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## In My View

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## IN MY VIEW

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### IRONING OUT THE DETAILS

Sir:

In the Autumn 2005 *Naval War College Review* (“Net-centric before Its Time,” pages 109–35), Erik J. Dahl explored the similarities and differences between the *Jeune École* school in the French navy of the nineteenth century and the advocates of net-centric warfare in today’s U.S. Department of Defense. Dahl’s argument was that “the *Jeune École* failed . . . primarily because it attempted to do too much, was unwilling to accept criticism or allow dialogue, and misjudged the pace of change in warfare. Today’s advocates of military transformation and revolution sometimes exhibit similar failings” (page 110).

Dahl’s detailed criticisms of what he calls the network-centric “school of thought” include the following: (a) “a strong faith not just in the latest technical fads but in technological progress writ large,” (b) “trust . . . in overly complex and esoteric mathematical calculations and scientific theorizing,” (c) a lack of flexibility in thinking and a concomitant unwillingness to admit mistakes, and (d) arrogance (pages 126, 128, 129). What he is really talking about is not so much a “school of thought” but a theology that rests on faith and a kind of special scholasticism alien to the way that most people think.

In making these points, Dahl highlights the problems that face *all* advocates of significant military reform, including the successful reforms. For example, for almost six months at the beginning of 1919, the Navy’s General Board reviewed the lessons learned from naval aviation’s experiences in World War I. The Secretary of the Navy wanted the board members to produce a series of recommendations that would shape the future of airpower at sea. In testifying to the board, pioneer naval aviator Commander John Towers observed, “I don’t think we can continue beyond . . . 1925 . . . in building aircraft carriers, because I think it will be quite possible that ships will all become more or less aircraft carriers and be so designed” (quoted in Thomas C. Hone, Norman Friedman, and Mark D. Mandeles, *American & British Aircraft Carrier Development, 1919–1941*

[Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1999], p. 23). Commander Towers, a key figure in the development of naval aviation, was *wrong*—both on that score and on several others (see Clark Reynolds’s excellent and detailed biography, *Admiral John H. Towers: The Struggle for Naval Air Supremacy* [Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1991]). Yet his energy, professionalism, courage, and dedication were essential to the success of the Navy’s aviation efforts.

Another way to describe dramatic changes in military affairs such as the introduction of carrier aviation is to say that they are messy. The advocates of change will have some evidence for their case, but their opponents will also marshal evidence for a stiff defense of existing technology, doctrine, and concepts of warfare. Partisans on both sides of the argument will often talk arrogantly and even act selfishly. Careers and reputations will be hazarded and lost. The most senior officials, such as Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld, will be asked to take risks and to make decisions based on little evidence or on disputed evidence. Mistakes will be inevitable.

What’s different now from the situation that faced the *Jeune École* and its detractors is that we have means of testing claims regarding new technology or new methods of fighting. In his essay, Erik Dahl noted that the French navy held its first modern naval maneuvers in 1886, right in the middle of the furor over the claims of the *Jeune École*. By contrast, the U.S. Navy tested the possibilities, tactics, and techniques of carrier aviation in major fleet exercises from 1923 right through the spring of 1941. My point is that the French navy began a fleet maneuver program because of the debate over the claims of the *Jeune École* but the program wasn’t continued, if only because no one then grasped that a continuous series of experiments and trials was essential if any prospective military revolution was to become reality. The key to avoiding error in the midst of change is to have a means of highlighting mistakes. The French navy didn’t understand this well enough in the 1880s. We do now.

Dahl’s conclusion was that “many of the *Jeune École*’s innovations were well ahead of their time” (page 123). He made the same criticism of the concept of net-centric warfare—that it was and is ahead of its time both technologically and strategically. His concern is that the effort to jump ahead—to take a major risk—will fail and set back a movement that has *some* promising elements. He fears that today’s “transformers” have, like their predecessors in the *Jeune École*, misjudged “the temper” of the times and overreached (page 130).

But today’s advocates of change have tools that weren’t available to any navy in the 1880s, including qualitative and quantitative simulations, distributed electronic war games, and a sophisticated national training system that links widely separated participants digitally. Put another way, we know a lot more today about how to define and then to limit risk. That doesn’t mean there won’t be

heated disagreements about net-centric warfare's strengths and weaknesses, but it does mean that those arguments won't just be played out in the media, as they were in France in the 1880s.

Indeed, the push for "transformation" has shifted from writers and thinkers to tacticians, developers, and our combat forces. Notions debated on paper and in slide presentations five years ago are being tested in combat and in simulations and games. Those who doubt this is so should consult the websites of the military services and the Joint Forces Command. Military revolutions are always bedeviled by details. U.S. armed forces are ironing out the details and developing new ideas as you read this, and that's just the way it should be.

So my response to Erik Dahl is to say, "Thanks for the thoughtful warning. It was appreciated, as are all such warnings. Pitch in! Help your colleagues transform our military forces and the institutions and processes that sustain them."

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Sir:

Erik Dahl's article "Net-Centric before Its Time," which examined whether the controversies surrounding the French *Jeune École* movement of the late 1800s might hold any lessons for a transforming American military today, is a useful and timely one. However, in concluding that the *Jeune École* was "ahead of its time strategically" and that its proponents were guilty of "misjudging the speed at which naval warfare was changing," the author may have erred, in not developing these thoughts sufficiently. To my mind, he misses the most fundamental and important lesson that can be drawn from the whole *Jeune École* experience, and that is that in times of great strategic uncertainty it does not pay to develop a navy with too narrow a strategic focus or too specialized a mission set. The only irrefutable historical consequence of this whole event was surely that the French, through their intermittent pursuit of a specialized form of warfare against a single opponent, failed to foresee that were the strategic situation to change, their innovative fleet was likely to be rendered irrelevant and furthermore that there

would be insufficient time for them to adjust. This is essentially what caused the French Navy to flounder for forty years and to lose its position as a leading naval power. As such, it has to be the key point that must be learned, particularly by the preeminent navy of the modern age.

Secondly, Dahl talks of the “differences in the strategic circumstances facing France during the 1880s,” a point that is well taken, but one that is again not fully developed. The major military difference between the French in the 1880s and the United States today was surely that France, as a strong naval power but not comparable to Great Britain, had little choice but to react in some way to the emerging threat posed by the Royal Navy. Not to do so would have been to abdicate its responsibilities as a competing naval power—worse still, it was nationally indefensible in situations such as this, where the power in question was clearly the most pertinent strategic threat on the horizon. In many ways, this situation parallels Western perceptions of Soviet naval might in the Cold War, only more acutely. The historian and analyst must therefore acknowledge that such circumstances provide considerable incentive for an inferior power like France in the 1870s to react in a specific fashion and against an obvious threat. In contrast, the United States, as today’s premier naval power, is under no such pressure. Instead, it should be free to examine technological developments in a more empirical manner, selecting only those that, in its judgment, might further its abilities in an appropriate strategic direction. In short, today’s American problem of how best to react to an era of technological change is categorically different from the one facing the French under the *Jeune École*.

Thirdly, and directly linked to this point, it must be understood that the French had precious little choice but to innovate if they were to compete at all. The British strategy, in times of war with France, was simply to adopt the age-old idea of a close blockade of the French Atlantic coast, an approach that had the added benefit of effectively dividing the French fleet in the process—the geographical handicap of the Iberian Peninsula and France’s continuing need to base major units in Toulon did the rest. Nor could France rely on its industrial capacity to pull it through. The differing rates of industrialization in Europe had left the French with a far weaker shipbuilding capacity than the British, a situation that was exacerbated by the French practice of providing minimal oversight in contracts let to individual shipyards. The results were, first, an inefficient and uneconomical process that produced ships at a far slower rate than the British, and second, a lack of standardization that made French yards hopelessly unsuited to the building of large and complex platforms like battleships. Worse still, these “one of a kind” ships were causing all sorts of maintenance and training problems for the navy that was to use them.

With no prospects therefore of ever gaining parity in battleships, it is little wonder that the building of the far less complicated torpedo craft seemed so attractive to the French. Not only did such vessels “fit” the cottage-industry style of their yards far more closely, but once the *Jeune École* had provided the necessary tactical rationale, fielding large numbers of these novel naval weapons in a radically new “networked” force disposition seemed at last to offer an affordable prospect of defeating the close blockade once and for all. Better, even the inferior French battle fleet would have the residual effect of “fixing” the British heavy units in place, where they could be worked on by this *defense mobile* of torpedo craft. These two factors were, in turn, expected to enable the third, offensive leg of the *Jeune École* strategy, which was to use France’s undoubted strength in fast, armored cruisers to slip through the blockade and threaten the consequently poorly protected British trade routes. The point to all these explanations, however, is to show that the French were reacting to some very specific criteria and from a position of military and economic inferiority—a handicap that does not currently afflict the United States.

So, if the French response in this era was too specific in nature to be of use as a model for the United States today, what of that of the British? After all, in many ways their strategic situation more closely parallels that facing America in this new century. Britain was the leader of a global trading empire and the premier naval power of the time. Its military-industrial complex was the envy of the world, and its ability to outproduce all comers in any prospective naval race seemed assured. Is there, therefore, anything in the way that it responded to the same naval “revolution” that might be of use to American planners today? The rather glib, if factually correct, answer would seem to be “yes and no.” Yes, the U.S. Navy should pay very close attention to the fact that the British essentially “hedged their bets” against a variety of threats while experimenting with a whole range of promising technologies. The result seemed to be that they were better placed to use their industrial might appropriately when the strategic situation settled—or at least they were certainly better off than navies like the French, which had invested too heavily in the one scenario. At the same time, however, Americans would do well not to look too closely at the reasoning of the British, who it seems were guided less by a sense of purpose in this than by a rather arrogant indecision.

For example, I am quoted by Dahl as arguing that the British were probably poorly prepared to deal with the sort of threat posed by a *Jeune École* France. While true, this is essentially a broader issue, in that the Royal Navy, preoccupied with its enthusiasm for naval technology and the prospects of a second Trafalgar, seemed very slow to recognize the fact that the industrial age had changed the entire nature of naval warfare forever. From this point onward, naval decisions

were going to depend less upon decisive engagements at sea per se and more on how such engagements might impact the broader and more mundane business of safeguarding the nation's economy and its crucial ability to generate the necessary combat power, in its widest sense. In short, the business of exercising "command of the seas" in the industrial age had widened considerably. For a country that, more than any other, was critically dependent on its naval might for the security of its overseas trade, this was a surprising oversight—all the more so when you consider that this oversight persisted essentially unchanged right up until the First World War, a full thirty years after the *Jeune École* threat should have provided the necessary impetus for change. This is the reason for my caution about drawing too many parallels with the quality of British naval thinking at the time, although the main lesson is certainly clear. The United States should anticipate that, in the same way that the industrial revolution altered naval equations, there are likely to be similar differences in the way in which an "information age" navy should exercise its influence.

The final caution I would add, and this echoes Dahl's thinking, is that we should never forget that the *Jeune École* was, first and foremost, a social reaction to an oppressive environment within the French Navy of the time, like that within any large bureaucracy of the day; it was, that is, simply a microcosm of the bitter turmoil evident in French society as a whole. The service's institutional thinking was therefore prone to being "hijacked" for political purposes and distorted for personal ends, with its establishment becoming hopelessly polarized in the process. While I am not suggesting that such bitter divides exist today in America, it is nonetheless timely to warn against any overly zealous pursuit of "transformation" for its own sake, or equally, against any outright rejection that offers little in return save the rejection itself. Such policies can only have the effect of polarizing opinion within the Navy to the extent that neither side would feel inclined to compromise. This would be damaging in the longer term, since the forging of an appropriate naval strategy to meet uncertain times requires a collective cool head and open mind in order to consider the full range of possibilities.

ANGUS ROSS

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## THE NATURE OF INSURGENCY WAR

Sir:

The Naval War College's Professional Ethics Conference 2005 grappled in a timely way with the inescapable issues of "insurgency" and "counterinsurgency." An unquestionable merit of this open meeting on the diverse, convoluted, culturally rooted, subjectively contended, and above all, destructive insurgency in the GWOT (Global War on Terror) is that it revealed the breadth and depth of the issue to be overwhelmingly beyond any single individual's study and experience and beyond a simple thesis or strategy for "the" solution.

To be sure, the event gathered an august spectrum of academic, legal, military, nonmilitary/agency, historical, religious, media, and political expertise as well as warriors (fresh from the front line of GWOT) and ex-warriors (from wars past). The debates underscored the insurgency as the core of the current U.S. and world geopolitical strait and, therefore, the utmost challenge—whatever the genesis, mistakes made, and their consequences in and prospects for the (Iraqi) war. Insurgents particularly of the current GWOT have many faces, beliefs, ethnicities, countries of origin, loyalties, reasons for hatred and fanaticism, each of which elicits many different assessments, sentiments, points, and counterpoints. The "ethics" context of the conference served to examine this complex issue, including reflections of individual judgment or even conscience for thoughtful conclusions.

Curiously, *Webster's* defines insurgency as "revolt against a government that is less than an organized revolution and is *not recognized as belligerency*" (emphasis supplied). In contrast, Bard E. O'Neill, cited in the conference program, adds the use of "*violence* to destroy, reformulate, or sustain the legitimacy of one or more aspects of politics." O'Neill separates terrorism as "threat or use of physical coercion . . . *against civilians*, to create fear in order to achieve political objectives." But he goes on to connect the two: "Insurgent terrorism is purposeful . . . violence . . . to achieve specific . . . goals." If so, it would make sense to try to identify unequivocally those specific *reasons* within the amorphous substance of the Iraqi insurgency. That is the case especially when the U.S.-led coalition troops are being sent into the war with a prosaic assignment—"Hunt down the insurgents"—that may be concise but is proving hopelessly open-ended. Perhaps more important than touting America's rhetorical "mission" or "victory"—as the administration is doing—might be to try learning what the insurgents' "mission" or "victory criteria" are. That would help to develop insight into the question of whether indeed the insurgents can be defeated.

The motivator for insurgency per se may be more universal than one might suspect from the peculiarities in Iraq. In the NWC forum, many historical parallels were noted, such as in the war of American independence, French colonial resistance in Algeria and Vietnam, the British struggle against the IRA, and America's Vietnam War. References were made also to the powerful underlying character of a warring nation or cultural entity, to the codes of the warriors, such as the (medieval) knights, (Japanese) samurai, and (U.S.) Marines. One universal causal element of revolt is the endemic resistance against "foreign" occupation or presence in a territory or populace invaded by the foreign government. Normally this resistance factor can be ameliorated only by a "signed"—that is, abiding—accord of cessation or of victory and surrender, possible only between sovereign nation states, as in the world wars. Thus, in insurgency—by a faction within a nation—this resistance tends to sustain itself in perpetuity. Discriminating chronicles of the Japanese surrender in World War II tell the real reason (that is, behind the often-told rationale of yielding to the A-bomb and Soviets' entry into the war) why Emperor Hirohito and his cabinet decided to surrender—to avoid the inevitable coup d'état by an Imperial Army faction determined to "fight till the last man." The insurgency would have imploded the Japanese nation.

The notion of a coup within a troubled sect might explain the Iraqis-killing-Iraqis plight. An anti-foreign-occupation cause can be strong and righteously unilateral enough to identify any foreign-enemy "sympathizer" as an enemy of the cause. The Iraqi-specific, historically rooted, Shia-Sunni-Kurd dispute (threatening a civil war in the post-Saddam instability) adds another dimension in the problematic internecine squabble. Further, the infusion of the non-Iraqi jihadists—since al-Qa'ida is seizing the opportunity in the U.S. invasion and deposal of a Moslem nation to claim legitimacy for infiltration into Iraq—has undoubtedly introduced a convoluted, equivocal, and elusive insurgency element under the umbrella of the pan-Islamic jihadist movement.

The U.S. effort to establish a new Iraqi sovereignty by cajoling—if not coercing—the installation of an interim administration, writing of a new constitution, and free election (pending at this writing) of the (first post-Saddam) government is evolving but slowly because of the insurgency. Would the insurgency disappear if the foreigners left? Can America's war on the Iraqi insurgency be turned over to the Iraqi "army" and "police" or the government? Would it then be the Iraqis' war? But against whom? If against the insurgents, for what insurgency cause—if no longer against foreign occupation?

Accounts of U.S. veterans of Iraqi battles indicate the problematic viscosity of the insurgency war, even in each of the encounters. For example, which of the Iraqis are insurgents, whether al-Qa'ida or just another Iraqi with a grievance? Is

their cause anti-foreign or indigenous dissatisfaction, and how strong is it? Military people on the ground put their lives in the insurgents' way—in real time and in real life.

The intensity and determination of the insurgents are manifest in their “suicide bomber” attack methods. The preemptive bravery and moral stigma of self-sacrifice inflict shock and even fear upon the ordinary global populace. Pragmatically, though, the “suicide” or certain-death aspect of the bombing technique points to use of the human—still the most precise cybernetic mechanism—as the targeting or guidance “system.” In the last days of World War II, the Japanese military was in desperate need of skilled attack pilots to inflict any possible damage on the overwhelmingly superior Allied invasion forces. As has since been chronicled, the Imperial Navy, after agonizing reflection, formed the “Special Attack” force—known in the West as the kamikazes. The literally final attacks were not ordered but requested, with appeals to each pilot’s ingrained spirit of *bushido* (the way of the warrior), which taught that there was “no greater honor than to die (sacrifice oneself) for the ancestors’ land.” It might be of special note that the Japanese never associated the kamikaze mission with the word “suicide” (*jisatsu*), which connotes cowardly capitulation rather than fighting to the end. A kamikaze pilot who was shot down in his final dive and rescued, and another who was en route to attack when he received the surrender notification, have uniformly said to this writer, “Everyone was going to fight and die for the country. My time had come.”

As the Marine and Army officers returning from Iraq recounted in the NWC discussions, in face-to-face, hand-to-hand encounters with an enemy as amorphous, frustratingly extrinsic, and preemptively explosive as the Iraqi insurgents, the individual fighter must make instantaneous assessments and tactical and moral decisions for the next moment’s action, actions that must ensure their own survival and save the lives of their teammates and achieve victory in the micro-localized combat. To the warriors on the ground—and most likely, to the opposing individual insurgents likewise—the fighting becomes personal, detached from the geopolitical strategies, weapons of mass destruction, oil, liberation, freedom, democratization, and, likewise, jihad and al-Qa‘ida. In his book *One Bullet Away*, Captain Nathaniel Fick, a Marine veteran of the Afghanistan and Iraq wars, describes the combat on the ground as “humanity stripped of the veneer of civilization,” and policy and strategy “as luxuries that men on the ground cannot afford.” He contends that one’s commitment and loyalty are not so much to “the idea of democratic Iraq or even the United States at large” but “to my Marines to the left and the right.” Fick says the only thing that mattered was that his Marines died or survived doing the “honorable thing.”

Another preponderant concern at the conference was the “ethics” of “information gathering” from captured insurgents—the question of “torture.” It became clear in discussions that laws and regulations in the final analysis leave the responsibility with the warriors on the scene. The chief of Navy and Marine Corps chaplains, Rear Admiral Louis Iasiello, the conference’s final speaker, concluded that “who we are drives what we must do,” that the “just war” is a product of the upbringing of the individual American warrior.

In the meantime, what could the United States do with respect to the Iraqi insurgency situation? If the foreign occupation is the basic cause of insurgency, it would make sense to remove the coalition presence from Iraq. But is it responsible and honorable to take over a nation (albeit one under a genocidal dictatorship), cause the rise of insurgency, and invite a global terrorism transplantation into the country, and then to leave the nation torn by insurgency, an internecine battle threatening its fledgling sovereignty? An honorable approach would be a clear policy to assist the Iraqi nation to stand up free of struggle against foreign coercion, including the easily misunderstood mandate for American-style democracy, and as a self-respecting and responsible sovereign state. At any rate, the Iraqization of Iraq would be the answer to the issue of “ethics of insurgency and counterinsurgency.”

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