructive, political dimension.¹² Similarly, Odierno, Amos, and McRaven attribute a strategic-level “repetitive shortfall” to the military’s neglect of sociopolitical dynamics: “Time and again, the U.S. has undertaken to engage in conflict without fully considering the physical, cultural, and social environments. . . . One has only to examine our military interventions over the last 50 years in Vietnam, Bosnia and Kosovo, Somalia, Iraq, and Afghanistan to see the evidence and costs of this oversight.”¹³ Strategic discontent, if the foregoing thinkers are right, has its roots in the neglect of “the political,” and especially the two-way causal connections between military interventions and politics.

Efforts to link strategic discontent to the neglect of sociopolitical dynamics are a recurrent theme among critics. This neglect is not solely the policymaker’s error. Military professionals also play a role. The

military officer should become an “expert in violence” by studying how violence—regardless of source—affects politics and vice versa. It is not sufficient to be a mere “manager of violence” who knows only how to deliver ordnance.¹⁴

Odierno’s own instruction regarding the military’s neglect of politics is emphatic and self-critical:

*The thing I learned most—and I always use Iraq as an example. When we went into Iraq in 2003, we did everything we wanted to do. We very quickly removed the regime. We gained control of the population. We had no idea or clue of the societal devastation that had gone on inside of Iraq and what would push back on us. We didn’t even think about it until we got in there. So we can’t allow that to happen again.*¹⁵

The application of lethal military power certainly affects rifle-bearing adversaries. But lethal power also disturbs politics, and this political disturbance in turn engenders boomerang effects on military and strategic performance. Odierno’s reflection shows how the causal relationships between military force and politics are reciprocal and hidden. His memory also betrays the existence of anti-politics, which indicates the Servicemember’s tendency to neglect the military relevance of sociopolitical factors.

Rose and Odierno are not alone in highlighting the influence of anti-politics. A 2012 study by the Joint Staff finds that the U.S. military’s number one shortcoming during this century’s first decade of war was a “failure to recognize, acknowledge, and accurately define the operational environment,” to include “information about ethnic and tribal identities, religion, culture, politics, and economics.”¹⁶ A 2014 RAND report echoes the Joint Staff’s findings by attributing mediocre strategic performance to the military professional’s failure to give due weight to “the sociocultural and historical knowledge needed to inform understanding of the conflict, formulation of strategy, and timely assessment.”¹⁷

The need to overcome anti-politics is not only a counterinsurgency imperative. It is crucial to all military operations.

Operation *Iraqi Freedom* began in 2003 as a conventional interstate war; however, it morphed into something else partly because of (if Odierno is correct) the U.S. military’s failure to appreciate political elements. Politics was similarly important to Dwight Eisenhower, who in 1942 lamented, “The sooner I can get rid of these questions that are outside the military in scope, the happier I will be! Sometimes I think I live ten years each week, of which at least nine are absorbed in political and economic matters.”¹⁸

If Odierno’s and Eisenhower’s experiences illustrate the centrality of politics to interstate wars, Major General Michael Nagata, USA, asks similar sociopolitical questions about the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). Nagata, the commander of U.S. Central Command’s special operations effort in the Middle East, declares, “We do not understand the movement, and until we do, we are not going to defeat it.” Moreover, “We have not defeated the idea. We do not even understand the idea.”¹⁹

Military professionals hoping to understand ISIL should consult the relevant scholarship. Over the past 15 years, a community of political scientists has become especially attuned to how civil wars comprise entangled lethal and political elements at the ground level. Stathis Kalyvas, an authority on civil wars, observes that “analysis of the dynamics of civil war (how and why people join or defect, how violence takes place, et cetera) is impossible in the absence of close attention to local dynamics.”²⁰

Kalyvas’s research program, which explores ground-level lethal and political dynamics, could help military professionals improve the efficacy of humanitarian interventions, transitions to civilian authority in the wake of conventional wars, and the prosecution of irregular wars. Yet it is precisely the intertwined lethal and political dynamics that military professionals neglect.

Senior military leaders, seeking to align the American profession of arms with the imperatives of the security environment, grasp the importance of overcoming anti-politics. They desire officers to expand their intellectual diet to

encompass the study of politics, including governance, economics, culture, ethics, and lethal power. For example, Dempsey articulates the need to study rising powers, nonstate actors, criminal organizations, religious groups, and ideological agitators.²¹ Odierno calls for the study of cultures as well as socioeconomic and political underpinnings.²²

The testimony of General Lloyd Austin, USA, before Congress illustrated how political elements are a top military concern. His 2014 and 2015 posture statements describe the importance of appreciating “the political, economic, and socio-cultural currents” that drive attitudes and behaviors in U.S. Central Command’s area of responsibility.²³ In March 2015, Austin more specifically described the “underlying currents” he must consider, including fracturing institutions, a growing ethno-sectarian divide, a struggle between moderates and extremists, rejection of corruption and oppressive governments, and a youth bulge. Most importantly, Austin insisted, “To be effective, our approach in dealing with the challenges that exist in the region must address these complex root causes.”²⁴

Any examination of “complex root causes” requires analytic attention, as Austin instructs, to ground-level politics. In fact, the 2014 Army Operating Concept states, “Army commanders [must] understand cognitive, informational, social, cultural, political, and physical influences affecting human behavior and the mission.”²⁵ A careful reading of this passage reveals two imperatives. First, military students must learn to proffer and assess causal claims. Strategies, campaign plans, operations orders, and mission statements are ultimately causal claims about the good things one hopes will arise if a commander employs his or her troops, resources, speech, and relationships in a particular way.²⁶

Second, the military professional’s understanding of causality must be politically attuned. In McMaster’s words, “We need to educate our soldiers about the nature of the microconflicts they are a part of and ensure they understand the

social, cultural, and political dynamics at work within the populations where these wars are fought.”²⁷ This imperative requires mid- and senior-level military students to *study* those political elements whose fortunate confluence constitutes “favorable conflict resolution” and “enduring political outcomes.” Put otherwise, this imperative requires that military teachers and students study the new science of politics and war.

The Macro Bias in American Strategic Thinking

Overcoming anti-politics requires attentiveness to ground-level politics. Political scientist Séverine Autesserre’s research program posits that the neglect of ground-level politics extends beyond the profession of arms to the international peacebuilding community. She argues that “peacebuilders” (including diplomats, representatives of nongovernmental organizations, and military officials) tend to restrict their analysis of a conflict’s causes to regional- or country-level actors and above. This macro bias causes peacebuilders working in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, for example, to neglect local drivers of violence and, thereby, local solutions.²⁸ Autesserre’s findings suggest that military practitioners and policymakers can, with fastidious attention to bottom-up causes of violence, improve strategic outcomes.²⁹

The macro bias, when applied to the American military context, comprises three subordinate biases regarding levels, anti-intellectualism, and compartmentalization. I briefly apply this argument as a plausibility probe to two excellent strategic education texts: Terry Deibel’s *Foreign Affairs Strategy* and Colin Gray’s *Fighting Talk*.³⁰ My aim is to indicate how these biases inhere in the texts. To the degree the works are representative of American strategic pedagogy and practice, the biases likely inhere in American strategic thinking more broadly.

The Macro Bias. Autesserre contrasts macro or “top-down” accounts of conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo with micro or “bottom-up” accounts of conflict. The former focus

on regional- and country-level actors and dynamics, whereas the latter feature local tensions concerning political power, land rights, and ethnicity. Autesserre finds that the macro bias “precluded action on local violence, ultimately dooming intentional efforts” to bring peace to the Congo.³¹

Deibel’s approach seemingly postures his readers to cultivate a macro bias. He insists that strategy is, first and foremost, “comprehensive.” Strategists are “to look at the whole picture” and make “a conscious effort to consider the whole range of issues in the nation’s external relations, those relating to functional concerns (like population, the environment, proliferation, or trade) as well as those relating to all regions and countries of the world.”³² Deibel warns against the “natural temptation of policymakers, confronted with crisis after crisis . . . to jump into the problem of the day and try to solve it.”³³

But the question arises: If the strategist is to cleave to the macro or comprehensive level (that is, “external relations,” “functional concerns,” and “regions and countries”), when are meso- and local-level dynamics to receive due analytic attention? A good strategy is tactically feasible; for example, it is feasible at the physical locus of intervention. But how are strategists to assess local feasibility and identify windows of opportunity without a granular analysis of local dynamics?³⁴

Colin Gray asserts that strategists should bridge policy and tactics, particularly with regard to feasibility.³⁵ Do strategists who strive to be “comprehensive” cultivate the skills necessary to analyze a variety of local dynamics and, thereby, assess feasibility? Deibel fails to address this requirement. It is notable that Deibel’s own proposal for a foreign affairs strategy specifies just two actors in his layout of the international strategic environment.³⁶ These actors, “countries” and “cultures,” are macro-level elements whose consideration does not penetrate to the local level. Yet such analytic penetration—as Autesserre finds—is a prerequisite for good strategy.

The Levels Bias. A derivative bias relates to the centrality that levels play in thinking about strategy. Gray speaks of



Secretary Carter attends North Atlantic Council meeting at NATO headquarters in Brussels, February 2016 (DOD/Adrian Cadiz)

“three levels of behavior,” each captured in his maxim, “Strategy is more difficult than policy or tactics.”³⁷ He adds, “Policymaking and tactics are not easy, but they are activities for the performance of which there are skilled professionals, steeped in relative experience.”³⁸ Gray suggests that those operating at the point of physical intervention confront more or less familiar problems. But this assumption is misleading, especially if the world’s complexity is scale-free.

Every potential or actual interaction that concerns policymakers and strategists relates to the ground level and entails physical effects. For instance, Gray speaks of seven “contexts of war,” including the political, sociocultural, economic, technological, military-strategic, geopolitical and geostrategic, and historical.³⁹ These contexts of war cease to be abstractions when they converge in complex ways at the ground, local level.

All interactions and proposed interventions are local; for example, a head

of state instructs a general to launch an attack; a local leader calls for his followers to commit genocide; a terrorist decapitates a journalist. Strategists and military professionals must not merely pay attention to “the local”; they must rigorously analyze it. For instance, proposals to intervene in a civil war (such as Syria’s and Iraq’s) must account for Kalyvas’s scholarship on the relationship between a civil war’s “master cleavage” (the country-level conflict) and the war’s many “local cleavages” animated by private conflicts and agendas.⁴⁰

The strategist should dampen thinking in terms of levels. The alternative, following the sociologist Bruno Latour, is to “flatten” and “localize” one’s worldview and focus more on concrete sites of interaction between lethal, sociopolitical, cultural, and technological systems.⁴¹ Moreover, and following the political theorist William Connolly, the strategist should adopt a capacious definition of “system” and “agency” such that persons,

terrain, natural resources, organizations, rule sets, norms, neural networks, viruses, and ideas are understood to be dynamic systems with agency insofar as they interact and, at times, create altered or completely new systems.⁴²

Examples of these system interactions include Max Weber’s Protestant ethic thesis, whereby an economic system and a cluster of interpreted religious symbols interact in concrete associations among persons to engender modern capitalism;⁴³ or a Syrian rebel uses an iPad’s accelerometer and global positioning system to adjust mortar fire;⁴⁴ or a volcanic eruption in Iceland engenders the firing of General Stanley McChrystal, USA, and the revamping of U.S. strategy in Afghanistan.⁴⁵

Strategic thinking, rightly understood, should not be confined to a rarefied “strategic level”; rather, strategists must now attend carefully to how their decisions, in the wake of an interaction *here*, might affect dynamics at



Soldier assigned to Delta Company, 1st Squadron, 8th Cavalry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, conducts presence patrol around U.S. Consulate in Herat, Afghanistan, January 2014 (U.S. Army/Alex Flynn)

the proposed locus of intervention *there*. Attending to “the local” is not optional, but a critical part of the strategist’s and military professional’s task.

Anti-Intellectual Bias. The implications of the foregoing argument are severe. If the strategist is to craft comprehensive foreign policies and strategies regarding Ukraine-Russia, Syria-Iraq, China, cyber, and so forth, decisions about prioritization and interventions must account for local knowledge. Since this intellectual burden is immense, strategists must integrate expert perspectives in their analyses, including scholarly, practitioner, and stakeholder perspectives.

The expert perspectives relevant to any single case will include a multiplicity of complementary and competing accounts. The strategist must develop the skill of examining and assessing these divergent expert perspectives and their attendant causal stories about current conditions and proposed interventions. This enquiry, called abductive reasoning,

exists as a scientific practice;⁴⁶ however, it is underdeveloped as a habit of mind appropriate for practitioners, especially military professionals and strategists.⁴⁷

The practice of abductive reasoning requires the integration of leading-edge expert perspectives; however, there exists an anti-intellectual strain that encourages strategists and military professionals to limit their reading to a certain canon. For instance, Gray writes, “If Thucydides, Sun-Tzu, and Clausewitz did not say it, it probably is not worth saying.”⁴⁸ Gray’s caveat takes on a disciplinary parochialism as well: “By way of sharp contrast to the contributions from arts disciplines, science and social science do not offer methodologies useful for the derivation of helpful understanding of the strategic future.” He goes on to assert that social science’s methods are “thoroughly disabled, not merely disadvantaged, by their nature.”⁴⁹

Gray’s instruction on this matter is unfortunate, particularly given his influence among strategic and military

educators. The 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review describes several potential threats, including North Korea, China, violent extremism, sectarian conflict, proxy groups, resource competition, fragile states, spillover effects, criminal organizations, militias, corrupt officials, and transnational crime.⁵⁰ Social and political scientists are producing valuable work on these topics. Clausewitz should be a staple in military classrooms, but so too should the science that bears directly on contemporary and future military work.

Deibel recognizes the value of social science, but he fails to unpack how this value translates into the exercise of strategic judgment. For instance, he spends nine pages reviewing older literature from scholarly and policy journals on the efficacy of sanctions as an instrument of national power.⁵¹ This exercise is fruitful. Yet Deibel should include one additional instruction: For any given problem, the strategist should consult the relevant science. This exercise would bring to the fore complementary and competing causal stories whose mapping would fruitfully complicate the strategist’s and military professional’s thinking. This exercise is the fundamental requirement of abductive reasoning as appropriate to the practitioner.

The neglect of abductive reasoning entails a two-fold danger. First, the military classroom will continue to rely on fictional scenarios and accompanying scenario reference books as opposed to real-world crises. Fictional scenarios discourage original research and thereby short-circuit the very skills military professionals and learning organizations require. Second, students will, in the absence of theory, rely too heavily on intuition. This reliance is counterproductive, particularly when much of politics, of which war is a subset, is hidden and counterintuitive.

For instance, anyone evaluating options to counter ISIL should consult the vast literature on civil wars.⁵² Also useful is Marc Lynch’s Project on Middle East Political Science, which renders much of literature easily digestible for, among others, troopers and strategists.⁵³ Officers who understand ground-level politics

and violence in civil wars improve their preparation for all missions, from security cooperation to conventional wars.

Compartmentalization Bias. Finally, strategic thinking suffers from a compartmentalization bias (which equates to the bailiwick approach plaguing educators described previously) whereby military professionals believe their role is merely to fight wars while civilian partners think about political outcomes. This bias led General Walter Boomer, USMC, to wonder why State Department representatives were not parachuting out of planes to handle the conflict termination phase following Operation *Desert Storm*.⁵⁴ The same bias led General Tommy Franks, USA, to tell his interagency partners, “You pay attention to the day after and I’ll pay attention to the day of.”⁵⁵

Compartmentalization is dangerous given that no expertise exists (or can exist) for achieving war’s constructive aims. No guidebook exists (or can exist) for attaining adequate stability in the wake of war’s destruction.⁵⁶ Since the thread of continuity between war’s lethal and constructive aspects is violence (whether potential or actual), the officer should cultivate the sensibility and skill necessary to proffer advice about not only ordnance delivery options, but also how to “win the peace.” Hence, military professionals—with the advantage of a comprehensive educational system—must read the social and political science Gray rejects.

Neither elected officials nor the military’s interagency partners have the requisite expertise about how to dampen ambient violence and stabilize environments. Military professionals must take up the strategic slack, since violence—including its dormancy, onset, maintenance, and dissipation—is military business.

Conclusion

If the thinkers cited throughout this article are correct, something is amiss in U.S. strategic performance. Two habits of mind—anti-politics and the macro bias—are contributing factors. Senior leaders, including Odierno and McMaster, sense that anti-politics is a problem,

which is why they implore military professionals to study the complex interactions among the exercise of lethal power, the sources of ambient violence, and politics. Similarly, Autesserre’s research program reveals that peace-builders (including military professionals) too often neglect bottom-up sociopolitical sources of violence and war. The need to attend to these political elements is arguably the principal lesson from the century’s first decade of war. Yet despite top leaders’ exhortations and a new, politically attuned Army Operating Concept, it is not clear that military professionals and their educators are postured for change.

Military expertise must entail more than the self-directed synchronization of command and control, intelligence, movement and maneuver, fires, sustainment, and protection. When a policymaker or superior commander asks for military advice, the military leader cannot simply proffer options for the delivery of ordnance. Military leaders must cultivate an expertise in violence per se. Put otherwise, military professionals ought not to be mere “managers of violence.” They must become “experts in violence.”

Experts in violence are able to proffer advice (whether to a President or battalion commander) armed with expertise about how the application of lethal power and ambient violence affect sociopolitical dynamics and how sociopolitical dynamics might dampen or amplify ambient violence and the ability to apply military power. Put simply, the new military professional should become an expert in violence as both an independent and a dependent variable. Strategists and military professionals must become experts in both ordnance delivery and sociopolitical drivers of conflict.

Fortunately, talented political scientists are doing groundbreaking work on the relationship between violence and politics while simultaneously satisfying the scholar’s ethical obligation. In Marc Lynch’s words, “Our primary ethical commitment as political scientists . . . must be to get the theory and the empirical evidence right, and to clearly communicate those findings to relevant

audiences—however unpalatable or inconclusive they might be.”⁵⁷ If the scientist has an ethical obligation to get the causal story right, the practitioner, especially the military professional, has an ethical obligation to consult the causal story. The place to begin is in the classroom. JFQ

Notes

¹ Ivo H. Daalder and James G. Stavridis, “NATO’s Victory in Libya: The Right Way to Run an Intervention,” *Foreign Affairs* 91, no. 2 (March–April 2012), available at <www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/137073/ivo-h-daalder-and-james-g-stavridis/natos-victory-in-libya>.

² Daveed Gartenstein-Ross, “The Consequences of NATO’s Good War in Libya,” *War on the Rocks*, May 8, 2014, available at <<http://warontherocks.com/2014/05/the-consequences-of-natos-good-war-in-libya/>>. See also Alan J. Kuperman, “A Model Humanitarian Intervention? Reassessing NATO’s Libya Campaign,” *International Security* 38, no. 1 (Summer 2013), 105–136.

³ Harold D. Lasswell, *Politics: Who Gets What, When, How* (New York: Whittlessey House, 1936).

⁴ Craig Parsons, *How to Map Arguments in Political Science* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 11–20.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Raymond Odierno, “Foreword,” in Army Doctrinal Pamphlet 3-0, *Unified Land Operations* (Washington, DC: Headquarters Department of the Army, October 10, 2011).

⁷ H.R. McMaster, “Continuity and Change: The Army Operating Concept and Clear Thinking about Future War,” *Military Review* 95, no. 2 (March–April 2015).

⁸ From 2012 to 2014, I led a scholars’ seminar at the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College titled the “Local Dynamics of War.” The aim of the seminar was to weave cutting-edge social and political science into existing modes of strategy formulation and military decisionmaking.

⁹ The Minerva Initiative, available at <<http://minerva.dtic.mil/overview.html>>.

¹⁰ Raymond T. Odierno, James F. Amos, and William H. McRaven, *Strategic Landpower: Winning the Clash of Wills* (Fort Eutis, VA: Army Capabilities and Integration Center, May 6, 2013), available at <www.tradoc.army.mil/FrontPageContent/Docs/Strategic%20Landpower%20White%20Paper.pdf>.

¹¹ Henry Kissinger, “To Settle the Ukraine Crisis, Start at the End,” *Washington Post*, March 5, 2014.

¹² Gideon Rose, *How Wars End* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010), 3.

- ¹³ Odierno, Amos, and McRaven.
- ¹⁴ Samuel Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1957).
- ¹⁵ Raymond T. Odierno, "Amid Tighter Budgets, U.S. Army Rebalancing and Refocusing: A Conversation with Raymond T. Odierno," interview by James Sciutto, Council on Foreign Relations, February 11, 2014, available at <www.cfr.org/united-states/amid-tighter-budgets-us-army-rebalancing-refocusing/p32373>.
- ¹⁶ *Decade of War, Volume 1: Enduring Lessons from the Past Decade of Operations* (Washington, DC: Joint and Coalition Operational Analysis, June 15, 2012), 3–4.
- ¹⁷ Linda Robinson et al., *Improving Strategic Competence: Lessons from Thirteen Years of War* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2014), vi–vii.
- ¹⁸ Harry L. Coles and Albert K. Weinberg, *Civil Affairs: Soldiers Become Governors* (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1964), 3.
- ¹⁹ Michael K. Nagata quoted in Eric Schmitt, "In Battle to Defeat ISIS, U.S. Targets Its Psychology," *New York Times*, December 28, 2014, available at <www.nytimes.com/2014/12/29/us/politics/in-battle-to-defeat-isis-us-targets-its-psychology.html?_r=0>.
- ²⁰ Stathis Kalyvas, "The Ontology of Political Violence," *Perspectives on Politics* 1, no. 3 (September 2003), 481.
- ²¹ "General Dempsey's Remarks at National Defense University," January 14, 2014, available at <www.jcs.mil/Media/Speeches/tabid/3890/Article/571921/gen-dempseys-remarks-at-the-national-defense-university.aspx>.
- ²² Odierno, "Amid Tighter Budgets."
- ²³ General Lloyd J. Austin III, statement on the posture of U.S. Central Command to the Senate Armed Services Committee, 113th Cong., 2nd sess., March 6, 2014, 4.
- ²⁴ General Lloyd J. Austin III, statement on the posture of U.S. Central Command to the House Armed Services Committee, 114th Cong., 2nd sess., March 3, 2015, 5–6.
- ²⁵ Pamphlet 525-3-1, *The U.S. Army Operating Concept: Win in a Complex World* (Fort Eustis, VA: U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, 2014), 19.
- ²⁶ See also Odierno, "Amid Tighter Budgets": "As we train our leaders, it's about training them to figure out, why is this happening? Then, what's the right tool to fix it? And we have to understand it much earlier in our careers now."
- ²⁷ "How Militaries Learn and Adapt: An Interview with Major General H.R. McMaster," interview by Andrew Erdmann, McKinsey and Co., April 2013, available at <www.mckinsey.com/insights/public_sector/how_militaries_learn_and_adapt>.
- ²⁸ Séverine Autesserre, *The Trouble with the Congo: Local Violence and the Failure of Inter-*
- national Peacebuilding* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).
- ²⁹ Séverine Autesserre, *Peaceland: Conflict Resolution and the Everyday Politics of International Intervention* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).
- ³⁰ The merit of the plausibility probe is to explore whether a given argument has sufficient warrant for further study. The probe does not produce a knock-down, unassailable argument; however, it can illumine a serious possibility worth considering.
- ³¹ Autesserre, *The Trouble with the Congo*, 10–11.
- ³² Terry Deibel, *Foreign Affairs Strategy: Logic for American Statecraft* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 13.
- ³³ *Ibid.*
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*, 152–156.
- ³⁵ Colin Gray, *Fighting Talk: Forty Maxims on War, Peace, and Strategy* (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, Inc.), 54.
- ³⁶ Deibel, 384.
- ³⁷ Gray, *Fighting Talk*, 51.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*
- ³⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.
- ⁴⁰ Stathis Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). For a contemporary example that extends Kalyvas's argument, see Kevin Mazur, "Local Struggles in Syria's Northeast," *Washington Post*, September 9, 2014, available at <www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/wp/2014/09/09/local-struggles-in-syrias-northeast/>.
- ⁴¹ Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).
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- ⁴³ Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Routledge Press, 1930).
- ⁴⁴ Jon M. Chang, "Fighting the Syrian Regime: There's an App for That," ABC News, September 19, 2013, available at <<http://abcnews.go.com/Technology/syrian-rebel-ip-ad-aiming-mortar/story?id=20296936>>.
- ⁴⁵ Tom Nagorski, "Editor's Note: Blame Volcano for McChrystal Eruptions?" ABC News, June 27, 2010, available at <<http://abcnews.go.com/International/gen-stanley-mcchrystal-icelands-volcano/story?id=11016455>>.
- ⁴⁶ Ian Shapiro, *The Flight from Reality in the Human Sciences* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 39.
- ⁴⁷ My current work seeks to develop a theory of political judgment that accounts for the problem of causality. This account applies abductive reasoning, which is normally written about as a scientific approach to hypothesis generation, to the realm of practice.
- ⁴⁸ Gray, *Fighting Talk*, 58.
- ⁴⁹ Colin Gray, *Defense Planning for National Security* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College Press, 2014), 15, 17.
- ⁵⁰ *2014 Quadrennial Defense Review* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2014).
- ⁵¹ Deibel, 243–252.
- ⁵² A small sample of the literature includes Stathis Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Ana Arjona, "Civilian Resistance to Rebel Governance," Working Paper 170, Households in Conflict Network, February 2014, available at <www.hicn.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/HiCN-WP-170.pdf>; Lars-Erik Cederman, Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, and Halvard Buhaug, *Inequality, Grievances, and Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Barbara F. Walter, "Why Bad Governance Leads to Repeat Civil War," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 59, no. 7 (2015), available at <<http://jcr.sagepub.com/content/59/7/1242.full.pdf+html>>; Paul Staniland, *Networks of Rebellion: Explaining Insurgent Cohesion and Collapse* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014); Peter Krause, "The Structure of Success: How the Internal Distribution of Power Drives Armed Group Behavior and National Movement Effectiveness," *International Security* 38, no. 3 (Winter 2013/2014), 72–116; Sarah Elizabeth Parkinson, "Organizing Rebellion: Rethinking High-Risk Mobilization and Social Networks in War," *American Political Science Review* 107, no. 3 (August 2013), 418–432; and Fotini Christia, *Alliance Formation in Civil Wars* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).
- ⁵³ Project on Middle East Political Science, available at <<http://pomeps.org>>.
- ⁵⁴ Rose, 231.
- ⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.
- ⁵⁶ Celestino Perez, Jr., "The Soldier as Lethal Warrior and Cooperative Political Agent: On the Soldier's Ethical and Political Obligations toward the Indigenous Other," *Armed Forces and Society* 38, no. 2 (2012), 177–204.
- ⁵⁷ Marc Lynch, "Can There Be an Ethical Middle East Political Science," *Washington Post* blog, July 3, 2014, available at <www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/wp/2014/07/03/can-there-be-an-ethical-middle-east-political-science/>.