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# Strategy for the Blind

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settlement, and the longer this is delayed, the more difficult it will be and the greater our dangers will become.

"From what I have seen of our Russian friends and Allies during the war, I am convinced that there is nothing they admire so much as strength, and there is nothing for which they have less respect than for weakness, especially military weakness. For that reason the old doctrine of a balance of power is unsound. We cannot afford . . . to work on narrow margins, offering temptations to a trial of strength. If the Western Democracies stand together in strict adherence to the principles of the United Nations Charter, their influence for furthering those principles will be immense and no one is likely to molest them. If however they become divided or falter in their duty and if these all-important years are allowed to slip away then indeed catastrophe may overwhelm us all.

"Last time I saw it all coming and cried aloud to my own fellow-countrymen and to the world, but no

one paid any attention. Up till the year 1933 or even 1935, Germany might have been saved from the awful fate which has overtaken her and we might all have been spared the miseries [Adolf] Hitler let loose upon mankind. There never was a war in all history easier to prevent by timely action than the one which has just desolated such great areas of the globe. It could have been prevented, in my belief, without the firing of a single shot, and Germany might be powerful, prosperous and honoured today; but no one would listen and one by one we were all sucked into the awful whirlpool. We surely must not let that happen again. This can only be achieved by reaching now, in 1946, a good understanding on all points with Russia under the general authority of the United Nations Organisation and by the maintenance of that good understanding through many peaceful years, by the world instrument, supported by the whole strength of the English-speaking world and all its connections. There

is the solution which I respectfully offer to you in this Address to which I have given the title 'The Sinews of Peace.'

". . . . If the population of the English-speaking Commonwealths be added to that of the United States with all that such cooperation implies in the air, on the sea, all over the globe and in science and in industry, and in moral force, there will be no quivering, precarious balance of power to offer its temptation to ambition or adventure. On the contrary, there will be an overwhelming assurance of security. If we adhere faithfully to the Charter of the United Nations and walk forward in sedate and sober strength seeking in no one's land or treasure, seeking to lay no arbitrary control upon the thoughts of men; if all British moral and material forces and convictions are joined with your own in fraternal association, the high-roads of the future will be clear, not only for us but for all, not only for our time, but for a century to come." *MR*

## *MR* Review Essay

### Strategy for the Blind

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**THE NEW WORLD STRATEGY: A Military Policy for America's Future** by Harry G. Summers Jr. 270 pages. Simon & Schuster, Inc., New York. 1995. \$11.00.

A well-known, respected military scholar and decorated Korean and Vietnam war veteran, retired US Army Colonel Harry G. Summers Jr. is a former holder of prestigious chairs at the US Army War College and Marine Corps University. Best known for his *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War* (1982); *On Strategy II: A Critical Analysis of the Gulf War* (1992); and his weekly column in *Army Times*, his important associations and powerful influence make him one of our country's military intellectual elites.

With military and scholarly credentials such as these, Summers' writings carry massive weight, as evidenced by prestigious individuals' accolades on

the back cover of his latest book, *The New World Strategy*. But, like the naive young child in the much celebrated tale "The Emperor's New Clothes," I do not see what others see in this book. I believe Summers' treatise—while magnificently written and expertly researched—to be inherently flawed. Its critical weakness stems from a reliance on Carl von Clausewitz as a timeless strategist instead of as one whose ideas are rapidly becoming obsolete due to changing technical, social, economic and politico-military conditions. The danger of relying on such a perceptual lens is that it blinds one to changing world conditions.

Summers states, "What we are faced with is not so much a revolution as an evolution in military affairs, as military policies adapt to meet what Clausewitz called the course of events and their likely consequences." This statement asks the reader to take a leap of faith, as Summers has, and elevate

Clausewitz's thoughts to dogma. This striking statement also surfaces another concern of mine, far better articulated by Major Ralph Peters, US Army. He says, "The relevant institutions of the US government need to re-define themselves vis-à-vis the rest of the world, but we will probably fail to do so until the situation becomes so desperate, it threatens our elites and the money-buffered enclaves in which they live, learn and work."<sup>1</sup> Summers' inability to move beyond Clausewitz as a deity means he does not properly address many critical US security issues.

*The New World Strategy's* most important chapter is its brilliantly written "Dangers to Democracy." The shift toward operations other than war (OOTW), a now defunct term, as the principal military post-Cold War role is viewed as destabilizing because of the future potential it generates for a US military coup.<sup>2</sup> The solution to this

toward operations other than war (OOTW), a now defunct term, as the principal military post-Cold War role is viewed as destabilizing because of the future potential it generates for a US military coup.<sup>2</sup> The solution to this dangerous trend toward OOTW, which Summers views as taking place, is a return to our traditional Armed Forces warfighting focus.

A revulsion against peace enforcement and peacekeeping (PK)—or counterinsurgency as it was called in the 1960s—is understandable.<sup>3</sup> One does not want the “ghost of Vietnam past” to haunt an Army that has worked so hard and so successfully to put that traumatic experience behind it. Yet, since publication of this book, the Bosnia operation that Summers and many of us find so repugnant has finally begun.

If one follows Summers’ “Ten Commandments,” which provide a future US military policy, PK is to be peripheral. This means we should allow the military to fight and win the nation’s wars, as defined in the Clausewitzian universe, that specifically take place among nation-states. Summers finds it far better to create an expanded Peace Corps and tasks the Department of State with the mission.

Under such a scenario, our military institutions would remain uncorrupted, providing as little stabilizing support as possible, which has somehow been done in counterdrug operations. The fallacy of such a policy is it ignores a “revolution in military and political affairs” that is well underway. If we follow Summers’ advice and ensure that our military institutions ignore the new form of non-Western warfare developing as part of this transformation, we will make those institutions irrelevant to future battlefields.

War is no longer waged solely among nation-states, nor can we define war in the narrow Clausewitzian sense as a struggle among nation-states or their coalitions over the preservation and extension of national sovereignty. War is now a struggle among competing forms of social and political organizations based on simultaneous political regionalization and fragmentation trends that will decide our nation’s and the world’s future.

The character of other nation-states within this context may very well take on a different threat perspective. A

case in point—a hostile Mexican nation-state sharing our border would undoubtedly be cause for concern. However, our military forces as they are now configured would have little trouble quickly defeating such a belligerent. Conversely, a failed Mexican state that was becoming another Bosnia or Lebanon would pose a US security nightmare. Imagine the level of civil unrest generated by hordes of displaced, starving refugees crossing into US border states. It would not be easy to achieve “victory”—if this is even the proper term—against a fragmented Mexican state full of private armies, local warlords and drug barons in which war was the natural end state and peace an anomaly.

Summers’ is apparently blind to such strategic perceptions or that the global emergence of new warmaking entities, such as private armies, free corporations and organized crime networks, represents a principal post-Cold War US security threat. He does not recognize that the US military has won its final Clausewitzian struggle. The Cold War is over, and the United States is the victor. No nation-state fighting within the Clausewitzian paradigm can now, or in the future, ever hope to defeat us.

The Prussian military before its crushing Jena-Auerstadt defeat won an earlier struggle based on the principles of *Absolutism*. That struggle was set on the Continent within the Frederickian paradigm in the age of the dynastic-states temporally preceding Summers’ analytical focus. My point is that Summers’ policy recommendations are based on an old world that is passing, rather than on the new world that is emerging. He advocates fighting the old way, as did the Prussians. What we should be doing, however, is radically reforming our military as the French did during their Revolutionary wars.

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Nothing could be worse for our nation than believing Summers’ observation that “when it comes to military policies for America’s future, there will be no ‘revolution in military affairs’ either in that phrase’s narrow sense as an information-age battlefield civilization, or in the broader sense of an upheaval in current military structure, organization and doctrine. Generally, revolutions are sparked by catastrophic breakdowns of the existing system or by massive threats that the system is unable to manage. Neither is true today.”<sup>4</sup>

The sole intent of the revolution in military and political affairs initiatives is to fix our existing system before we suffer a catastrophic breakdown. Those issues Summers fears most have not been resolved. PK operations are a professionally repulsive form of warfare waged against subnationals and other groups that do not play by the unwritten rule that says, “Only nation-states legally have the right to make war.” These are the operations that will become central to our Armed Forces’ mission. In a war over future social organization, we have no choice.

Summers is right when he says Clausewitz’s trinitarian concept—the people, the government and the military—is the US military’s foundation stone. That a potential future military coup might take place within our nation, stemming from what PK operations are likely to do to our civil-military relations, seems a growing possibility. The fundamental question Summers refuses to address is how we effectively engage in such intrastate operations while ensuring our nation’s political and military institutions are not undermined?

Some of Summers’ policy suggestions in *The New World Strategy* make absolute sense in an age when hostile nation-states and emergent regional-states will concurrently exist. US and allied Theater High Altitude Air Defense systems are needed now more than ever. It is sage advice to have the capacity to engage in escalation dominance and to recognize we currently cannot hope to successfully fight two major regional conflicts. We should not continue to promote a policy that states we can. Summers’ book contains a wealth of other information and useful insights only someone at his senior level could provide.

Summers could yet make a significant and positive impact on the US military policy debate if he would reformulate his perceptions and policy recommendations within a post-Clausewitzian framework that accepts new forms of threat entities, the accompanying definitions of war and traditional nation-state centered concerns. However, as it stands, his cur-

rent work is an anachronism. Causing even further consternation is that *The New World Strategy* is so lauded by our nation's elite, because ultimately, it represents a strategy for the blind. *MR*

#### NOTES

1. MAJ Ralph Peters, "After the Revolution," *Parameters* (Summer 1995), 13.
2. LTC Charles J. Dunlap Jr., "The Origins of the Amer-

ican Military Coup of 2012," *Parameters* (Winter 1992-1993); "The Last American Warrior: Non-Traditional Missions and the Decline of the U.S. Armed Forces," *The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs* (Winter-Spring 1994).

3. Brian M. Jenkins, *The Unchangeable War*, RIM-6278-2-ARPA (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, November 1970). A concise view of the US Army's inability to engage in counterinsurgency can be found in this often overlooked document.

4. New concepts of politico-military force stemming from nonlethal technology; advanced battlespace concepts giving rise to new forms of maneuver; and global positioning system targeting allowing for precision strike and advanced command and control technologies that invalidate COL Harry G. Summers Jr.'s Luddite perceptions on military organizational change.

## *MR* Insights

### The American Civil War's Effect on US River Crossing Doctrine Major Stephen R. Riese, US Army

The US Army Command and General Staff College's Applied Tactics course introduces students to two river crossing scenarios: the successful 24th Infantry Division (ID) Naktong River crossing during the Korean War; and the 36th ID's failed Rapido River crossing attempt during World War II.<sup>1</sup> Both examples are replete with mistakes of poor planning and battle friction.

Another interesting American example sharing these common problems is the Union Army's 15 to 17 June 1864 James River crossing. It is significant because it predates the other two examples by nearly a century, was a typical Civil War river crossing and is universally considered successful. Yet, Civil War crossing successes, like the one at the James River, contributed indirectly to the mistakes made later at the Rapido and Naktong rivers by delaying needed river crossing doctrinal improvements.

The US Army began crossing rivers in earnest during the Civil War when hundreds of float bridges—pontoon boats connected with a wooden planked roadway—and trestle bridges—fixed timber structures—were constructed over miles of rivers and streams. Their life spans were often short. The pontoon bridges were especially scarce and typically dismantled immediately after being crossed.<sup>2</sup>

During May and June 1864, Union Major General George G. Meade's Army of the Potomac, and Confederate General Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia, raced southward

toward Richmond, Virginia, attempting to outflank each other. During this maneuvering, the Union Army made an unexpected James River crossing 20 miles east of Petersburg. This move nearly gave Meade the element of surprise he needed to take Petersburg before Lee could complete his defenses there. In 48 hours, the entire Army of the Potomac had crossed to the river's southern side.<sup>3</sup>

There is little question that the James River crossing was a success. It was described by a US Military Academy historian as "a model river crossing" and by Confederate General E.P. Alexander as "the greatest bridge which the world has seen since the days of Xerxes."<sup>4</sup> Although typical in most technical aspects to other Civil War crossings, it probably influenced military thinkers because of the bridge's length and the tactical surprise the crossing provided. At 2,200 feet, it was the longest float bridge in recorded history and would remain so until World War II.<sup>5</sup> Lee was not expecting the Union Army to come at Petersburg from south of the James River. When General P.G.T. Beauregard reported spotting enemy troops south of the river, Lee initially refused to believe the report.

The Union Army's river crossing plan called for two bridges across the James River at a narrow point near Fort Powhatan. Engineer Lieutenant P.S. Michie made the reconnaissance and selected three suitable sites, one of which was eventually used. What Michie did not consider, however, was the Union Army's current location—it

still had to march from Cold Harbor to the James River. Between lay the Chickahominy River, where Union engineers had constructed 12 bridges directly east of Richmond two years earlier.<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately, these bridges had been removed, destroyed or become dilapidated by 1864. Michie's oversight caused the bridging materiel intended for the second James River bridge to be diverted to the Chickahominy River bridge. In a 1923 article, Warren T. Hannum is critical of Michie's mistake. He suggests that, had the second James River bridge been built, the Union Army could have attacked Petersburg a day earlier, before the Confederate defenses were in place, which might have carried the city, preventing a protracted and bloody siege.

The James River crossing site was not an ideal one. The river's northern bank disappeared into a wide marsh that troops and wagons had to cross before arriving at the river proper. The bridge construction mission was given to the Engineer Brigade. Several of its volunteer companies were at the crossing site when the materiel arrived.<sup>7</sup> However, many critical supplies were not deposited on dry land but were dumped in the swamp "as though [they] had been struck by a cyclone."<sup>8</sup> The volunteers refused to obey their officers' orders to go into the swamp to gather the pontoons and begin the bridge work.

After a several-hour delay, regulars from the Engineer Battalion arrived and these work groups "sprang into the water, which was almost up to