

revised American strategy in Afghanistan and Pakistan focused mainly on counterterrorism in Pakistan, an effort to be accomplished exclusively from offshore so that the issues of American ground forces and a more vigorous effort at counterinsurgency in Afghanistan would be moot.

Gates recounts that he was never himself all in for full-up counterinsurgency operations in Afghanistan, but he believed that some of it was necessary. The Secretary's comfort with Obama's late-2009 decision on Afghanistan-Pakistan strategy favoring the Gates approach—one that viewed limited counterinsurgency in Afghanistan as the means to the strategic end—ultimately proved unsatisfying, however. Gates uses *Duty* to call out Vice President Biden, NSC Afghan-Pakistan director Lieutenant General Douglas Lute, and other White House politicians for never accepting the President's decision and for working to sabotage it in the President's mind "before it even got off the ground." It is in this context that Gates writes that by early 2011, he was increasingly confronted with "[a] president [who] doesn't trust his commander, can't stand [Afghan President Hamid] Karzai, doesn't believe in his own strategy and doesn't consider the war to be his . . . a President who was expressing premature doubts about his own strategy."

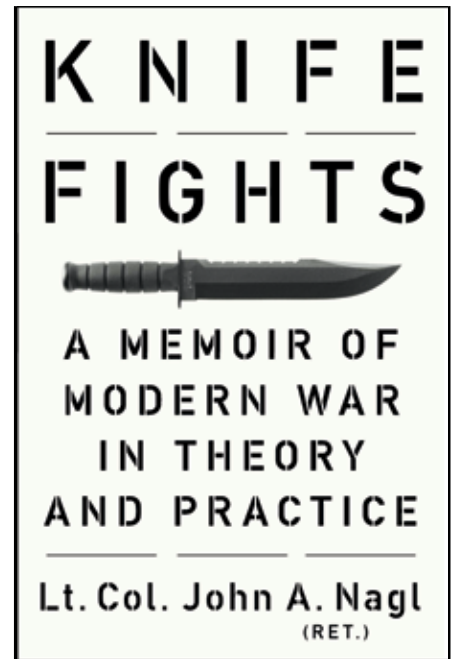
Out of office for just over 2 years when he wrote it, Gates seems to have intended *Duty*, at least in part, as a vehicle of external caution to President Obama and his advisory team in early 2014. Gates's passion for American men and women in uniform and his belief that their role in Afghanistan deserved the President's continuous full attention—much as it had consumed Gates's attention as Defense Secretary—resonates strongly.

On another level, Gates offers a unique vantage point on the special challenges of executive leadership in both bureaucratic and counterinsurgency warfare. Far from dyspeptic, *Duty* delivers a tone of urgency and commitment that Secretary Gates rightly brought to a trying set of missions at a very trying time. He demonstrates to his reader that he

"got it" when it came to achieving results in complex and messy military operations. He got it that the culture of Washington bureaucracy must be energized at the highest levels to get beyond business as usual, for a counterinsurgency fight requires exceptionally detailed coordination that can too easily become passé. He got it that Pentagon culture will snap back into one of a procurement-acquisition-budgeting miasma unless corralled and spurred. Bob Gates also got that change is a difficult but worthy endeavor. He implores both his readers—and those remaining on the Obama security team—to stay the course in Afghanistan and Pakistan and not prematurely pull the plug. In this exhortation, Gates correctly anticipates the unabating worries about U.S. force posture and strategy in Afghanistan that continued to consume the Obama administration throughout 2014 and 2015.

Duty is an excellent memoir of a free-speaking and self-critical former Secretary of Defense. It lays bare the emotional and bureaucratic grit involved with spearheading a complex contingency operation in hostile parallel environments: at home and in the field. *Duty* is an important work and a great read. JFQ

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Knife Fights: A Memoir of Modern War in Theory and Practice

By John A. Nagl

Penguin Press, 2014
253 pp. \$27.95
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Reviewed by Richard McConnell

John Nagl, the author of *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife*, offers an intimate portrait of the education, experience, and practice that contributed to his emergence as one of the premier advocates of counterinsurgency (COIN) doctrine during the past decade. In *Knife Fights* he provides an unvarnished description of what it is like to advocate doctrinal change to a nation at war.

Nagl begins his story by giving readers vivid and engaging accounts of his early formative experiences: undergraduate studies at West Point, his first combat action during Operation *Desert Storm*, and his graduate and doctoral studies at Oxford. These accounts depict a journey of experience combined with scholarship that laid the foundation for *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife*. Although Nagl's

experience during *Desert Storm* was with classic conventional warfare, he ultimately became interested in the ambiguous pursuits of counterinsurgency operations. It was at Oxford where Nagl came to believe that U.S. military leaders had walked away from COIN doctrine after Vietnam. This resistance to counterinsurgency operations constituted a hole in U.S. military doctrine waiting to be exploited by our enemies.

Nagl describes what it was like to watch that exploitation happen during his second deployment to Iraq in 2004–2005. He found himself in the unenviable position of attempting to unify practice with the theories he had studied at Oxford and use them against the thinking and adaptive enemies in Anbar Province. This section of the book contains descriptions of the difficulties military leaders faced because of the lack of planning for post-invasion operations. The demobilization of the Iraqi army combined with senior leader refusal to recognize a developing insurgency created opportunities that insurgents exploited. These descriptions will be poignant for readers who may have experienced similar challenges and ambiguities while deployed in Iraq or Afghanistan.

The chapter entitled “COIN Revisited” is one of the most engaging portions of the book. Nagl provides detailed analysis of the last 14 years of COIN theory and practice. Readers interested in understanding the positions of COIN advocates will find this section illuminating as it presents some thoughtful reflections by Nagl. He also provides detailed discussions of the importance of combat advisors in counterinsurgency and the need to provide language and cultural training to succeed. Nagl asserts that because most opponents cannot compete with U.S. conventional capabilities, irregular operations represent the most likely way future opponents will fight our forces. U.S. leaders who do not prepare for such a possibility do so at their own peril.

Knife Fights is a window into the education, experiences, and leader development of a warrior-scholar through two different conflicts over two decades.

Few senior U.S. leaders predicted the challenges that would result from the events that began on September 11, 2001. Nagl asserts that the need for ongoing doctrine, training, and leader development to deal with the challenges created by insurgents should have been anticipated. This was not the case, however, because leaders incorrectly assumed that after Vietnam, U.S. forces would never again engage in counterinsurgency operations. The consequences of this mistaken assumption would become all too apparent first in Afghanistan and then in Iraq. According to Nagl, U.S. leaders can ill afford repeating this mistake by discarding the lessons gained over the last 14 years at the cost of so much blood and treasure: “The final tragedy of Iraq and Afghanistan would occur if we again forget the many lessons we have learned about counterinsurgency over the past decade of war, and have to learn them yet again in some future war at the cost of many more American lives” (p. 234). JFQ

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China Strategic Perspectives 9
*China Moves Out: Stepping Stones
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by Christopher H. Sharman



In this paper, Christopher H. Sharman examines the geography, history, and strategic focus of near seas active defense, which is China’s current maritime strategy. He then carefully illustrates how the New Historic Missions expanded People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) requirements from traditional near seas operating areas to operations in the far seas. He next provides a strategic framework for a new maritime defense strategy that would incorporate far seas capabilities. He finally concludes by identifying several factors that, if observed, would indicate PLAN incorporation of far seas defense as part of an emerging new maritime strategy.



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