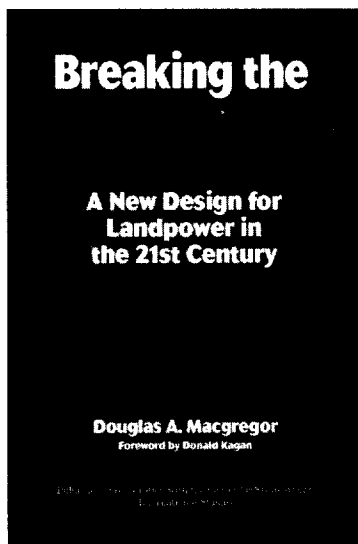


## In Search of the Army After Next: Another Perspective

reviewed by Dr. Williamson Murray

**BREAKING THE PHALANX: A New Design for Landpower in the 21st Century.** By Douglas A. Macgregor. Praeger Publishers, Westport, CT, 1997, 283 pp., \$65.00 (HB), \$24.95 (PB). (Member (HB) \$58.50, (PB) \$22.45)



Col Douglas A. Macgregor, USA, has written an important and useful contribution to the current defense debate—one that should be of considerable interest to its Marine readers. It has two central arguments, both of which are right on target. First, Col Macgregor argues for the central importance of ground forces to U.S. strategy in the next century. Second, he argues for a fundamental reorganization of the Army in the face of the vast changes that have occurred in the strategic environment. Although there are several problems with this book, some of which may annoy Marine readers, they are not of overriding importance nor do they detract from Col Macgregor's overall message. By raising a number of crucial issues he has contributed immensely to the current debate about where defense needs to go in the next century.

It has become popular among those who know nothing about war within the Service hierarchies and in the civilian academic world to argue (on the basis of scanty and incomplete evidence from the Gulf War) that a revolution in military affairs (RMA) has already occurred and that by using a combination of precision guided munitions and highly sophisticated technologies, the United States can wage war at a distance to achieve its national objectives. Supposedly, with its technological superiority—total battle space dominance—the United States will be able to wage wars that cost it little in lives and treasure and will allow it to dominate the 21st century.

Such views, enormously popular within the Beltway and among the engineering systems analysis crowd that makes up all too much of the Pentagon, also argue that there will be minimal need for ground forces in the next century—at least within the American military. If the United States ever does need ground forces, then obviously U.S. allies can provide the bulk of them and thereby reduce the exposure of Americans to the possibilities of death, injury, and discomfort that ground war entails.

There are all sorts of reasons for

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slam dunking such nonsense, but Col Macgregor confines himself to focusing on the strategic consequences of such views. To put it bluntly, the technological view of the current RMA misses a number of critical points. War, as Clausewitz suggested in a number of places, is predominately a political endeavor. Consequently, the destroying of targets at a distance does not automatically translate into victory. Instead, as the sorry history of our century suggests, naval and air power have been essential enablers to the projection of ground forces, but only ground forces have been able to translate the projection of U.S. military power into victory. There is no reason to believe that the situation is going to change in the next century.

Moreover, the argument that the United States can rely on its Allies to provide whatever ground forces are needed, while it provides the air and naval power, misses the essential point that the Allies may not find it particularly attractive to provide the ground forces that will bear the brunt of the casualties. The argument represents, of course, the reappearance of B.H. Liddell Hart's disastrous formulation of a strategy of "limited liability" for the British Government in the mid-1930s. That strategy had a disastrous impact on the British Army's rearmament and contributed significantly to the misestimates of a British Government that believed that it could get away with defense on the cheap.

Col Macgregor's second argument is equally important. In many ways, the author has taken a courageous stand, for virtually everything he argues for flies in the face of current Army culture and certainly its structure and organization. To put it simply, Col Macgregor argues for nothing less than the complete reorganization of the Army from top to bottom. He would do away with the current emphasis on the division and place brigade-sized, com-

bined-arms units (which he calls groups) as the central unit of organization. Much of the overhead in the current Army would disappear (large division and corps staffs, for example) to be replaced by a flatter and less hierarchical organized structure. The aim would be to task organize a combination of such groups according to the needs of the situation. The result would be an increase in combat power and capability, while lessening the strain on the logistical structure. More of the Army would end up on the sharp end and less would find itself in overbloated staffs.

Although Col Macgregor, like myself, is an opponent of much of the nonsense about a current RMA and information warfare, he is not an enemy of technology. Rather he sees technological change as an essential component in furthering the ability to adapt more rapidly and with greater flexibility to the actual conditions of combat than do our opponents. The essential question in the next century is going to be the problem of getting U.S. combat power to the scene and employed before our opponents have the time to adapt to our moves or solidify the political situation. Consequently, U.S. forces are going to have to do more with less, and technology must be an essential component in that equation.

Col Macgregor understands how traumatic such change will be for the Army, particularly an Army that has, over the decades since World War II, proven all too willing to minimize the importance of ideas. He also recognizes how at odds he is with both the branch system on which the present Army rests and its comfortable atmosphere of "just getting along." As he suggests, "Thus, the officer with the 'perfect file' may simply be someone who 'goes along' and never questions his superior's opinions or directives." And, as most of the leadership of the Marine Corps has for a long time recognized, real professional military education will be of crucial importance in changing the Army in substantive ways. Unfortunately, the Army's senior leaders have remained largely contemptuous of

the idea that hard study at the War College might be of use in preparing for the next war.

There are, however, as suggested at the beginning of this review, problems with the book. Col Macgregor unfortunately is largely ignorant of the Marine Corps—a factor that typifies all too many Army officers. Because many Marine officers have attended Army schools, the Marine officer corps remains relatively well-informed of the Army's strengths and weaknesses—the same cannot be said in the other direction. Since few Army officers have exposure to the Marine Corps, the Army's officer corps has remained all too ignorant of Marine capabilities and capacity to contribute to the land battle (the Marine advance into Kuwait is an excellent example of the underestimation of Marine capabilities by Army planners).

In a real sense, Col Macgregor also remains a prisoner of the

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Army's contribution to victory in the Cold War—nurturing European stability. Consequently, even his interesting replay of the Gulf War in the next century remains tied to the stabilities of the past. He clearly believes that U.S. military forces will have access to the ports and airfields from which to mount military campaigns; that much of the war in the next century will be against foes who will wage war at the high tech level; and, that the United States will maintain considerable forces abroad where they can quickly and easily move to troubled spots.

There is, moreover, a disturbing unwillingness in his argument to recognize the crucial importance of the capacity to project military power from the sea and a general unwillingness to recognize what the Marine Corps is trying to do with

the V-22. In fact, had Col Macgregor been more knowledgeable on such a conception, he might have seen their utility in aiding and supporting the very Army capabilities which he is urging.

One might also note a number of mistakes and errors in Col Macgregor's account of the other Services as well as the Marine Corps—in some cases things are even worse than he suggests, such as in the case of the Navy's F/A-18E/F program. However, what is of importance here is that Col Macgregor is on sure ground when he discusses the Army and the essential importance of ground power to the strategy of the United States in the next century.

In the largest sense, American land power in coming decades will be an amalgamation of the Army and the Marine Corps. As the Commandant has suggested on a number of occasions, the Marines may win a number of battles in whatever campaigns the United States military fights, but the Army will win or lose the war. As LtGen Paul K. Van Riper, USMC(Ret), and MajGen Robert Scales have argued in a recent issue of *Strategic Review*, landpower will be essential to how well the United States fares in the next century. To paraphrase Benjamin Franklin, the Army and the Marine Corps can either hang together or they can hang separately.

Col Macgregor has contributed in very useful ways to the thinking of how the United States Army needs to retool itself for the next century. Marines can only hope that his arguments contribute to change in the Army and that he and his fellow soldiers begin to think about how to fold the Marine Corps, as it really is, into their conceptions.

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