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THE US ARMY WAR COLLEGE QUARTERLY PARAMETERS

Contemporary Strategy & Landpower

Exploring War's Character & Nature

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Lessons Unlearned: Army Transformation and Low-Intensity Conflict

Pat Proctor

ABSTRACT: This article examines the US Army's experiences and lessons learned during military interventions in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo. It explores why these lessons did not affect the Army transformation, directed in the late-1990s by James M. Dubik, John W. Hendrix, John N. Abrams, and Eric K. Shinseki.

Military interventions in the Balkans during the late 1990s demonstrated the US Army was ill-prepared for low-intensity conflicts.¹ Likewise, a growing chorus of critics warned the future portended not Gulf War-style, high-intensity conflicts but an increasing number of low-intensity conflicts.² Army transformers, steeped in a culture that emphasized preparation to fight high-intensity conflicts over all other activities, ignored these warnings and continued the Army's "transformation" toward an even more deployable, high-tech, networked force built to fight two nearly simultaneous "major regional contingencies" (high-intensity conflicts against conventional adversaries). This transformation culminated in the creation of interim brigade combat teams (BCTs). In the end, however, the two "major regional contingencies" America would fight were not against conventional adversaries but against insurgents in Afghanistan and Iraq. And, the US Army was unprepared to fight them.

The Army of the early 1990s was still basking in the glow of Operation Desert Storm, the stunningly successful liberation of Kuwait from the Iraqi Army.³ The surprising results of the Persian Gulf War seemed to validate the Army's high-tech, post-Vietnam War approach to rebuilding—supplanting the superior numbers of the Soviet Army with superior American technology.⁴ The focus of Army transformers in the wake of the Gulf War was how to fight similar future conflicts better by exploiting information technology in what was commonly referred to as a "revolution in military affairs" (RMA). Transformers predicted that, in future wars, the Army would have "near 'perfect,' near-real-time

1 The term "low-intensity conflict" refers to operations ranging from humanitarian assistance and disaster relief to counterinsurgency and counterterrorism operations. This is an imperfect choice, but I have chosen to avoid terms such as operations other than war, military operations other than war, or stability and support operations—in vogue during the period this study considers. Of course, "low-intensity conflict" comes with its own baggage, but other terms, such as "small wars" miss the fact that such operations might be large yet still have a character quite distinct from that of high-intensity conflicts.

2 The term "high-intensity conflict" describes combat against a conventional military force of industrial-age or greater technological ability.

3 Keith L. Shimko, *The Iraq Wars and America's Military Revolution* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 3027–40, Kindle.

4 Shimko, *Iraq Wars*, 167–78.

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intelligence . . . sufficient lethality with precision strike systems, and massing of lethal effects” to defeat any adversary.⁵

But the reviews for Desert Storm were not all glowing. Army transformers were concerned about taking nearly half a year to buildup sufficient logistics, equipment, and combat forces to eject Saddam Hussein from Kuwait. And, if the ground war had continued much longer than 100 hours, the Army might well have run out of critical supplies such as fuel and spare parts.⁶ Transformers believed the Army had to become more deployable and more sustainable.

Yet transformation would occur in the context of shrinking budgets and a shrinking force. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, Congress cashed in the “peace dividend”; defense spending fell and the Army shrank from 2.1 million soldiers before Desert Storm to 1.4 million soldiers by the end of the drawdown in the mid-1990s.⁷ The Army stood down four of 16 divisions and eliminated one corps in Europe.⁸

Moreover, while the Army was shrinking, the demands upon it were increasing dramatically. Between 1988 and 1992, the US military participated in 12 separate United Nations peacekeeping or humanitarian missions.⁹ By 1994, nearly 21,000 soldiers were operating in 70 different countries.¹⁰ The National Defense University’s *Project 2025* concluded the future held more of the same “demographic pressures, religious and ethnic passions, and environmental constraints [that would] continue to encroach upon and at times threaten [US] interests.”¹¹ The future seemed to promise not high-intensity, Gulf War-style conflicts but a growing number of low-intensity conflicts.

And more low-intensity conflicts did come. In the final days of his presidency, George H. W. Bush sent American forces to Somalia to assist a teetering humanitarian assistance mission led by the United Nations. Under President Bill Clinton, the mission in Somalia expanded until 1,200 Soldiers from the 10th Mountain Division and the 75th Ranger Regiment were engaged in what General Anthony Zinni, US Central Command (CENTCOM) commander, would later call a “counterinsurgency operation, or . . . some form of war.”¹² In the cataclysmic, 17-hour battle (October 3–4, 1993) immortalized in the book and movie *Blackhawk Down*, 84 American soldiers were wounded and 18 were killed along with 500 or more Somalis. The US forces were unceremoniously withdrawn five months later.¹³

5 Deputy Chief of Staff for Doctrine, *Reader’s Guide: FM 100-5, 1986–1993 Comparison* (Fort Monroe, VA: Deputy Chief of Staff for Doctrine, Training and Doctrine Command [TRADOC], [1993]), 1.

6 Shimko, *Iraq Wars*, 2994–98.

7 Allan R. Millet, Peter Maslowski, and William B. Feis, *For the Common Defense: A Military History of the United States from 1607 to 2012* (New York: Free Press, 2012), 11766–70, 11805–13, 12157–72, Kindle.

8 Millet, Maslowski, and Feis, *Common Defense*, 12157–72.

9 Millet, Maslowski, and Feis, *Common Defense*, 12124–34.

10 Gordon R. Sullivan and James M. Dubik, *War in the Information Age* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, 1994), 13.

11 Institute for National Strategic Studies *Project 2025* (Washington, DC: National Defense University, 1992), 61–63.

12 “Ambush in Mogadishu,” Frontline, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/ambush/interviews/zinni.html>.

13 Shimko, *Iraq Wars*, 2888–901; Millet, Maslowski, and Feis, *Common Defense*, 12260–98.

The disastrous outcome of the war in Somalia should have caused the Army to question the limitations of the RMA-fueled transformation in which it was engaged.¹⁴ Instead, the debate over the lessons of Somalia became embroiled in political recriminations. Defense Secretary Les Aspin Jr. was blamed for—and later resigned over—his failure to send armor to Somalia. The Clinton administration was blamed for *mission creep*. And Samuel Huntington led a chorus of national security experts questioning the wisdom of “nation building.”¹⁵

Meanwhile, the Army continued to march headlong toward ever more optimized, networked, high-precision capabilities. The Department of Defense undertook a bottom-up review that predictably concluded the US military needed to be prepared to fight two major regional contingencies—large, high-intensity conflicts.¹⁶ To prepare for these conflicts, the future Army began prototyping and experimentation with Force XXI, the 4th Infantry Division at Fort Hood, Texas.¹⁷

Army Chief of Staff General Gordon R. Sullivan predicted the future force would “be able to locate enemy forces quickly and precisely,” distribute that information “among all committed forces,” and “observe, decide, and act faster, more correctly and more precisely” than the enemy.¹⁸ This force would also fix the Army’s deployability problems by better “projecting and sustaining combat power.”¹⁹ The concept paid lip service to the need to fight across the range of military operations—against enemies ranging from “agrarian war lords” and “industrial armies” to an “Information Age peer”—but was clearly designed to dominate a high-intensity conflict environment.²⁰ The unspoken assumption was that an Army that excelled at high-intensity conflict would have no problem operating in a low-intensity conflict.

Low-intensity conflict, on the other hand, was a neglected area of US military thought in the early 1990s. The Army’s concept of low-intensity conflict—captured in *Military Operations in Low-Intensity Conflict*, Field Manual (FM) 100-20, and *Operations in a Low-Intensity Conflict*, FM 7-98—had serious flaws, such as an epigraph stating “peacekeeping isn’t a soldier’s job, but only a soldier can do it.”²¹

Army doctrine on low-intensity conflict also suffered from the contemporary relegation of insurgency and counterinsurgency to special operations forces (SOF). Restricted by Congress’s post-Vietnam aversion to military interventions, the Reagan-era model for insurgency

14 Shimko, *Iraq Wars*, 3027–40.

15 Millett, Maslowski, and Feis, *Common Defense*, 12260–98.

16 John Sloan Brown, *Keplar Legions: The Transformation of the US Army, 1989–2005* (Washington, DC: US Army Center of Military History, 2011), 1989–2005, Kindle.

17 John L. Romjue, Susa Canedy and Anne W. Chapman et al., *Prepare the Army for War: A Historical Overview of the Army Training and Doctrine Command, 1973–1998* (Fort Monroe, VA: TRADOC, 1998), 31–32.

18 Sullivan and Dubik, *War in the Information Age*, 15.

19 See Headquarters, US Department of the Army (HQDA), *Decisive Victory: America’s Power Projection Army*, white paper (Washington, DC: HQDA, October 1994), 8–9.

20 HQDA, *Decisive Victory*, 11; Sullivan and Dubik, *War in the Information Age*, 15; and Shimko, *Iraq Wars*, 3504–3507.

21 John B. Hunt, “OOTW: A Concept in Flux,” *Military Review* 76, no. 5 (September–October 1996): 3–10; HQDA, *Military Operations in Low-Intensity Conflict*, Field Manual (FM) 100-20 (Washington, DC: HQDA, 1990); and HQDA, *Operations in a Low-Intensity Conflict*, FM 7-98 (Washington, DC: HQDA, 1992), 4-1–4-9. This quote has been attributed in various sources to former UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld or military sociologist Charles Moskos.

and counterinsurgency in places like Honduras and El Salvador was to use small special forces elements. This SOF mission was codified by the *Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986*.²² The US Army abdicated responsibility for insurgency and counterinsurgency to SOF through the manuals, which proclaimed the activities were tasks best reserved for the elite units and that America's proper role in counterinsurgency was only to support a host nation.²³ This philosophy dangerously assumed a host nation existed and had the capability to combat an insurgency.

Counterinsurgency receded even more from Army doctrine during 1993: counterinsurgency was not even listed with other operations that occur in “conflict” environments, the ill-defined gray area between war and peace.²⁴ The dubious phrase “operations other than war” also replaced “low-intensity conflict.”²⁵

Justifying this diminution of low-intensity conflict in favor of a laser focus on exploiting the RMA to prosecute high-intensity conflicts better, Sullivan argued “we cannot optimize the force for a single threat. We must instead build a force with the capability to win in the most important contingencies, while retaining the versatility, flexibility, and residual force to win across the range of uncertainty inherent in our forecasts of the future.”²⁶ Elsewhere, he wrote “nation-building is not an Army issue, but the Army is prepared to support those agencies of the government which are directly concerned with that task.”²⁷ He also declared, “The Army exists to fight and win the nation's wars.”²⁸ This perspective sheds much light on “operations other than war” replacing “low-intensity conflict” in Army doctrine. Rather than “nation-building,” high-intensity conflicts were “the most important contingencies.”²⁹ Low-intensity conflicts were an unwelcome but unavoidable tax on Army resources.

In the aftermath of the Cold War, Yugoslavia shattered along ethnic and religious lines into four separate countries.³⁰ In and around Bosnia and Herzegovina, militia forces and criminal gangs—armed with everything from small arms to armored vehicles from the former Yugoslav army—engaged in brutal acts of ethnic violence against each other as well as murder and ethnic cleansing against civilian populations. These actions killed as many as 250,000 people and rendered over 2 million more people refugees or internally displaced.³¹

As the fighting grew, so did concern in European capitals that the fighting might spread to the neighboring Balkan states. In February 1992, in an effort to halt the fighting, the United Nations established

22 David Fitzgerald, *Learning to Forget: US Army Counterinsurgency Doctrine and Practice from Vietnam to Iraq* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013), 79–81.

23 FM 7-98, 3-2.

24 FM 100-5, 2-0–2-1.

25 Hunt, “OOTW.”

26 Gordon R. Sullivan and Andrew B. Twomey, “The Challenges of Peace,” *Parameters* 24, no. 3 (Autumn 1994): 4–17.

27 Sullivan and Twomey, “Challenges of Peace.”

28 HQDA, *Decisive Victory*, 2.

29 Sullivan and Twomey, “Challenges of Peace.”

30 Robert F. Baumann, George W. Gawrych, and Walter E. Kretchik, *Armed Peacekeepers in Bosnia* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2004), 2–3.

31 Baumann, Gawrych, and Kretchik, *Armed Peacekeepers*, 1, 4.

a multinational protection force that eventually assigned 38,000 troops, from 37 countries, across more than 7,000 bases in the former Yugoslavia. But the weak mandate for the force, its lack of cohesion, and the potpourri of caveats from the contributing nations rendered this force impotent; it was largely a spectator to the violence rather than an enforcer of the peace.³²

No ethnic or religious group was innocent in the conflict; all engaged in violence against civilians and ethnic cleansing. But the Bosnian Serbs were guilty of some of the worst atrocities of the war, including the murder of 7,000–8,000 Bosniaks at Srebrenica in full view of Dutch peacekeepers, 100 of which were taken prisoner.³³

In 1994, the United States and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) began to escalate military pressure gradually—primarily through air strikes. In December 1995, the warring parties signed the Dayton Accords, ending the fighting and delineating lines between the warring parties in Bosnia and Herzegovina.³⁴ A provision of the Dayton Accords was an international Implementation Force (IFOR) that would, among other things, establish and enforce a zone of separation, protect the civilian populace, and create the conditions for reestablishing civil governance.³⁵

The NATO force had a much more robust mandate and many fewer national caveats than the UN effort; with the additional effectiveness, the Implementation Force could compel compliance from each faction. V Corps Commander, and future commander of US Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC), Lieutenant General John N. Abrams commanded US Army Europe (USAREUR) (Forward) in Bosnia.³⁶ The core of the US contingent, Task Force Eagle, was the division headquarters for the 1st Armored Division with two armored brigades, an aviation brigade, and attached enablers such as engineers, field artillery, military intelligence, and military police. Altogether, the United States contributed 17,500 troops to the 60,000 soldiers of the IFOR.³⁷

The US support to Bosnia and Herzegovina during Operation Joint Endeavor looks eerily similar to the stability phase of Operation Iraqi Freedom. The Balkan state was divided into three multinational divisions. American forces assumed control of the northern region and assumed varying degrees of authority over forces from countries including Russia, Turkey, Poland, and Denmark.³⁸ Prior to deployment, US forces went through rigorous training, including a “mission readiness exercise” at the Combat Maneuver Training Center in Hohenfels, Germany.³⁹ After arriving in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Task Force

32 Baumann, Gawrych, and Kretchik, *Armed Peacekeepers*, 27.

33 Baumann, Gawrych, and Kretchik, *Armed Peacekeepers*, 27–28, 50; and Millett, Maslowski, and Feis, *Common Defense*, 12378–96.

34 Millett, Maslowski, and Feis, *Common Defense*, 12366–75, 12403; and Baumann, Gawrych, and Kretchik, *Armed Peacekeepers*, 29–30.

35 US Army Europe (USAREUR), *Military Operations: The US Army in Bosnia and Herzegovina*, Army in Europe (AE) Pamphlet 525-100 (Heidleberg, Germany: USAREUR, 2003), 16.

36 USAREUR, AE Pamphlet 525-100, 16-17.

37 Baumann, Gawrych, and Kretchik, *Armed Peacekeepers*, 37, 94, 120.

38 AE Pamphlet 525-100, 20–21; and Baumann, Gawrych, and Kretchik, *Armed Peacekeepers*, 94.

39 AE Pamphlet 525-100, 12–13.

Eagle executed operations and logistics from forward operating bases. Units tried to balance force protection with the need to interact with the population, developing a tactic of four-vehicle convoy operations. Intelligence personnel and linguists were always in short supply.⁴⁰

Army leaders raised in the doctrine and tactics of high-intensity conflict struggled to meet the intellectual challenge of operating in an environment where mission success required dealing with civilians, establishing civil governance, practicing the “art of street diplomacy,” and exercising a nuanced application of force under strict rules of engagement. Officers struggled to untangle a complex web of history and family ties, as well as ethnic and religious conflicts, to weave together a political, economic, and social solution. Young platoon leaders and company commanders were called upon to balance intimidation and negotiations, dismantle illegal militia checkpoints, and understand and interpret their mandate from vague international accords drafted by diplomats half a world away. And as soon as a unit finally understood its area of operations and how to do all of these things, it rotated out to be replaced by the next unit.⁴¹

Yet instead of addressing its unpreparedness to fight a low-intensity conflict, the US Army focused on what Operation Joint Endeavor revealed about continued problems with the deployability of the Army. Moving more than 9,000 people and 20,000 short tons of US equipment into Bosnia and Herzegovina had required nearly 400 trains with more than 7,000 railcars; 1,400 sorties of cargo aircraft; 400 buses; and 200 commercial truck convoys; as well as 42 military convoys. The deployment was further complicated by flooding along the Sava River on December 28, 1995.⁴²

During that year a Congressional panel, on the roles and missions of the Armed Forces, concluded that peace operations and operations other than war ranked among the four most “significant security challenges and opportunities in the years ahead.”⁴³ The Joint Force’s response to this commission report, *Joint Vision 2010*, was a defiant reaffirmation of the RMA and the US military’s focus on high-intensity conflict.⁴⁴ *Joint Vision 2010* was even more explicit than the Army XXI vision in arguing that operations other than war were a lesser included military activity for “forces optimized for wartime effectiveness.”⁴⁵ But, more important, *Joint Vision 2010* posited an idea that became a focal point of the debate over transformation well into the Iraq War: future adversaries would seek “asymmetry” by using “information technology” to negate US military advantages rather than duplicate them capability-for-capability.⁴⁶

General Dennis J. Reimer assumed his duties as the 33rd Chief of Staff of the Army in June 1995 and immediately endorsed the Army’s high-intensity conflict focus. Reimer continued to build Force XXI

40 Baumann, Gawrych, and Kretchik, *Armed Peacekeepers*, 95–96.

41 Baumann, Gawrych, and Kretchik, *Armed Peacekeepers*, i–iii, 126–27.

42 AE Pamphlet 525-100, 17–20.

43 Commission on Roles and Missions of the Armed Forces, *Directions for Defense: Report of the Commission on Roles and Missions of the Armed Forces* (Washington, DC: US Department of Defense, 1995), ES-4; and Millett and Maslowski, *Common Defense*, 12192–97.

44 Millett, Maslowski, and Feis, *Common Defense*, 12192–97.

45 US Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), *Joint Vision 2010* (Washington, DC: JCS, 1995), 17.

46 JCS, *Joint Vision 2010*, 10.

and, in February 1996, began the Army After Next program, a series of semiannual wargames augmented by continuous experimentation.⁴⁷ Projecting to the year 2025, the Army After Next succeeded Force XXI by achieving and maintaining “dominance” across every “domain” of warfare—the “air-, land-, sea-, space-, and cyber-domains”—through “knowledge and speed.”⁴⁸

The fact that the human domain was conspicuously absent from the concept was not lost on the growing chorus of transformation critics who were beginning to question the Army’s approach. Commenting on the insufficiency of current operations-other-than-war doctrine, Dr. John W. Jandora, Special Operations Command, insisted “military planning . . . must move beyond the Cold War mind-set and its preoccupation with standing, conventional forces” to consider the social, economic, and political aspects of the battlefield.⁴⁹ Historian Jeffrey Record was more direct in his criticism of transformation: “Our present strategy portends an excessive readiness for the familiar and comfortable at the expense of preparation for the more likely and less pleasant.”⁵⁰

As the debate grew, urban operations became a focal point of discussion. As early as 1995, scholars like Stephen Blank and Earl Tilford began to point to the Russian debacle in Chechnya as an alarming example of a modern military force humbled by guerilla forces fighting in an urban environment, among a civilian population.⁵¹ But debate over urban operations did not truly gain momentum until the Army After Next project stumbled across the problem during a wargame at the US Army War College.

A December 1998 report described the problem: every time the “red team” (enemy) was faced with the technologically superior US force of 2025, it would “dive into cities.” The enemy chose this course “for both operational and political ends.” The operational ends were to negate the “advantages in speed and mobility” and “diminish the effect of a US information advantage because forces are more difficult to locate, target, and assess.” The political ends were to embroil the local population in the conflict. The wargame report noted “urban operations will require a much higher degree of integration with local societies than has been the US experience heretofore.”⁵²

This tactic was asymmetry rearing its head in a way that *Joint Vision 2010* had not anticipated—the enemy forcing the Army to fight a low-intensity conflict. Major General Robert Scales, commandant of the US Army War College, began to wrestle with this problem the following year.

47 Dennis J. Reimer, “Where We’ve Been—Where We’re Headed: Maintaining a Solid Framework While Building for the Future,” *Army*, October 1995, reprinted in *Soldiers Are Our Credentials: The Collected Works and Selected Papers of the Thirty-third Chief of Staff, United States Army*, ed. James Jay Carafano (Washington, DC: Center for Military History [CMH], 2000), 3; and Chapman et al., *Prepare the Army*, 52.

48 TRADOC, *Knowledge and Speed: Battle Force and the US Army of 2025* (Fort Monroe, VA: TRADOC, 1998), 8–10.

49 John W. Jandora, “Threat Parameters for Operations Other Than War,” *Parameters* 25, no. 1 (Spring 1995): 55–67.

50 Jeffrey Record, “Ready for What and Modernized against Whom? A Strategic Perspective on Readiness and Modernization” (paper presented, annual strategy conference, US Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, Carlisle Barracks, PA, 1995), v.

51 Stephen J. Blank and Earl H. Tilford Jr., *Russia’s Invasion of Chechnya: A Preliminary Assessment* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 1995), 12.

52 TRADOC, *Knowledge and Speed*, 19.

Scales acknowledged cities presented a challenge to the Army because of the “millions of people that house [the enemy’s] political, cultural, and financial centers of gravity.” But his solution—sitting outside the city and waiting for the enemy to quit—missed the most important facet of this asymmetry: control of these “millions of people” and the “political, cultural, and financial centers of gravity” they represented was essential to the political ends that prompted US military intervention.⁵³

Other Army transformers likewise tried to dismiss the problem of urban operations. Army After Next experimenters Robert Hahn and Bonnie Jezior prescribed a dizzying array of high-tech salves—from jet packs to robots—for the urban operations problem.⁵⁴ For these analysts, cities were simply complicated terrain that obstructed movement and obscured vision rather than complex, human environments essential to the political purpose of future wars.

Lester Grau and Jacob Kipp, at the Command and Staff College, would not let Army transformers wish away the problem of urban operations: “Urban combat is increasingly likely, since high-precision weapons threaten operational and tactical maneuver in open terrain.” But their analysis continued to the heart of the “asymmetry” produced by urban operations: enemies would choose to fight in cities because they could “mobilize the city’s resources and population to their purposes.” For Grau and Kipp the inescapable quality of a city that made it a difficult and unavoidable military problem was the population of the city as the political objective of war. In light of this central fact, they insisted, both the Russian approach in Grozny—destroy the city—and the approach suggested by Scales—avoid the city—suffered from “an utter disconnect between the political objective. . . . and the military means.”⁵⁵

The problem of urban operations was sufficiently dire to prompt General John Abrams, commander, TRADOC, to commission a study. The results, from the Combined Arms Center did not offer Army transformers any solace. Roger Spiller echoed Grau’s and Kipp’s argument that the essential property of a city was its nature as a “human environment” and used historical examples to show how a city becomes an even more complex problem as it begins to collapse under the stresses of war. He quipped that Army transformers had taken to calling anything they did not understand “asymmetry.” He added, “That asymmetric warfare would be associated with urban warfare is significant.” He urged the Army to stop the transformation until it could come to grips with the problem of urban operations.⁵⁶

Bosnia and Herzegovina revealed the depths of the Army’s unpreparedness to fight in “human environment[s].”⁵⁷ Despite promises before the deployment that Operation Joint Endeavor would only last a year, Army forces conducting operations other than war in the Balkans

53 Robert H. Scales Jr., *Future Warfare: Anthology* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, 200), 211.

54 Robert F. Hahn II and Bonnie Jezior, “Urban Warfare and the Urban Warfighter of 2025,” *Parameters* 29, no. 2 (Summer 1999): 74–86.

55 Lester W. Grau and Jacob W. Kipp, “Urban Combat: Confronting the Specter,” *Military Review* 89, no. 3 (July–August 1999): 9–17.

56 Roger J. Spiller, *Sharp Corners: Urban Operations at Century’s End* (Fort Leavenworth: US Army Command and General Staff College, 2000).

57 Spiller, *Sharp Corners*.

seemed to have no idea how to produce a durable political solution to the conflict, and Bosnians of all factions feared the departure of international forces might lead to renewed fighting.⁵⁸ The 1st Infantry Division replaced the 1st Armored Division in November 1996, the mandate for IFOR was extended, and the IFOR became the Stabilization Force.⁵⁹ In 1997, General Eric K. Shinseki assumed command of the Stabilization Force and the 1st Armored Division again assumed Task Force Eagle.⁶⁰ They were followed by the 1st Cavalry Division and the 10th Mountain Division before returning for a third rotation.⁶¹ The mission continued until 2004, well into the Iraq War.⁶²

Reflecting on his experience as a battalion commander in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Colonel Tony Cucolo, struck at the heart of the problem. He wrote the “prevailing attitude among some senior leaders” was that solving political problems in Bosnia and Herzegovina “was ‘out of [the Army’s] lane.’”⁶³ Rather than seeking a political solution, the Army’s “measures of effectiveness,” to borrow a term from operations-other-than-war doctrine, were avoiding US casualties, preventing wide-scale ethnoreligious violence, and keeping the operation off of televisions back in the United States. By these measures, Operation Joint Endeavor was an overwhelming success.⁶⁴

Brigadier General James Dubik confronted this problem in an unpublished thought piece that he wrote in March 1999 while serving as the deputy commander of operations for Task Force Eagle. Discussing how to “reduce the time our military forces would have to be involved or the size of the military force required after initial intervention” in low-intensity conflicts, Dubik suggested the initial entry force in such operations be followed by a hypothetical “national judicial force” that would wrest the nonmilitary, illegal levers of power from the leaders that the United States wished to supplant.⁶⁵ It is telling that Dubik’s solution to the problem was that some force other than the US Army should arrive and assume the duty of navigating the political dimensions of the low-intensity conflict. This idea would reemerge a few years later, when he was charged with a critical element of Army transformation.

Professional Army critic Ralph Peters disagreed, insisting that navigating the political dimension of low-intensity conflict was the Army’s job—a job it refused to prepare to do: “Our military is determined to be unprepared for missions it does not want, as if the lack of preparedness might prevent our going. We are like children who refuse to get dressed for school.” Nonetheless, “when the President is out of options and key

58 Baumann, Gawrych, and Kretchik, *Armed Peacekeepers*, 121, 123.

59 AE Pamphlet 525-100, 21–22.

60 Baumann, Gawrych, and Kretchik, *Armed Peacekeepers*, 188, 204.

61 AE Pamphlet 525-100, 27.

62 Baumann, Gawrych, and Kretchik, *Armed Peacekeepers*, iii; and Jim Garamone, “US Peacekeepers Finish Bosnia Mission, Case Colors,” DoD, December 1, 2004, <http://archive.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=24700>.

63 Tony Cucolo, “Grunt Diplomacy: In the Beginning There Were Only Soldiers,” *Parameters* 29, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 110–26.

64 TRADOC, *Multiservice Procedures for Humanitarian Assistance Operations*, FM 100-23-1 (Fort Monroe, VA: TRADOC, 1994), 4-5–4-6.

65 James Dubik to LTG Thomas Burnett, thought paper, “Thought Paper-Similarities. Haiti and Bosnia,” March 12, 1999, James M Dubik Papers, Bosnia and Herzegovina, folder 5—unpublished thought papers, box 29—Task Force Eagle and Multinational Division North Operation Joint Forge, B-H 7 Jan 1999–circa 1999, Army Heritage and Education Center (AHEC), Carlisle, PA.

interest groups or foreign leaders are clamoring for American action, we are going to go to school.” Peters added, “The military must be ready for reality, not for its fantasy war.”⁶⁶

While the debate between critics and transformers continued, events developed in Serbia that dramatically impacted transformation and short-circuited the debate. In March 1999, NATO began a sustained bombing campaign aimed at ending Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic’s ethnic cleansing of Albanians in Kosovo. But, as the campaign wore on, it became clear that bombing was not going to be sufficient. The Serbs had adopted precisely the tactics transformation’s critics had envisioned; among other tactics, the Serbian Army was hiding in urban centers among the civilian population.⁶⁷

Yet it was not this asymmetry, but rather deploying the Army to the conflict, that changed the course of Army transformation. To counter Serbian tactics, the US Army deployed AH-64 Apache attack helicopters, along with associated logistics and force protection support, to a base in Albania from which to launch more effective attacks against Serbian armor. The deployment soon devolved into a debacle. Facilities in and around the airfield were insufficient for the massive logistic requirements of the aviation unit. Two Army aviators were killed and their helicopters destroyed in a training accident while preparing for the specific requirements of the operation. By the time the aviation unit was in place and ready to operate, the war was over—Operation Allied Force had ended and Slobodan Milosevic had capitulated.⁶⁸ Things got worse when a succeeding American armored force, Task Force Falcon, deployed into Kosovo to execute stability operations as part of Operation Joint Guardian. Streets were clogged with refugees and bridges could not support 70-ton M1 Abrams tanks; the deployment ground to a crawl.⁶⁹

Critics used the episode to argue that the Army was too heavy and too slow, rapidly becoming irrelevant to modern warfare.⁷⁰ This event had an especially large impact on Army transformation since the operation was overseen by Lieutenant General John Hendrix, commanding general, V Corps, US Army Europe and Seventh Army, who later became the commander of US Army Forces Command, and because on June 22, 1999, only weeks after this fiasco, Shinseki became the 34th chief of staff of the Army.⁷¹

From the beginning of his tenure, Shinseki had a very clear vision for the future of Army transformation.⁷² He would create a whole new

66 Ralph Peters, “Heavy Peace,” *Parameters* 29, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 71–79.

67 Millett, Maslowski, and Feis, *Common Defense*, 12417–441.

68 R. Cody Phillips, *Operation Joint Guardian: The US Army in Kosovo* (Washington, DC: CMH, 2007), 14–17.

69 Phillips, *Operation Joint Guardian*, 14–30.

70 Hunter Keeter, “Cody: Apache Units Need Equipment, Training,” *Defense Daily*, July 2, 1999, 1; “Kosovo Fallout: Army Readiness under Intense Scrutiny,” *Armed Forces Newswire Service*, July 2, 1999; “Army Says Apaches Were Ready for Action in Kosovo,” *Helicopter News* 25, no. 13 (July 16, 1999); Shimko, *Iraq Wars*, 3448–62; and “The NATO Capability Gap,” *Strategic Survey* 100, no. 1 (1999): 15–21, doi:10.1080/04597239908461105.

71 Phillips, *Operation Joint Guardian*, 14–30; and Eric Shinseki, “The Army-Intent of the Chief of Staff,” *Joint Force Quarterly*, 22 (Summer 1999): 113–14.

72 Brown, *Kevlar Legions*, 4385–86.

organization, the Interim Force.⁷³ The first purpose of the Interim Force was to provide an organization for testing the tactics and structure of an eventual Objective Force. But the force also had another purpose: to cure the Army's deployability woes.⁷⁴ The Interim Force—equipped with medium-weight, 20-ton armored vehicles—would fill the gap between heavy forces, which were lethal, mobile, and survivable, but took months to get to a theater of operations, and light forces, which were rapidly deployable but not survivable or self-sustaining beyond a few days. The Interim Force would have the deployability of light forces and be able to leverage the technology from the RMA to provide the lethality and staying power of heavy forces. Moreover, this transformation was not going to happen in 2025. Shinseki wanted the first interim BCTs fielded in three years.⁷⁵

To head the actual training, manning, and equipping of the teams, Shinseki chose Dubik. The first two brigades chosen for the transformation were at Fort Lewis, Washington. One armor brigade and one light infantry brigade were selected so the new doctrine could benefit from the best practices of each type of force. Hendrix and Abrams directly supervised Dubik's efforts.⁷⁶

In a massive bureaucracy like the Army, adopting a new combat system—let alone an entirely new type of unit—usually takes a decade or more. In that respect, the creation of the interim BCTs in only three years was a masterpiece of strategic leadership worthy of its own study.⁷⁷ But on a more fundamental level, the effort must be judged a failure. The brigades did successfully bridge the deployability gap between light and heavy forces; but they failed to bridge the more profound capability gap: a lack of competency in low-intensity conflict.

The Interim Force was unequivocally designed for high-intensity conflict. Even with the benefit of hindsight, when asked directly if the interim BCTs were intended to address shortfalls in executing operations other than war, Shinseki still insists they were intended to dominate “conventional” operations.⁷⁸ Dubik, as well as the documentary evidence from the time confirms this stance. The organizational and operational concept, which served as the blueprint for developing the interim BCTs, repeatedly claimed the units would be a “full spectrum, combat force.”⁷⁹ But the concept also acknowledged the interim BCT was “designed and optimized primarily for employment in small scale contingency operations” (smaller high-intensity conflicts).⁸⁰ These teams could only succeed in “stability and support operations” (low-intensity conflicts) with significant “augmentations.” Moreover, even with augmentation,

73 John Sloan Brown (former director, General Eric K. Shinseki's Special Staff Study Group and former chief, Center for Military History), interview with author, December 15, 2016; and Brown, *Keylar Legions*, 4462–83.

74 James M. Dubik, *The Army's "Twofer": The Dual Role of the Interim Force*, Land Warfare Paper 39 (Arlington, VA: Association of the US Army, 2001).

75 Eric K. Shinseki, “Address to the Eisenhower Luncheon” (speech, 45th Annual Meeting of the Association of the United States Army, 12 October 1999).

76 James M. Dubik (former deputy commanding general for transformation, TRADOC), interview with author, November 17, 2016.

77 Harold Kennedy, “Army Approaches Decision on Interim Combat Vehicle,” *National Defense*, September 1, 2000.

78 Eric K. Shinseki (former chief of staff, US Army), interview with author, October 21, 2016.

79 Dubik, interview.

80 HQDA, *Operations*, FM 3-0 (Washington, DC: HQDA, 2001), 1-14–1-17.

they were only capable of serving in stability and support operations “as an initial entry force and/or as a guarantor to provide security for stability forces.”⁸¹ This concept was the reemergence of Dubik’s national judicial force, a hypothetical “other” force that would arrive to do the dirty work of navigating the political dimension of low-intensity conflict so that the Army would not have to do so.⁸²

The concept paid little attention to concerns over urban operations and asymmetry, repeatedly insisting the design to dominate in “urban and complex terrain” and acknowledging the future operating environment would entail “asymmetry.”⁸³ But the conflation of “urban and complex terrain” is telling. The organizational and operational concept never connected urban operations to dealing with a population or the loss of information dominance. Moreover, “urban and complex terrain” was simply terrain that was complicated, an obstacle to movement and observation that would be overcome by superior mobility and networks.⁸⁴ Likewise, asymmetry was stripped of its messy association with urban operations, guerilla warfare, and civilian populations. Instead it was defined in terms of enemy technologies that could deny access to a theater of operations or produce mass US casualties.⁸⁵ The interim BCT was a giant leap toward greater deployability and lethality, but it did not solve the problem of low-intensity conflict, particularly the political dimension, which transformation’s critics identified as the true asymmetry of urban operations.

In fact, the Army never solved the problems of low-intensity conflict or its political dimension. Thus, when the twin towers fell on September 11, 2001, the stage was set for a slow-motion military disaster. The apparent “cheap win” in Afghanistan through special operations forces and airpower further validated transformers’ convictions that technology could supplant numbers.⁸⁶ The Army that invaded Iraq in March 2003 was tragically ill-prepared for the character of warfare that it ultimately faced. While the depleted Iraqi Army rapidly melted before the advance of the vastly superior American Army, it did not disappear. Instead, the Iraqi soldiers hid among the population, evading America’s high-tech surveillance and precision strike capabilities. Once Saddam’s regime was toppled, the Iraqi Army reemerged, not as a conventional military threat but as an insurgency that severely challenged America’s halting efforts to establish a new Iraqi government. Other adversaries

81 TRADOC, “The Brigade Combat Team, Organizational and Operational Concept,” January 6, 2000, Fort Monroe, VA, 1-13, James M Dubik Papers, Box 2—Official Correspondence Email Traffic Received from 20 to 5 January 2000, Folder 7—Official Correspondence-Email Traffic Received in January 2000 (part 19 of 20), AHEC.

82 Dubik, “Thought Paper-Similarities.”

83 TRADOC, “Brigade Combat Team,” 1-13; and TRADOC, “Chapter 2 Assessment of Operational Environment,” Fort Monroe, VA, November 2, 1999, 1-14, James M Dubik Papers, Box 2—Official Correspondence Email Traffic Received from 20 to 5 January 2000, Folder 6—Official Correspondence-Email Traffic Received in January 2000 (part 18 of 20), AHEC.

84 TRADOC, “Brigade Combat Team,” 1-13.

85 TRADOC, “Assessment of Operational Environment,” 1-14.

86 Millett, Maslowski, and Feis, *Common Defense*, 12781–84.

also emerged, including Shia militias, Sunni extremists, and foreign terrorist groups.⁸⁷

America continues to pay the price for its Army's initial unpreparedness for the low-intensity conflict in Iraq. The Army also remains engaged in other low-intensity conflicts in Syria and Afghanistan. The Army has resumed its headlong march toward ever-greater capability to fight high-intensity conflicts. Since the end of the Vietnam War, the Army has been asked to fight less than 30 total days of high-intensity conflict. In this same period, it has been asked to fight dozens of low-intensity conflicts, many running years in duration. It is time that the Army reshaped itself not only to fight and win the nation's battles but to fight and win the nation's wars—including the messy postconflict stability phase of future wars.

87 Michael R. Gordon and Bernard E. Trainor, *Cobra II: The Inside Story of the Invasion and Occupation of Iraq* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2006); Thomas E. Ricks, *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006); Dexter Filkins, *The Forever War* (New York: Random House, 2008); Bob Woodward, *State of Denial: Bush at War, Part III* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006); James A. Baker III et. al., *Iraq Study Group Report: The Way Forward—A New Approach* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 2006); and Michael R. Gordon and Bernard E. Trainor, *The Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq, from George W. Bush to Barack Obama* (New York: Pantheon, 2012).