

# Bush Administration's Strategic Policy Creates a Conundrum for U.S. Military

by Carl Osgood

The process by which competent military professionals are attempting to develop operating principles and conceptions by which the Bush Administration's strategic policy can be militarily implemented, appears to be heading into a contradiction which suggests that that policy cannot be implemented—at least, not in a rational way. This contradiction was first noted two years ago by this reporter after the Unified Quest 03 war game, co-sponsored by the Army's Training and Doctrine Command (TraDoc) and U.S. Joint Forces Command, and held at the Army War College in Carlisle, Penn., when the pre-emptive war policy became an issue in the game. A different but comparable problem emerged at the Unified Quest 05 war game, which ran from May 1 to May 6, 2005. This time, the issue was "trying to bite a very big apple with a very small mouth," as Richard Hart Sinnreich, a retired Army officer and consultant who played the Red force commander in the game, put it in discussion with reporters on May 4.

In 2003, the discovery was that the threshold for use of weapons of mass destruction might, in fact, be lower than anyone had thought up to that time. The scenario (which was continued into the 2004 game) that produced that discovery was based on a confrontation between the United States (Blue) and a country called Nair (Red), in a scenario set in 2015. Nair, basically an extrapolation from present-day Iran (with its letters rearranged), concluded from watching Blue's behavior over the previous 15 years, that if the Blue force buildup reached certain trigger points, then war was a certainty. Rather than waiting for Blue to complete its buildup, Red attacked first. Sinnreich who also played the Red force commander in the 2003 game, explained, at the time: "We established a set of triggers and when Blue preparations penetrated those triggers, we didn't wait for Blue to attack. We attacked." (For more on this, see "Army War Game Shows Pre-Emptive Disaster," *EIR*, May 30, 2003.) Put another way by Clement "Bill" Rittenhouse, the chief of the Wargaming Division in TraDoc's Futures Center, when discussing the insights learned from the 2003-04 game: "Red pre-empted the pre-emptor. We didn't expect that." He also noted that traditional military operating principles, such as mass and economy of force, still count.

For 2005, TraDoc wrote a completely different scenario, because of another problem from the 2003 game. That sce-

nario looked too much like war planning to some outside observers and to non-U.S. participants in the game. According to Rittenhouse, Nair became "very sensitive" for that reason, and "drove us to consider whether to classify the game" or to rewrite the scenario so that the game could be kept unclassified and left open to participation from allied countries and civilian agencies.

The new scenario concerns a country called "Redland," situated in the region that runs from the Dalmatian coast of the Adriatic Sea to the Ukrainian border with Russia. Redland also sits astride the energy flows from Central Asia to Western Europe, which gives it considerable leverage in any dispute, leverage which it uses without hesitation. It is a European-Islamic country that has its own history and ambitions, and that still winds up, in the judgment of this reporter, looking like very much like how the U.S. perceives Iran, today. Rittenhouse and other game officials insist, however, that the only purpose of the scenario is to "get at the game objectives," which is to subject the joint operations concepts under test to maximum stress to determine how well they stand up.

"Ultimately, it's a sandbox," said Rittenhouse. "How do we defeat the kinds of adversaries we think will take us on with all the means" at their disposal, including the use of weapons of mass destruction, irregular warfare, and a strategy of protracted operations? In order to do that, the scenario is designed to be as difficult as possible, both in terms of geography and in terms of the capabilities of the Red adversary. The geography includes the mountainous terrain of the Balkans, and the constricted and shallow waters of the Adriatic, the Aegean, and the Black Seas, with the narrow passages of the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles. The geography is complicated by the politics of neutral countries, including Greece and Hungary, which refuse access to their air space and surrounding waters. The Red adversary is equally challenging, with powerful land and air forces, and a population that has a proud tradition of resisting outside invaders, even if the government they are fighting for is deemed illegitimate.

## A Challenging Scenario

With a scenario like this, it's not surprising that difficulties would arise for the Blue force, since the game is deliberately designed to be challenging. What makes it more interesting, however, is that some of the issues that arise have also arisen



*The Unified Quest war game is showing that potential adversaries watch and react to U.S. strategic policy and behavior in ways that are often unexpected. Here, U.S. soldiers clearing an area in al-Iskandariyah, on March 5, 2005.*

with respect to the current operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, even though those adversaries have nothing like the capabilities given to Red in the game. These include the stress imposed on a force with global commitments, but with limited force structure and size. “We’re trying to look at the gaps between the way we wish to fight and our ability to do so,” said Army Lt. Gen. Bill Carter (ret.), the Blue force commander in the game. In the scenario, those gaps turn out to be quite substantial, particularly in the area of sea lift and air lift, of the kind that can operate without ports of entry. Industrial base issues also arise, because of Blue’s heavy dependence on precision-guided munitions, which are expensive, limited in numbers, and require long lead times to produce.

Red’s behavior in the game is not unlike that of Red in the 2003 game. It examines Blue’s history and behavior and reacts accordingly. One can safely assume that, in the real world, many countries are closely studying the U.S. operations in Iraq and drawing their own conclusions. In the current game, Red concludes that Blue’s problem is as Sinnreich was quoted above saying: “Trying to bite a very big apple with a very small mouth.” He explained that Blue’s vulnerability is that it is trying to take Red on quickly and cheaply, and therefore Red’s strategy is to “make it very long and very expensive.” He added that Redland is a modern nation-state with a very large, well-equipped army that, in terms of its capabilities, looks like any of several actual nations. “There’s an irreducible relationship between the size of the job and the size of the force needed to deal with it,” he said. “The Blue force can fight and beat any Red enemy, but only so many at a time.”

Another important aspect of the game is the relationship between military and political objectives. The Bush Administration went into Iraq convinced that overwhelming military

force would achieve its political objectives. Therefore, with the lesson of the aftermath of the Iraq invasion in mind, the war game has a political component to include how to positively influence a population and immediately establish stability in the wake of an offensive operation. Or, as Gen. Kevin Byrnes, TraDoc commander, put it, the game is “looking at how the population is influenced in reaching the desired end-state.” The problem is that influencing the population has proved to be very difficult. In the game, the Red population has a national strong identity, and it coalesces around the government when the country is threatened by invasion.

### **Policy Assumptions in Bushland**

Underlying all of this is the Bush Administration’s strategic policy, which is what drives the assumptions on which the game is based. Those assumptions include, as noted above, the pre-emptive war policy, but also everything that the Bush Administration says it wants to do in the world with the military forces under its control. That policy goes back to the Quadrennial Defense Review of 2001, the National Security Strategy of 2002, and numerous other documents, including the National Defense Strategy and the National Military Strategy, released in March 2005. The last two documents provide the conceptual framework for how the Defense Department and the military services will organize themselves to implement the strategy outlined in the first two documents.

One of the themes that runs through the National Defense Strategy document, is contempt for international law, to the point where a government’s, or other entity’s, use of international fora and judicial process to attempt to change U.S. behavior, is equated with terrorism. As was brought out by a reporter’s question during a March 18 press briefing, the

Pentagon sees any attempt by any party to “constrain” the ability of the United States to do whatever it wants in the world as “terrorism.”

Under the heading “Our Vulnerabilities,” the document claims that “Our strength as a nation-state will continue to be challenged by those who employ a strategy of the weak using international fora, judicial processes, and terrorism.” Undersecretary of Defense for Policy Doug Feith, a leading neocon and ally of Vice President Dick Cheney, said: “There are various actors around the world that are looking to either attack or constrain the United States, and they are going to find creative ways of doing that that are not the obvious conventional military attacks. And we’re just pointing out that we need to think broadly about diplomatic lines of attack, legal lines of attack, technological lines of attack, all kinds of asymmetric warfare that various actors can use to try to shape, constrain our behavior.”

Feith made an oblique reference to the war crimes charges filed, at the behest of the Center for Constitutional Rights, against Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, in Germany, a few months ago, as “the arguments that some people try to make to, in effect, criminalize foreign policy and bring prosecutions” where there’s no basis in international law, “as a way of trying to pressure American officials.” Rear Adm. William Sullivan, Vice Director for Strategy, Plans and Policy for the Joint Staff, added that “what that vulnerability really gets to is that if there are countries that don’t share our goals, they may try to use established international fora to inhibit us doing what we need to do in our own national interest.”

Nor does the document stop there. It further declares: “Many of the current legal arrangements that govern overseas posture date from an earlier era, but today, the challenges are more diverse and complex, our prospective contingencies are more widely dispersed. . . .” Therefore, “international agreements relevant to our posture must reflect these circumstances and support greater operational flexibility.” The Bush Administration will therefore “seek new legal arrangements that maximize our freedom” to operate, militarily, around the world. Of course, if such efforts fail, the Administration has already demonstrated its willingness to ignore international law, including the UN Charter, the Geneva Conventions on the treatment of prisoners of war, and the Convention Against Torture.

The impact of this aspect of U.S. strategic policy was not made visible to reporters during Unified Quest’s media day. In any case, it may have been biased because, by design, efforts to resolve the dispute by diplomatic and other means had to fail; otherwise, there would have been no war to game. Other aspects of the policy were more visible, however, including some of the key strategic objectives. Among these are “Securing strategic access to key regions, lines of communication, and the global commons,” and “The United States will counter aggression or coercion targetted at our partners

and interests,” including “where dangerous political instability, aggression, or extremism threatens fundamental security interests, the United States will act with others to strengthen peace.”

This is where the issues raised by Sinnreich, that is, the size of the force in relation to the size of the job, came into play. In the game, the size of the force available was impacted by contingencies in other parts of the globe, including homeland security challenges, a narco-insurgency in Colombia, tensions in the Indian subcontinent and the Arabian peninsula, a border dispute on the Korean peninsula, and a crisis in Indonesia. In the real world of today, those physical constraints are, among other things, limiting the freedom of action of the U.S. military outside of Southwest Asia, creating a tremendous recapitalization problem, because of the rapid pace at which equipment is being worn out in Iraq and Afghanistan, and creating a recruitment crisis in the Army and the Marines.

## **Do We Know How To Win Wars?**

The bottom line, however, is reaching what General Byrnes referred to as “the desired end-state,” something which was not achieved in the 2003-04 Unified Quest. One of the lessons of the Vietnam War that surely has application today is that military superiority does not necessarily equal political victory. That political victory certainly still appears to be a distant possibility in Iraq, even though U.S. soldiers and Marines win every engagement they have with the insurgents. Army Col. Robert Killebrew (ret.), speaking at an April 11 conference at the American Enterprise Institute on the future of the Army, declared: “It is my contention that we no longer know how to fight and win wars. We have become very good at campaign planning. We are an excellent battle force; but in terms of linking the battles to strategic victory, tying it up in a bow with an outcome that totally satisfies our commitment and then moving on, I don’t think we as a defense establishment anymore understand how to do that.” Killebrew gave four reasons for this situation: There is nobody left in the defense establishment who remembers how we won World War II; during the Cold War, we deliberately limited our conflicts in order to avoid antagonizing our superpower rivals; the Defense Department has long had an infatuation with technology in order to limit liability in any conflict; and the military reform of the 1980s was incomplete.

The problem is not just one of tying military superiority to political victory, but of strategic policy itself, particularly when the current strategic policy increases the likelihood of conflict—as has been shown with the pre-emptive war policy—rather than decreasing it. One point that Unified Quest raises is that other nations will respond to the behavior of the United States, and not always in ways that the policy predicts. If, instead, the United States based its policy on the Treaty of Westphalia’s principle of promoting the “advantage of the other,” then the rest of the world would respond to that accordingly.