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# Factotum

## The US Military in the Twenty-First Century

LT COL RYAN SANFORD, US AIR FORCE

History has not ended, certainly not as Francis Fukuyama asserted it would following the end of the Cold War.<sup>1</sup> The enduring nature of strategy and war tick on like the mechanical movement of a timepiece. While the character of twenty-first-century conflict and its concomitant forms of warfare appear chameleon-like, an enduring nature remains. Certainly, the Soviet Union's demise hearkened novel "nation-building" and peacekeeping efforts in Eastern Europe, followed shortly by a war on terrorism. Still, novelty allures. There is sagacity, however, in a prophet's word that there is nothing new under the sun. Hence, the proper role of the US military is the same as it was since the nation's birth: it is a servant of the state. This truism borders on banality and requires qualification. As Martin Cook asserted, "The United States finds itself at a moment history hands to few . . . [which] challenges . . . our thinking about the . . . role of the profession of arms."<sup>2</sup> Despite this revelation, frustration fomented when civilian leadership asks the military to accomplish tasks not typically considered native to its abilities.<sup>3</sup> Despite changes in the strategic environment, they are "unique in detail, not in kind"; thus, the US military's proper role remains constant as the dutiful servant of the state.<sup>4</sup>

The emergence of a bipolarity amid the international order and advent of nuclear weapons motivated Morris Janowitz to reconsider the profession of the military officer. He assessed that the boundary conditions engendered by the Cold War antagonists necessitated a new role for the military, that of a constabulary force.<sup>5</sup> This force would operate across the spectrum of conflict, from nuclear war to "wars among the people," always prepared to seek "viable international relations, rather than victory."<sup>6</sup> While portions of the Vietnam War and other conflicts exhibited characteristics evocative of conventional conflict, experiences post-victory in Iraq and Afghanistan and peacekeeping efforts in Europe and Africa suggest Janowitz was quite prescient. Whether it is helpful to cast war in different hues—such as irregular, regular, and hybrid—remains to be determined.<sup>7</sup> However, the past seven decades belie a context suggesting the need for the dutiful servant to function as a constabulary.

Operations other than full-scale war seem likely in the future, especially peacekeeping and stability efforts. On the African continent, where colonial machinations ossified into a panoply of weak, fierce, and warlord states, American peace-

keeping and stability assistance efforts persist with no real end in sight.<sup>8</sup> In such contexts, the military must remember, however, the objective is not enemy-centric but is the population itself, if it has any hope of achieving its designated political purpose—that is, to quell the conflict.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, modern conflict may no longer be a duel or dialectic between just two parties.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, the message force “offers [is] an interpretative template . . . used to persuade audiences . . . in a given way.”<sup>11</sup> Yet, how polities perceive an antagonist’s policy aims matters just as much as how such aims obtain.<sup>12</sup> As such, American political and military leaders must remember that although conflicts among the people exhibit characteristics different from conventional war, strategic theory is universal.<sup>13</sup> Ends, ways, and means must mutually enable one another to ensure coherence in the strategic narrative.<sup>14</sup>



(US Army photo by Sgt Aubry Buzek)

**Figure 1. US forces serve as a constabulary.** US Army Soldiers assigned to the 2nd Battalion, 502nd Infantry Regiment navigate a low-water crossing with members of the Ethiopian National Defense Force during a cordon and search training exercise at the Hurso Training Center near Dire Dawa, Ethiopia, 19 July 2019. The situational training exercise was conducted as part of Justified Accord 2019. Justified Accord is an annual combined, joint exercise designed to strengthen partnerships, increase interoperability, and enhance the capability and capacity of international participants to promote regional security and support peacekeeping operations for the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM).



Despite the prevalence of irregular or nontraditional warfare, new technologies usher in additional considerations for tasking the US military. In space, a militarized realm from the onset—the Soviet satellite Sputnik was a military satellite—the threat of weaponization pulls like gravity on much of the strategic space literature.<sup>15</sup> Current US space law and executive policy, however, set the stage for broadening the discourse to include commercial exploitation of space.<sup>16</sup> Thus, the military, besides adapting to defending US interests in and through space, may soon don the mantle of protecting commercial space exploration beyond merely Earth's orbit. Historically, state protection follows merchant endeavors in a “flag follows trade” fashion.<sup>17</sup> Consequently, the US military, specifically the US Space Force, must prepare for such a role, potentially in the vein of the US Coast Guard as a space guardian—or as international space constabulary—in addition to the extant task of defending against and deterring adversaries in space.<sup>18</sup>

Cyberspace, too, promises to foist upon the US military tasks traditionally conceived for law enforcement and intelligence communities. The Department of Defense's 2018 *Cyber Strategy* averred that it would “defend forward to disrupt or halt malicious cyber activity at its source, including activity that falls below the level of armed conflict.”<sup>19</sup> Such admission inheres tasks not traditionally conceived under the auspices of Title 50 United States Code. Cyberpower may not be a panacea or independently, strategically decisive, but the military must adapt to a constabulary role in cyberspace.<sup>20</sup> By cultivating operators engrained with a multi-domain ethos, the military can posture, “ever-ready” to serve and protect American interests.<sup>21</sup>

While twenty-first-century conflict exhibits characteristics foreign to earlier times, the quintessence of war and the role of the US military remain unchanged. “Tools and agents change.”<sup>22</sup> Advances in cyber, space, and robotic capabilities precipitate changes in warfare, and since the nation “cannot always pick [its] fights,” it must be ready for these myriad capabilities and tasks.<sup>23</sup> However, “war and strategy do not change their nature.”<sup>24</sup> Indeed, war is still “a true political instrument, a continuation of political intercourse, carried on by other means.”<sup>25</sup> Notwithstanding Emile Simpson's recognition of multiple audiences in said intercourse, policy reigns supreme.<sup>26</sup>

The proper role of the military, therefore, remains the servant of the state—whether as a peacekeeping force or a space guardian. Equally important, the military, through its officer corps, retains the lesser included role of “manager of violence.”<sup>27</sup> Whether employing autonomous systems, “pushbutton” cyberattacks, or executing counterinsurgency campaigns, the management of violence necessitates moral behavior within the conflict, or *jus in bello*. Morality in war is even more critical, given that the strategic narrative engendered by the use of force

loses legitimacy and viability when the managers thereof wield such force immorally. The imperative to adhere to just war principles is not novel. The ability to wage war remotely and perhaps highly asymmetrically, or to participate in civil wars where legitimacy correlates inversely with indiscriminate violence, however, reinforces such a moral imperative.<sup>28</sup>

Being a dutiful servant certainly requires ethical and moral conduct within conflict—lest misconduct warp the strategic narrative and hinder intended aims. The role also requires the military to participate in aspects of the justification for war, or *jus ad bellum*. At times, however, the military has abdicated such responsibility.<sup>29</sup> Current policy, however, calls for a military able to compete across the spectrum of conflict; thus, the military must explain when it can or cannot compete as desired.<sup>30</sup> The military is an instrument of policy, but policy is not a tyrant.<sup>31</sup> There must exist a dialogue between political and military leaders regarding the decision to use force.<sup>32</sup> Previous thinking suggested “it was not the moral responsibility of the officer to assess the . . . justice of the war the officer is ordered to conduct.”<sup>33</sup> The dutiful servant, however, must be “intellectually independent” and willing to articulate why using force may not be the *ultima ratio*, provide a reasonable chance of success, or lead to a better peace.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, the military provides options and acts as an appetite suppressant against the hunger to use the military for all tasks.<sup>35</sup> In the end, the military should act as the “voice of caution . . . reminding the nation” of what is feasible for the military.<sup>36</sup> Still, “the military does not set the terms of its social contract, and at times, the strategic context necessitates a change in terms”; however, by providing thoughtful feedback, the military helps align means to the ends political leaders desire.<sup>37</sup> In so doing, political leaders may avoid embarking upon an endeavor whose nature they do not understand and, instead, adapt policy aims to “its chosen means” to ensure strategy’s success.<sup>38</sup>

Although prosaic, the proper role for the military amid twenty-first-century conflict is, as it ever was, servant of the state. Despite being the servant, the military need not “embrace all tasks assigned by society,” nor should society expect the “one-way, unquestioning execution of policy.”<sup>39</sup> Instead, dutiful service requires preparing for the unique characteristics of modern conflict as elucidated here but also requires a willingness to explain when the military instrument is ill-suited for the task. Otherwise, “war [becomes] disconnected from politics and becomes a purely destructive act.”<sup>40</sup> The signal of the strategic narrative may fade in the noise of war. Future contexts may require constabulary roles or high-end technology to defeat a peer adversary. In a so-called era of great competition, the military must be ever-ready—not just operationally but also intellectually. Understanding its foremost role as servant, one who advises on the proper use and management of

violence, helps policy makers to “convert the overwhelmingly destructive element of war,” a “terrible battle-sword,” into the “light, handy rapier” wielded deftly for the ends a nation seeks.<sup>41</sup>

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Lieutenant Colonel Sanford is transitioning to an assignment in the J5 Directorate on the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He is a graduate of the US Air Force's School of Advanced Air and Space Studies and Test Pilot School, and the US Army's Advanced Strategic Leadership Studies Program at the School for Advanced Military Studies (SAMS). He flew the F-15E operationally and in combat and commanded a flight test squadron.

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# The United States Post–COVID-19

VINAYAK DALMIA

VRINDA KAPOOR

Bill Gates first called the COVID-19 pandemic the defining moment of this era, likening it to World War II.<sup>1</sup> World leaders followed suit, with Italian prime minister Giuseppe Conte invoking Winston Churchill's words to describe "Italy's darkest hour," and Queen Elizabeth referencing the lyrics of the 1939 Vera Lynn "We'll Meet Again."<sup>2</sup> The United Kingdom's Health Secretary, Matt Hancock, describes the British Coronavirus Bill as "measures that would be unprecedented in peacetime," because it allows the erosion of the robust democratic institutions that have been the framework for civilized society for over two centuries.<sup>3</sup>

How do we fight an enemy that cannot be sensed? How do we win a war, where the front-line fighters are no longer soldiers in uniforms but health workers in blue scrubs? How do we maintain hope, when the fear of death does not come from the sound of a jet engine roaring above but the sound of a pneumonia-like rattling cough and even the most sophisticated technology available to mankind has left half the world's population in lockdown?

Rest assured there will be life after COVID-19. However, the post–Covid-19 world will look dramatically different than it did before. We believe that the world and history will be split across the middle by this monumental event, much as most of the Western world conceptualizes history in the Christian BC (before Christ) and AD (anno domini) paradigm, as permanent lines in the sand to think about the world. The virus will spawn a Before COVID (BC) Post-COVID (PC) paradigm. Children born during these times will be labelled as Generation C.

## Threats on US Soil

The United States is blessed with an uncomplicated neighborhood and protected by oceans on either side. Therefore, it is unaccustomed to attacks of any kind on its soil—man-made or otherwise. Rest assured any threat causes deep durable changes to its national security landscape, and the virus will have a profound impact on the United States and its associated geopolitics. To understand why and the magnitude, consider this fact—since Pearl Harbor, this is only the third instance of civilian devastation at this scale on American soil. Can the COVID pandemic be likened to monumental events like Pearl Harbor and 9/11?

In eerie parallels to the evolving US–China relations, the relationship between Washington and Tokyo eroded through the late 1930s. The belligerent aggression of the Japanese government was met with stricter sanctions and trade embargoes from the United States, causing an effective stalemate in diplomatic relationships.

On 7 December 1941, an enemy in stealth devastated a US naval base in Honolulu, killing 2,400 civilians, which became immortalized as the turning point in the history of World War II. The US Congress, urged by Pres. Franklin D Roosevelt, declared war on Japan with war on Germany and Italy being declared a few days after.<sup>4</sup>

Similarly, the seeds for 9/11 were sown as early as 1993, with Osama bin Laden’s campaign to “Expel the United States from the Muslim World” following the 1990–91 Persian Gulf War.<sup>5</sup> The attack, which resulted in the death of nearly 3,000 US civilians, spurred the United States Global War on Terror and almost completely defined the remaining tenure of George W. Bush as a major war-time president.<sup>6</sup>



*(US Army National Guard graphic by Wayne Thomas)*

**Figure 1. Our altered work environment.** Artwork to illustrate the concept of telework-  
ing or remote work by US Department of Defense members during COVID-19.

## Back to the Future

“May you live in interesting times” is an unverifiable, unattributable proverb, long considered a Chinese curse. These are interesting times indeed. Not since

World War II and 9/11 has this kind of devastation been seen on American soil.<sup>7</sup> At almost 94,000 deaths of US citizens till date, COVID-19 has far exceeded the combined death toll of two of the most monumental events in recent American history. Those numbers also exceed the numbers on the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington, DC. The world waits with bated breath for the White House to respond.

There are some obvious responses. Author Yuval Harari sums it up eloquently: “Once the storm passes, we will inhabit a different world.”<sup>8</sup> International travel will be forever altered; masks and sterilization equipment will become the new norm; student life will never be the same again; and work will follow strict social distancing norms with work from home at least a few days a week becoming a new normal. However, the geopolitical ramifications are even larger and more complex still.

### **National Security and Biosafety**

Post-9/11 natural disasters and epidemic disease were placed within the remit of the Department of Homeland Security. Post-COVID we can expect a more vigorous reinclusion and readoption of biosafety into the national security framework. One should not be surprised to see a Five Eyes equivalent exclusively focused on pandemics and bio-risks. Among other things there will also be greater scrutiny around biosafety level-4 (BSL-4) labs and the controversial gain-of-function work performed in them. Currently, there are around 70 BSL-4 sites in 30 countries, and more facilities are in the works. The Wuhan Institute of Virology, Chinese Academy of Sciences, at the center of attention in the COVID saga is a BSL-4 site.<sup>9</sup> We can also expect the United States to lead an international effort to call for sanctions and fines on countries that fail to report outbreaks in a timely fashion.

Older people are most vulnerable to such pandemics. Hence the risk of future outbreaks will be most severe in countries with an aging population. Today more than 10 percent of the US population is over 70. By 2050, that number is expected to account for 17 percent. Mitigation strategies will have to be put in place and health policies will have to be reshaped to reduce future costs.<sup>10</sup> Going forward the Food and Drug Administration might even relax standards to fast-track technologies to market.

## **Gated Globalization and New Supply Chains**

In 1918, it took six days to cross the Atlantic on a ship; in 2020, it takes six hours on an airplane. From 1995 to 2018, global air traffic grew from 1.3 to 4.3 billion passengers.<sup>11</sup> Air travel has a strong impact on the spread of epidemics.<sup>12</sup>

The increase in globalization witnessed after the fall of the Soviet Union has led to an interconnected, trade-dependent and driven world. That world is also more fragile. The response to that fragility will be a push for greater nationalism, a trajectory already causing fissures across the world. Supply chains will be nationalized and diversified and excess capacity will be created. Excess capacity and redundancy will replace the “just-in-time” supply that consumers have all come to take for granted.<sup>13</sup>

The Chinese stamp on the essential supply chain is glaring. For example, China is currently the dominant producer of surgical masks, producing nearly 50 percent of the N95 respirators that are so critical for the basic safety of health workers.<sup>14</sup> China also produces most of the active pharmaceutical ingredients required for the manufacture of antibiotics.<sup>15</sup> Beijing views Western countries’ incentives for reduction of Chinese dependence on domestic manufacturing as a war cry, causing further strain on international relationships that already lack trust.<sup>16</sup> US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo’s criticism of Beijing’s delayed response and lack of transparency echoes Western sentiments currently portraying China as untrustworthy.<sup>17</sup>

We can expect a host of new rules. These will include guidelines for where American companies can send their chips for fabrication and where they can accept capital from.

## **New World Order—Gazing into the Future**

In the aftermath of the virus, the temperatures will rise further in the new Cold War between the United States and China. Other countries will be compelled to take sides, and the world may find itself being split into two teams—those with the United States and those with China, with little room for ambiguity in the middle. Thus, another casualty will be certain international multilateral organizations. The World Health Organization will likely be among the first to be targeted, and to survive, it will need a radical overhaul and to expect Chinese influence to be challenged.

As the world grapples with the day-to-day struggles amid this pandemic, leaders are being forced to answer difficult questions. Is the correct response to this crisis increased nationalism or global solidarity? Perhaps the solution lies in yet another alliance—one defined by the concepts of democracy, transparency, and

open systems that have robust economic and military cooperation with each other while promoting sanctions against closed and authoritarian systems.<sup>18</sup> While China does not have a bench strength of controlled territories or strong allies, a widespread boycott of China's role in the global economy might have consequences similar to the advent of the Soviet Union's Iron Curtain.<sup>19</sup> Unlike the nuclear arms race of the previous century, technologies such as cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, and genomics will drive the ideological supremacy of this new Cold War.<sup>20</sup>

Scientist and policy analyst Vaclav Smil wrote about a long overdue pandemic in his 2019 book, *Growth*.<sup>21</sup> In January 2017, the US National Security Council, as a part of the transition to the new administration, highlighted the importance of a robust US response to a global pandemic.<sup>22</sup> Large-scale pandemics were yet again highlighted as a very significant risk by the 2019 US Senate Select Committee on Intelligence as part of its annual risk assessment—heralded as one of the top threats facing the nation.<sup>23</sup>

It would be intellectually lazy and incompetent to call COVID-19 a black swan event. By some estimates, the recurrence interval of pandemics is about once every 28 years.<sup>24</sup> Pandemics are better described as white swan events—predictable and foreseeable.<sup>25</sup>

The question beckons why and how did we miss this? Is it a collective failure or a let down by the few? The lack of global leadership and coordination has been perplexing. By the time the G7 managed to organize a videoconference, it was already the third week of March.

For better or for worse the world will never be the same again. Keep the masks on, and let's wait and watch.

### **Vinayak Dalmia**

Mr. Dalmia is an entrepreneur and national security and foreign affairs thinker. He has studied economics at Cambridge and the University of California, Berkeley.

### **Vrinda Kapoor**

Ms. Kapoor is a deep-technology entrepreneur running a data analytics company focused on complex big data solutions using cognitive AI. She writes frequently on healthcare, data analytics, and national security.



## Notes

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# Economic Prospects for the Arctic: What Does It Mean for the United States?

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The Arctic will continue to melt due to a positive feedback loop and this action will encourage Russia and China to begin even more aggressive challenges of American global military and economic supremacy. To explain the continued melting, one must understand that the albedo effect measures the reflection of solar radiation compared to the total solar radiation the planet receives. With less reflective surfaces such as ice and snow, less radiation is reflected, heating up the atmosphere, precipitating melting, and creating a loop where reversal of the trend will be incredibly challenging. This trend is predicted to continue until a massive environmental event brings about drastic change.



*(US Army photo by Staff Sgt. Elizabeth Pena)*

**Figure 1. Arctic training.** US Air Force Special Tactics operators assigned to the 352nd Special Operations Wing step out for movement during a simulated contact patrol, 5 March 2020, near Banak Air Base, Norway. The special tactics training event included the movement to contact, and hasty ambush-based training scenarios. The 352nd SOW deployed to Norway at the invitation of Norwegian forces in order to enhance war-fighter capabilities in challenging arctic and mountainous terrain within special operations forces and conventional forces and operations.

In the game for Arctic dominance, the main players are the United States, Russia, and China. Each is looking to decrease the costs in shipping and fuel expenses as well as claim the newfound natural resources as the ice melts and waters become available. It is estimated that under Arctic ice there is roughly one-eighth of the world's undiscovered oil and one-third of its natural gas.<sup>1</sup> In addition to these energy resources, the melting opens up huge swaths of ocean to fishing and new territories for mining minerals.

The United States needs the Arctic to be free of conflicts and defense over-spending, enabling the country to scale back its global strategy and focus on the Indo-Pacific region.<sup>2</sup> This is unlikely, given Chinese and Russia interests and tendencies. Consequently, the United States is preparing for a more adversarial environment in the Arctic, with Marine Corps commandant Gen. Robert Neller recently telling US Senators, "after years of focusing on the Middle East and Pacific, the Marines 'had gotten back into the cold-weather business.'"<sup>3</sup> Arctic energy reserves are key to American economic and military expansion; this means such resources are also of vital interest to Russia and China.

Russia, an economy heavily reliant on energy production and natural resources, has already begun planning energy expansion into the Arctic with a multibillion-dollar deal with British Petroleum to explore and develop three license blocks on the Russian Arctic continental shelf.<sup>4</sup> Russian president Vladimir Putin is bent on reasserting Russia's former power on the world stage, and to accomplish his goal, he needs a major economic revival. By bringing control of the energy sector under the state, he has secured profitable short-term investments. However, as the EU continues to ramp up its environmental initiatives and reduce dependence on Russian energy in favor of North African or Middle Eastern imports, the profitability of the energy sector might diminish. Therefore, Putin has pressed the Russian state energy company, Rosneft, to expand its efforts to curry favor in emerging markets in India and Africa.

However, Russia is not looking to militarily challenge the United States, at least not on its own. "Russia, in particular its economy, needs the U.S. in the Arctic more than the U.S. needs Russia, as the latter wants mineral deposits, technology, [and] financing."<sup>5</sup> Therefore, Moscow requires peace and stability in the Arctic as a prerequisite for gaining markets, capital, technologies, and strategic development, which are vital for Russia's economic revival. Without foreign assistance, Russia stands to be swept aside; Moscow does not have the economic strength to take full advantage of the resources on its doorstep.<sup>6</sup>

China has been, therefore, presented a unique chance to help itself and in turn, Russia. Using the Arctic waterways, travel routes from China and the Far East to Europe can be halved and weeks can be removed from the journey.<sup>7</sup> Such a shift

in transit would potentially eliminate the control on transportation linkages between Europe and Asia by challenging the status of the Suez Canal as the foremost route between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.<sup>8</sup> Beijing has long been attempting this transformation through China's "Belt and Road" initiatives, but an Arctic passage would be a welcome boost in facilitating trade.<sup>9</sup> The melting ice also makes huge energy resources available, possibly stimulating what has recently been slower economic growth for China. Moreover, new untouched fishing waters and supplies of fresh water, an increasingly scarce resource on Earth given the growing population, would greatly benefit China. China already has begun to assert itself within its geopolitical sphere, referring to the United States as a "paper tiger."

In the future, we could see a closer alliance between Russia and China as they move to secure the Arctic for their own purposes. While the two nations have had a long history of conflict and disagreement, that situation could shift given the current administrations. For two decades, Moscow has faced EU and NATO expansion into Russia's backyard. While it did not have the means anymore to keep them, Moscow also gave up Eastern Europe under the idea that those Western organizations would not continue expansion. Since at least the Clinton administration, the opposite has proven to be true.<sup>10</sup> China has long been the target of contempt from liberal Western democracies, and given its economic dominance, Beijing is seeking to expand its sphere of influence and challenge American military supremacy. Chinese president Xi Jinping is ambitious, as is Vladimir Putin, and it is likely these two leaders will cooperate in efforts to bring about the downfall of American domination before turning against each other to vie for global control. This possible alliance will put the United States in a position it has not faced since England and France controlled the globe—a world with two powers potentially stronger than itself.

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## Notes

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