

## War in (Another) New Context: Postmodernism

by  
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“We’re really having to deal with this debate of what is truth, especially when it comes to who do you go and put lethal force against.”

Colonel Roger King, spokesman for US forces, Bagram Air Base,  
Afghanistan, January, 2003.

“While there may be no system and no mechanical way of  
recognizing the truth, truth does exist.”

Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, Book 6, Chapter 30.

### MODERN WAR

Since Plato, the Western approach to war has been to discover unified, immutable, and absolute truths through rigorous and rational analysis, which could be applied to any condition of conflict. The onset of the modern age in Western history, nurtured by the Enlightenment’s faith in science and perfectibility and incorporating industrial and scientific advances, brought the study of warfare to its current level of development. For centuries military forces of the West have established an abiding faith in the proper application of the foundationalist truths about war to assure victory against an enemy. The essence of the modernist approach to war is found in Carl von Clausewitz’s nineteenth-century treatise, *On War*. As the prototypical modernist, Clausewitz appeared to demonstrate that intellectual effort and careful scientific analysis could yield the basic elements of warfare. Clausewitz’s ideas reflect an inherent belief that even out of the chaos that is war, much of what happens is knowable and discernable through the proper application of intellect and reason.<sup>1</sup> An example is Clausewitz’s concept of first identifying, and then attacking with all force available, the enemy’s center of gravity. This “hub of all power and movement,” as Clausewitz put it, must be identified through rigorous analysis, and once identified, cannot only be quantified, but it can also be applied to all levels of warfare.<sup>2</sup>

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His approach to examining war has been the dominant influence on American military thinking certainly since the early 1980s. Clausewitz's intellectual model of applying a systemic, rational, scientific approach in order to move and sustain large numbers of men and equipment to achieve a political-military objective is critical to all modern Western military planning.<sup>3</sup>

The bedrock principles of the modernist faith – reason, science, technology, and intelligent bureaucratic management will assure progress – are at the core of the current Western military transformation initiatives.<sup>4</sup> American strategy documents refer to a rapidly employable force using an adaptive approach to planning against enemy capabilities that is networked and capable of decision superiority – making decisions and taking actions better and faster than an enemy – by analyzing and rapidly disseminating information and intelligence. By employing a shared understanding of causal relationships to execute, assess, and adapt, the future modern joint force will be more agile, lethal, and ultimately invincible. American strategists acknowledge that three factors will change the conduct of future military operations: the security environment, technology, and the threat. Nevertheless, US strategists believe wars of the future will continue to conform to the Clausewitzian modernist definition: “a violent clash of wills between nations or armed groups in the pursuit of political or ideological ends.”<sup>5</sup>

The modernist vision of transformation is largely applicable against an adversary able and willing to engage in a Clausewitzian clash of wills. The reliance of the future force on speed to achieve a decisive effect – speed of decision-making, speed of deployment, and speed of action – implies that the enemy places the same value on speed and precision. But what happens if the enemy does not seek a contest of equals? What if the enemy fights using non-traditional or unexpected means? What if speed does not matter? A powerful military force can be reduced to impotence and a nation's security can be threatened by any number of non-traditional means from any number of actors and can include the use (or even the threat of the use) of weapons of mass destruction. The term currently used to characterize this approach is asymmetry.<sup>6</sup> Although asymmetry as a concept is nothing new, its appearance in the strategist's vocabulary reveals that future war may not be as rapid or precise as predicted. Thus, asymmetric threats resist categorization and analysis, remaining frustratingly indistinct for the modernist model. Clausewitz himself warned that it was possible that the logically constructed realities of the concept of war would not apply to the reality of war that presented itself. “We must therefore,” he wrote, “be prepared to develop our concept of war as it ought to be fought, not on the basis of pure definition, but by leaving room for every sort of extraneous matter.”<sup>7</sup> The danger exists that the direction of transformation is based on logically constructed realities of the modernist concept of war is not based on the realities of a changing context of warfare.

## FROM MODERN TO POSTMODERN

In defining the new security environment following the end of the Cold War the focus has been on how information will shape the future of war. At the beginning of the new century, the influential American strategic thinker, Steven Metz, attempted to come to grips with the new landscape that the information revolution had created. He described this revolution as a new interconnectedness of people around the world, a dispersion of both power and knowledge, “challenging the traditional frameworks which provided personal identity and moderated behavior.” Technology, he observed, allows everyone with access to it to become attuned to any number of issues and problems, allowing personal, economic, political, ethical factors to change within moments. He saw the effects that both this new interconnectedness and the increased pace of economic, political, ethical, and social change it spawned could have on the evolution of armed conflict. “A strategic revolution may be under way, spawned by and reflecting the information revolution. Underestimating the extent of the ongoing revolution in military affairs and failing to understand its intricacies and second order effects can endanger American security.”<sup>8</sup> Metz called this post-modern war (the hyphen here is important). Post-modern wars of the future, he predicted, will involve “loose networks of nonstate organizations, some political or ideological in orientation . . .” He described this interconnected security environment and globalized economy as a means of integrating information technology and the development of a system of systems that would allow for greater speed and precision on future battlefields. For Metz, however, post-modern war is not significantly different from modern war, except by the means in which globalization and interconnectedness shape the intensity, scope, modes, and rules of warfare.<sup>9</sup>

Another military writer, Avi Kober, adopted Metz’s characterization of postmodern war, but applied it to low-intensity conflict. Kober describes post-modern low-intensity conflict in terms of blurred lines between sub-conventional and unconventional conflict and the convergence of military and non-military missions. Individuals and the media act as independent players and technology is a force multiplier for the weak. This type of conflict was “often difficult to distinguish between traditional military challenges . . . and crime . . . Postmodern terrorism, in particular, all too often resembles criminal activity.” In postmodern low-intensity conflict, he asserts, the political control over the conduct of war has been shattered, “as a result of a combination of societal-political constraints, on the one hand, and technological capabilities, on the other.”<sup>10</sup>

What neither Metz nor Kober clearly acknowledge is that in the wake of the information revolution a new epoch is emerging. The onrushing global economy and its accompanying technological and social transformations that have given rise to an electronic, computer-regulated, media-saturated, and mass consumer society mark modernism giving way to postmodernism. In the postmodern era, knowledge and information are the new principles of social organization. The rational linear order and sequence of events and concepts that marked the

modern world are giving way to a new structure that has not yet been fully defined. “Generally, postmodernism stands for the repudiation of a belief in reason and progress . . . a questioning of the nature of knowledge together with the dissolution of the idea of truth, and problems of legitimacy in many fields.” Postmodernism dismisses the possibility of objective knowledge and truth as goals of inquiry – reason or truth are products of dominating ideological or political interests.<sup>11</sup>

Jean-Francois Lyotard, and other postmodernists, reject ideas of universal truth in favor of a legitimation that is local and plural. Postmodernists argue that it is no single common consciousness that gives cohesion to society, but a complex interweaving of discursive practices.<sup>12</sup> Postmodern culture makes no distinction between myth and fact – words, images, ideas, can be constructed or deconstructed any number of ways because they have meaning only within the current narrative structure. The explosion of information and communications speeds the evolution of political and social values, actions, and forms of organization, creating both regionalization and transnationalization – and with them, multiple, overlapping identities, which are often global in scope. These identities are often ethnic, religious, or racial, but also consist of newly constructed identities based on redefined imagined communities formed in cyberspace.<sup>13</sup>

Technical innovations have created communications systems of enormous breadth and complexity. The modern world of rationality and stability is being overtaken by the ability to exchange and access vast amounts of information to reshape identities and cultures by offering an alternative to current society that is perceived to be both limited and flawed. Virtual and real communities exist side by side, the dividing line between them no longer clear. Inexpensive, flexible, easily acquired, and rapid communications systems reconfigure words, images, texts, and sounds in ways that suit the individual or specific groups which are linked without having to share the same physical space. Information can be limitlessly played and replayed, reshaped, and replayed again. Rules, norms, mores, habits, speech, language, even the meaning of language itself all can be redefined to suit whatever reality groups or individuals choose to define. Identities multiply based on the number of realities perceived. Outlines of a new age that functions entirely differently from the modern, with new modes of interaction and shifting identities, have appeared. Power is defined by how much information is controlled to define and shape what is known.

As a result, the strategic and operational conditions that define the modern context of war are being challenged by a new reality. This new reality is emerging in Afghanistan, Iraq, Yemen, Chechnya, Colombia, the Horn of Africa, and is increasingly happening in Central Asia and Indonesia as the West undertakes a global war on terrorism. The new reality signifies not asymmetric war as much as the emergence of war derived from postmodernism. The Western modernist context of war derived from Clausewitz is:

a remarkable trinity – composed of primordial violence, hatred, and enmity, which are to be regarded as a blind natural force; of the play of chance and probability within which the creative spirit is free to roam; and of its element of subordination, as an instrument of policy, which makes it subject to reason alone. The first of these three aspects mainly concerns the people; the second the commander and his army; the third the government.<sup>14</sup>

The interplay of the people, the army, and the government that has been the guiding light of the nation-state in the conduct of modern war now operates far more disproportionately in favor of the people. In a postmodern context the people display far less loyalty to a state or nation-state and the people's connection with military institutions are far more tenuous than they have been since the rise of nationalism. Both the architecture and speed of information in the postmodern world shape individual and collective knowledge. As the quantity and scope of information continuously grows and becomes more interactive, people are shaped by emerging identities fostered by information technology. This often results in unanticipated associations of people and ideas and leads to constantly shifting (and often contradictory) opinions.<sup>15</sup> This restructuring of the modernist context of war has far reaching consequences for strategy formulation and operational planning.

## THE CONTEXT OF POSTMODERN WAR

The postmodern emphasis on information, language, and the use of symbols, traditions, myths, techniques, effects, and metaphors to construct truths is redefining war. Images and simulations are sometimes just as important as actual events because they become events in themselves. Truth is irrelevant at worst and contingent or situational at best. Postmodern war rejects the modernist belief in the existence of immutable principles or a set of universal truths about war. Instead of a unified vision of warfare, postmodern war seeks what is different or dissimilar. The rational, scientific, bureaucratic approach is replaced by intuition and insight. At its heart, postmodern war has no pre-set rules or recognized code of conduct – it is spectacle. In fact, rules, such as they are, can be created to fit the moment and, depending on circumstances, rules can be recreated, discarded, or rejected. Postmodern war views the battlefield prismatically, presenting a multitude of forms, often shaped by ideologies and agendas. Societal or political influences have far less effect in postmodern war than do information-shaped identities that form the personal psychological and cultural framework of the participants.

Postmodern fighters (fighters are different from soldiers; soldiers submit to codes of conduct and standards of discipline that they accept as rational controls based on objective reasoning) have a far more individualistic and mentally fragmented approach to war. The current and future enemy, motivated by greed,

patriotism, religious fervor, naiveté, revenge, boredom, has no true central direction, may or may not work toward a common purpose, and may work periodically in concert or alone. Chaos and disruption make the population shift loyalties, portray unfocused and indefinite goals, or retreat to new touchstones that redefine identity. The importance of this cultural, often personal, identity-based perspective toward war cannot be understated, because at its heart, postmodern war's goal is to employ power (in whatever form available, but usually in the form of discourse) to define what is known.<sup>16</sup>

### **POSTMODERNISM WITHIN MODERN WAR: DEFINING WHAT IS KNOWN**

The war in Iraq has illustrated a bewildering crosscurrent of examples of both the modern and postmodern. The Ba'athist regime of Saddam Hussein relied upon modernist assumptions of absolute truth as defined by the nation-state: patriotism and duty combined with a mixture of fear and compulsion. This kind of modernist totalitarian model was easy for Western military planners to understand, because Saddam Hussein and Iraq could be expected to fight war along accepted modern lines. Present were Clausewitz's centers of gravity and the modern military planners of the coalition created a unity of function and organization, assembling order from the fog, friction, and chaos of war. Boundaries were fixed and decisions made to ensure that the Clausewitzian trinity remained balanced within its inherent tensions. Brilliantly conceived and executed, coalition forces eliminated Saddam's murderous regime and the army that kept it in power – it was a triumph of modern war.

However, when Saddam's regime collapsed, the postmodern context suddenly emerged to define and redefine what was known. What Westerners saw as farce in the fervid pronouncements of Mohammed Saeed al-Sahaf ("Baghdad Bob") was actually the drama of postmodern war being played out. The regime clumsily struggled to forestall defeat by attempting to define for Iraqis and the world what was known. In the end, the Ba'athist Truth and its symbols no longer held any validity. The Iraqi Ministry of Information, CNN, BBC, and Al Jazeera were all involved in producing visual and auditory images mixed with rhetoric, factoids, ideas, desires, and spectacle, which created multiple realities for the population. What was known was being redefined within the Iraqi population through the standard postmodern means of interconnecting myth and fact – words, images, and ideas took on a number of levels of meaning within the current narrative structure. Thus, in the ultimate postmodern act, individual Iraqi soldiers shed their uniforms and redefined their identities temporarily. Others, in an equally postmodern response, turned to using women and children as shields, feigning surrender to lure coalition soldiers into kill zones, or attacking from ambush from schools, hospitals, and mosques. What was known shifted in a matter of hours from state-defined objective truth to objective truth defined by the individual.

This process played out in Afghanistan as well. Once the Taliban was perceived as no longer able to define what was known, its power slipped away and shifted to influential individuals, tribal leaders, or warlords. The postmodern fighter in Afghanistan, like his Iraqi counterpart, chose to melt away into the population, changing identities as easily as changing uniforms. John Walker Lindh, is a prototypical postmodern fighter – rejecting all forms of truth except that defined by political Islam, he joined the war against the West. Once it became clear that the Taliban no longer had power over what was known, Lindh attempted to shed the inconvenient trappings of a combatant and return to middle class America. Unfortunately for him, he was captured before he could completely make the identity transition.

There is no better example of postmodern war's effects on determining what is known than the story of Jessica Lynch. First described as a fierce fighter who sustained gunshot and stab wounds before being captured after her unit was ambushed near Nasiriyah, she was then rescued in dramatic fashion at a hospital by special operation forces, which conducted a flawless operation while all the time expecting resistance from any number of military and paramilitary forces in and around the hospital where Lynch was bedridden. The media and the military created Lynch as a symbol, fed it with special operations heroics, and transformed an unlucky Army supply clerk into everything the American public knew about the war, the American military, the enemy, and special operations forces. The facts, thin as they were, were far less important than conveying to the population a larger narrative with images of what was known. True to postmodern form, the American public displayed conflicting emotions, shifted from gloom and uncertainty about the pace of the war to vibrant optimism and a certainty of victory literally overnight based on their understanding of what was known. A mythical Lynch was created by those who could not stand to hear even whispers of doubt or defeatism, and attempted to stem a stampeding public by recasting what was known about the circumstances of her capture. The camera footage of Lynch being loaded into the waiting aircraft for evacuation and the details of the assault by special operations forces as provided to the press, demonstrated American military competence and heroic success against a still-dangerous threat. Again, in true postmodern fashion, what is known has shifted again, as doubts have been raised about what actually happened to Lynch at Nasiriyah and hints that the clockwork precision of the special operations forces rescue was staged, and there actually was no enemy.<sup>17</sup>

The people of Iraq and Afghanistan are in the unenviable position many societies in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia have faced since the end of the Cold War – deciding what of the past to remember, while trying to forget everything else. It is postmodernism at its most volatile – society doubting what was previously held to be certain. The postmodern struggle for what is known now dominates the Iraqi-Afghani battlespace, and it looks something like this: all institutions are questioned as well as who has the right to play a central

role. Traditional cultural boundaries are under stress; as individuals seek to place loyalty in something that can provide structure and order, ethnic, tribal, and religious identities emerge in competition with the idea of the nation-state. As identities and loyalties are sorted out in the struggle for what is known, enemies are also defined.

Unlike the modernist approach that views a political endstate as preeminent in determining the outcome of conflict, control of the population may be more important than gaining political control in the postmodern context. President Hamid Karzai in Afghanistan is already discovering this as he battles against the powerful localism of warlords to define a broad national identity. "Politics has to have some moral standing," he said recently. Karzai also touched on the importance of determining what is known: "The Taliban had no moral standing, so they could destroy the country but not build it. The people recognize the difference between them and us."<sup>18</sup> Most disturbing to the modernist approach to ending war on political terms is the possibility that whoever has political control may ultimately be irrelevant if the population's version of what is known is different from the central government's version.

## **THE POSTMODERN BATTLESPACE**

As long as conventional enemy forces in Afghanistan and Iraq were willing to operate in the modernist context of war, coalition forces had absolute mastery. The exceptionally powerful combination of intellect, organizational structure, and technology was irresistible. But once the enemy disappeared and fled into the streets or the mountains to reappear later in another guise, the confidence and mastery was lost. Even now, conventional force commanders in Iraq and Afghanistan struggle to make sense of the conditions they face at the present. None of the certainties of modernist war exist now. The enemy is unknown and invisible. There is no Clausewitzian center of gravity to direct all efforts to bring about a decisive result. The battlespace is undefined and resists any attempts to bring it into a rational structure. Previous intelligence products based on these concepts are all but useless, old methods of collection and analysis yield little. Denied a battlespace that conforms to the modernist model, commanders and staff labor in frustration to find some way to define progress and victory. There are various names for the enemy – insurgents, *fedayeen*, outsiders, foreign fighters, militants, or the much broader anti-coalition forces – depending on the day and event.

The battle in Al Fallujah, Iraq in April 2004 can be seen as a case study of war in a postmodern context. Events moved fast after the killing and mutilation of four American contractors on 31 March was broadcast throughout the world. The image of charred bodies, surrounded by celebrating crowds, was intentionally orchestrated to remind the world of a similar incident in Mogadishu in 1993 that illustrated American impotence and lack of will. Shortly thereafter, when an



improvised explosive device killed five soldiers, US Marines entered the city to retaliate. Their mission appeared to be a curious attempt to win the population's hearts and minds through a demonstration of intimidating presence and firepower. Intense fighting began and within the equally intense media coverage the inevitable accusations came from different sources claiming that hundreds of women and children were killed by the indiscriminate use of US air strikes. The Americans countered with claims that insurgents were using civilians as human shields and firing on the Marines from schools and hospitals. Mosques were being used both as arsenals and as strong points.

As the Marines pushed deeper into Fallujah, seeking to eliminate pockets of resistance in neighborhoods where the enemy had occupied and fortified homes, offensive military operations were unilaterally suspended. An agreement was reached with local leaders who pledged to have the fighters in town turn in heavy weapons to prevent a threatened US cordon and assault on the city. Coalition and Iraqi security forces would conduct joint patrols. As the US-supported Fallujah Brigade entered the city, its commander wearing the uniform of Saddam's Iraqi Republican Guard, no one was sure who was who: resistance fighters, insurgents, criminals, foreign fighters, rebels. Information-shaped identities among the participants had formed a number of frameworks during the week: personal, psychological, and cultural. Some of those who had fought the coalition a few days ago were now marching behind the Fallujah Brigade. American forces pulled back, not sure what had been accomplished. The enemy, when he appeared, had been faced and killed efficiently, but the situation remained amorphous, changing almost every day depending on what was known within the city. What was left, in the end, was a rapid proliferation of contradictory trends and illogical alliances of ideas and people with rules that can be created to fit the moment. As of now, the truce holds – a confounding, but understandable condition in the postmodern battlespace.<sup>19</sup>

## **POSTMODERNISM AND THE WAR ON TERROR**

The United States and its allies are now engaged in a global war on terrorism, of which the brilliantly conducted conventional campaign against the Taliban and the Ba'athists were a part. But what has not been voiced, is that the war lacks definition, order, and rationality, in short it is not modern. The enemy is not conducting an insurgency in the modernist sense, although at times the enemy's organization and methods resemble a clandestine insurgent organization and reflects Mao's dictum that guerrilla strategy must be based on "alertness, mobility and attack." Unlike the Viet Cong, the enemy has no strategic direction from a Central Committee; no cadres of political agitators and shadow governments in the villages; no Maoist model of guerrilla war moving to a conventional war of maneuver. In modern guerrilla war, the goal is to deny territory to the enemy by political control of population. Battles are to be avoided unless they

are clearly to the guerrilla's advantage. The focus of all efforts is to win the hearts and minds of the population.<sup>20</sup> For the postmodern fighter, however, none of this applies. As British military historian John Keegan has noted:

The terrorists are not an army, nor a people, nor a state. They present none of the targets which a traditional military establishment is trained to place under attack. They have no apparent geographical base (though *al-Qaeda* means "the base" in Arabic), they are not an arm of any government, they do not belong to any identifiable ethnic group. Most baffling of all, they do not fear death, indeed seem to welcome it.<sup>21</sup>

Unlike modern insurgents, this enemy is often passive, has a superficial direction and organization, and is significantly shaped by perceptions of success or failure. The enemy lacks a political or military structure usually seen in insurgencies, yet the enemy, is active-learning, observing, adapting, always attuned to what is known in order to direct activities. All of these can be considered postmodern attributes.

More importantly from the postmodern perspective, *al-Qaeda* is an idea – an idea that is spread to provide moral and material support to those who identify and engage in the discourse the idea presents and expands upon via the many forms of media available to it. The *Abu Hafs al-Masri* Brigades, which supposedly works for *al-Qaeda* in the Middle East, North Africa, and Europe, most likely is not a brigade at all, but an idea that creates and mobilizes followers by adapting and shaping what is known through access to information technology. Without information technology Osama bin Laden and *al-Qaeda* could not function.<sup>22</sup> *Al-Jazeera*, the Arabic satellite television and Internet provider, is the information source of choice of the educated elite. Even *Hamas* has a website. The Taliban is limited in Afghanistan because it has been denied use of modern information technology by coalition forces.

The adage used so often in approaching counterinsurgency is the need to win hearts and minds. In the context of postmodern war, hearts and minds are replaced with asking and understanding what is known. The complex interaction of discourses created by the vast increase in the flow and access to information challenges the logic of modernity. The role of virtual communities, local narratives, and levels of reality in the creation and re-creation of new identities is at the heart of postmodernism and reflects how war and combat will be perceived. Global communications networks transcend the identities and loyalties bound in nation-states; the shifting ethnic, religious, regional, or imagined identities created as a result negate the state's monopoly on the use of violence. War in the postmodern context appears to have several components:

- the enemy is not fixed – loyalties can shift with identities;
- goals and motivations shift with conditions;

- the choice of targets for attack are not always based on rational analysis;
- ideas are more powerful than ideologies;
- the individual is more important than the cause; and,
- all actions or reactions are based on an understanding of what is known within the population.

## CONCLUSIONS

The Western approach to war, although justifiably successful against a conventional modernist enemy, faces a challenge from war in the postmodern context. The modernist approach to war, with its articles of faith summarized by employing overwhelming force on an enemy's center of gravity, having a clearly defined political goal, and supported by the people does not apply to the individualistic and kaleidoscopic nature of postmodern war. From the interrelations of the modern and postmodern warfare in Iraq and Afghanistan, to the larger global war on terrorism, the enemy may be defining the type of combat that marks the postmodern age. The power to define what is known in postmodern society – to shape the structure of identities and change points of reference in favor of one side or the other – is decisive. How much is known about what, and through what means, are the two basic questions that must absorb military planners facing war in a postmodern context. Planning must be sophisticated, addressing both perceptions and fears, and be multifaceted to apply information as trope, as weapon, as metaphor, to create a language of understanding that in turn creates new conversations and images, while at the same time constructing new discourses, shaping the rules implicitly and explicitly, to construct new truths that serve to support the goals and outcomes sought by the employment of military force.<sup>23</sup>

In his formulation of war, Clausewitz continually emphasizes the importance of “the powers of intellect” and the demands of a “skilled intelligence *to scent out the truth* (my emphasis).” This emphatic requirement for practitioners of war to be intelligent and insightful thinkers may smack of intellectualism and elitism, qualities that most results-oriented, function obsessed modern military professionals abhor. But, as Clausewitz notes, the powers of a trained intellect are absolutely indispensable in the conduct of war and certainly need to be established as the cornerstones of military art in the postmodern age.<sup>24</sup>

War in the postmodern context calls for a renewal of the study of how groups and individuals react to perceived conditions and a new appreciation for identity formation in a global communications environment. Military forces must be willing to discard modernist models whenever they no longer apply and realign plans and forces for defining, adapting, and assessing what is known.

## Endnotes

1. Trevor N. Dupuy describes Clausewitz's theoretical concept of war as "deterministic, predictive, [and] mathematically based." Trevor N. Dupuy, *Understanding War: History and Theory of Combat* (New York: Paragon House, 1987), p. 22. Dupuy also asserts that J.F.C. Fuller, a twentieth-century philosopher and practitioner of warfare, developed the principles of war and sought to discover the "laws of combat or a science of war," p. 16. Clausewitz's philosophical approach to warfare is found in the following statement from *On War*: "This much is clear: this subject [war], like any other that does not surpass man's intellectual capacity, can be elucidated by an inquiring mind, and its internal structure can to some degree be revealed." Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. by Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), p. 150.
2. Clausewitz, *On War*, pp. 485-87, 618-69.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 526, 545.
4. Office of the Secretary of Defense, *The National Military Strategy* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 2004), pp. 6, 14. The goal is full spectrum dominance through decision superiority – commanders making better decisions faster than the enemy can react. The transformation initiatives embody the modernist creed of attempting to seek a synthesis of variety and unity, of change and stability – recognizing each opposite as necessary to the other. See Chris Hables Gray, *Postmodern War: The New Politics of Conflict* (New York: Guilford, 1997), p. 194.
5. Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Joint Operations Concept* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 2003), p. 5.
6. See, for example, Office of the Secretary of Defense, *The Quadrennial Defense Review* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 2001), pp. 3, 61-2. The "Strategic Context" section of *Joint Vision 2020* addresses asymmetric approaches and their challenges to US military forces. General Henry H. Shelton, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Vision 2020* (Washington, DC: Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, June 2000), pp. 4-5. See Keith D. Dickson, "A New Look at Asymmetry," *Special Warfare* 14, no. 4 (Fall 2001), pp. 14-19; and R. V. Gusentine, "Asymmetric Warfare – On Our Terms," *Proceedings* (August 2002), pp. 58-61. Both authors argue that asymmetric warfare can be a weapon of choice for the United States. Steven Lambakis, James Kiras, and Kristin Kolet, in their article "Understanding 'Asymmetric' Threats to the United States," make the point that the terms "asymmetric" and "asymmetry" are too vague to help in organizing, planning, and strategizing to be of any use, except in a political context. *Comparative Strategy* 21 (2002), pp. 241-77.
7. Clausewitz, *On War*, p. 580.
8. Steven Metz, *Armed Conflict in the 21st Century: The Information Revolution and Post-Modern Warfare* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, 2000), pp. 2, 10, 14.
9. *Ibid.*, pp. x, xiii, ix, 16-19. Metz examines American strategic options in a far more modernist context in "Alternative Approaches to American Strategy," *National Security Studies Quarterly* VII, Issue 1 (Winter 2001).
10. Avi Kober, "Western Democracies in Low Intensity Conflict: Some Postmodern Aspects," *The Review of International Affairs* 2, no. 3 (Spring 2003), pp. 16, 5, 9.
11. Postmodernism often defies definition; at its heart postmodernism attempts to come to grips with the social, political, cultural, and economic transformations that have grown out of communications technology and the new ways information is received and processed. It accepts that these transformations have created new forms of knowledge, which do not recognize defined boundaries and reject order and continuity in favor of multiple perspectives, randomness, and chaos. It is interesting to note that while postmodernists have viewed art, religion, history, and literature in this context, they have not done the same with war. Perez Zagorin

- "History, the Referent, and Narrative: Reflections on Postmodernism Now," *History and Theory* 38, no. 1 (February 1999), pp. 5-6, 9-10. See also Steven Best and Douglas Kellner, *Postmodern Theory: Critical Interrogations* (New York: Guilford, 1991), p. 300.
12. Linda J. Nicholson, ed., *Feminism/Postmodernism* (New York: Routledge, 1990), pp. 23-24. Foucault is one of the leading lights of postmodernism. His ideas are best represented in Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977* ed. and trans. Colin Gordon (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1980). Other works dealing with similar postmodern themes are Ihab Hassan, *The Postmodern Turn: Essays in Postmodern Theory and Culture* (Columbus, OH: Ohio University Press, 1987); and Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* (New York: Routledge, 1989).
  13. Mary Kaldar, *New and Old Wars: Globalized Violence in a Global Era* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), pp. 6-7, 71-3. Another view is posed by Colin S. Gray, *Explorations in Strategy* (London: Greenwood, 1996), p. 239. Gray states, "In any particular period a society has a particular system of war which has at least as much political and social content as it has technological."
  14. Clausewitz, *On War*, p. 89.
  15. Information "as a weapon, as a myth, as a metaphor, as a force multiplier, as an edge, as a trope, as a factor, and as an asset . . . has become the central sign of postmodernity." Chris Hables Gray, *Postmodern War: The New Politics of Conflict* (New York: Guilford, 1997), p. 22. See also Kaldar, *New and Old Wars*, pp. 6-7. "The goals of new wars are about identity politics in contrast to the geo-political or ideological goals of earlier wars." Kaldar notes that identities are no longer linked to a state or ideology, but a claim to power on the basis of labels. "This type of identity politics is inherently exclusive and therefore tends to fragmentation." On the role of postmodern moral dilemmas related to shifting identities, see Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 194.
  16. Those who have used the term postmodern war have done so to examine what they perceive as the increasing trend of displacing humans with technology to conduct warfare. Gray, *Postmodern War*, is the most prominent example. I agree with Gray in his general assessment that a redefinition of war is needed as part of what he calls "the worldwide crisis of post-modernity." (p. 21) A recent essay by Douglas Kellner examining America's war on terror ("The Political Costs of Postmodern War in the Age of Bush II," <http://www.gsels.ucla.edu/faculty/kellner/papers/POMOWar.htm>), updates Gray and takes the same approach. Unlike Gray or Kellner, I attempt to place the conduct of campaigns fought in the war on terrorism using postmodernism as a frame of reference. In doing so, I view postmodern war in a practical warfighting context rather than Gray and Kellner's pacifist-resistor context. My view of post-modern war is assembled from various writings, but draws most heavily on the following authors, whose ideas have helped me define my approach: Ernest Gellner, *Postmodernism, Reason, and Religion* (New York: Routledge, 1992); Jonathan Friedman, *Cultural Identity and Global Process* (London: Sage, 1994); and Best and Kellner, *Postmodern Theory*.
  17. According to Chris Hables Gray, postmodern war is ". . . a conversation for the whole electronic culture. In that conversation, images and simulations are sometimes just as important as actual events because they become events in themselves." *Postmodern War*, p. 47. See the following press reports for a flavor of the Jessica Lynch saga: "She Was Fighting to the Death," *Washington Post*, 3 April 2003; "Iraqis Say Lynch Raid Faced No Resistance," *Washington Post*, 15 April 2003; "BBC Questions US Version of Lynch Rescue," *Toronto Star*, 17 May 2003; "War Spin," televised on BBC Two, 18 May 2003; "A Broken Body, A Broken Story, Pieced Together," *Washington Post*, 17 June 2003.
  18. Ahmed Rashid, "Taking The Initiative, Karzai Seeks To Extend Kabul's Writ," *Wall Street Journal*, 3 January 2003.
  19. Rowan Scarborough, "Senior Fighters Escape Fallujah," *The Washington Times*, 4 May 2004; Robert D. Kaplan, "The Real Story of Fallujah," *Wall Street Journal*, 27 May 2004, p. A20. Among all the reports from the battle of Fallujah, Kaplan is the only reporter who talks about

- “postmodern 21st century conflict” in a cultural context. In Fallujah with the Marines, he had the following insight: “It [speaking of combat] becomes a matter of perception, and victory is awarded to those who weave the most compelling narrative.” In the Iraqi towns and villages he visited Kaplan observed them from what could be called a postmodern perspective: “I found that there are many different levels of reality to each of them.”
20. Bard E. O’Neill, *Insurgency and Terrorism* (Washington, DC: Brassey’s, 1990), pp. 13, 25. The political element, which has always been considered as the cornerstone of modern insurgency, seems to be missing in postmodern war. A classic handbook of modern insurgency and counterinsurgency is David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (New York: Fredrick A. Praeger, 1965), pp. 8, 79. “In revolutionary warfare, strength must be assessed by the extent of support from the population as measured in terms of political organization at the grass roots. The counterinsurgent reaches a position of strength when his power is embodied in a political organization issuing from, and firmly supported by, the population.”
  21. John Keegan, “The Radical at the Pentagon,” *Vanity Fair*, 1 February 2003, p. 126.
  22. Ayman Zawahiri, Osama bin Laden’s top deputy, (and also believed to be bin Laden’s doctor and spiritual adviser), posted a message on the Islamic affairs site of Montasser Zayat, a lawyer, who at one time was imprisoned with Zawahiri. “The e-mail urged Zayat not to doubt the purpose of the 11 September attacks or ‘to stop the new Muslim souls who trust your word from taking the road of holy war, represented by killing all Americans as they are killing us all.’” Since the coalition attacks on *al-Qaeda’s* sanctuary in Afghanistan, both bin Laden and Zawahiri have used audio tapes to convince the world they are still alive and in command. “E-Mail Praises 9/11, Killing of Americans,” *Washington Post*, 8 January 2003, p. 16. See also Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare*, p. 86. He notes that, “Highly decentralized modern communications systems speed up the pace of political mobilization.”
  23. Gray, *Postmodern War*, pp. 93, 95.
  24. Clausewitz, *On War*, p. 101.