

BOOKS

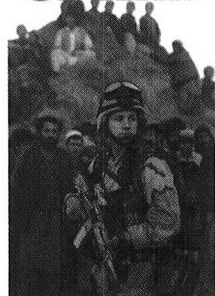
A New Way of War?

reviewed by LtCol F.G. Hoffman, USMCR(Ret)

TERRORISM, AFGHANISTAN, AND AMERICA'S NEW WAY OF WAR.

By Norman Friedman. United States Naval Institute Press, Annapolis, MD, 2003, ISBN 1591142903, 304 pp., \$29.95. (Member \$26.96)

Terrorism, Afghanistan, and America's NEW WAY OF WAR



Norman Friedman

Many years ago Winston Churchill warned that:

We have the spectacle of the powers and weapons of man far outstripping the march of his intelligence. We may find ourselves in the presence of the strength of civilization without its mercy.

This old warning is far more relevant today. If Osama bin Laden or some irrational actor were to get a weapon of mass destruction, we would see a brief, but blinding, glimpse of "civilization without its mercy." We have already had a glance, although civilization itself was not threatened, on 11 September 2001. Without mercy, thousands of innocents were slain. The attack did not place the physical survival of the United States at risk, but it did threaten the basis of America's open society.

In his latest book, Dr. Norman Friedman describes the nature of this

new national security threat and the particulars of the 11 September attack. He details the shock of the assault and the confusion and halting response our Government initially made. His concise narrative transitions to the resolute leadership and determined action plan ultimately put in place by the Bush administration here and abroad in response to Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda. The bulk of the book is devoted to Operation ENDURING FREEDOM (OEF) in Afghanistan and its implications for the future.

The author is a well-recognized naval historian and one of the world's most respected experts in naval systems design. His unique grasp of the correlation between naval power, strategy, and technology has placed him at the very forefront of strategic analysts and has made him a widely sought lecturer and commentator. He has previously authored a solid history of the first Gulf War (*Desert Victory: The War for Kuwait*, Naval Institute Press, 1991) and an award-winning history of the Cold War (*The Fifty-Year War: Conflict and Strategy in the Cold War*, Naval Institute Press, 1999). His best book, *Seapower as Strategy: Navies and National Interests* (Naval Institute Press, 2001), is an underappreciated jewel.

America's New Way of War starts slowly. The first five chapters set up the preconditions for 11 September 2001, and the emergence of al-Qaeda as a manifestation of modern terrorism. Chapter Six describes the emergence of the revolution in military affairs and network-centric warfare

(NCW) as the new way that American forces will fight. The author notes that NCW is very familiar to many naval officers because of its close correlation to technical networks and strike operations that the U.S. Navy has been perfecting for decades. The relevance of NCW to unconventional modes of warfare is the critical question that this book addresses and constitutes its value to today's debate about the transformation of the U.S. Armed Forces. This gives the book great salience to the larger debate about where this transformation should focus. Should the Office of the Secretary of Defense focus on perfecting strike warfare techniques and shift its force structure from heavy platforms/shooters to investments in smart sensors that permit higher degrees of situational awareness to engage targets from standoff distances with precision munitions? Or does the Department of Defense need to balance its portfolio to deal with urban warfare and the messy complexities of the "three block war" concept? Are the capabilities central to NCW relevant across the spectrum of conflict?

Dr. Friedman uses NCW as a lens with which to examine the application of force in OEF. He characterizes U.S. operations in Afghanistan as a test of NCW and concludes that its initial application was a failure. He notes that until the Northern Alliance was emboldened to concentrate and advance on the Taliban, aviation-based strike assets were less than fully successful at collapsing the resistance. Ultimately, the introduction of adequate numbers of highly trained special operations forces in the north, and Marines in the southern region, helped convince local warlords that the United States was serious. Friedman does an excellent job of describing the unique

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maritime aspects of the campaign and notes how critical the Navy was to U.S. operations. Without the ability to operate independently, Friedman surmises that many countries might have exercised a veto over U.S. military operations. The author also gives a good account of Task Force 58's operations led by then-BGen James N. Mattis. Friedman astutely grasps how critical the introduction of the Marine force was in unhinging further resistance in the southern region.

Where the book runs into difficulty is in relating NCW to those ground

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operations when determined defenders selected highly complex terrain and carefully prepared positions to confront U.S. forces. In Operation ANACONDA, U.S. forces were surprised by these resolute defenders and initially were rebuffed when they attempted to introduce ground forces into the region. Neither overhead satellite, unmanned vehicles, nor strike aviation proved sufficient to either detect or disperse these defenders. They had to be isolated and eliminated with “legacy” concepts, including integrated ground maneuver and fires.

Regrettably, Dr. Friedman's depiction of Operation ANACONDA was less than clear and needed a few tactical maps. Friedman is a brilliant strategist and naval historian, but capturing the fluidity of ground combat is not his forte. Operation ANACONDA, properly analyzed, reflects the shortfalls of NCW and undercuts the argument for shifts in resource allocation for which its proponents argue. Even with improved sensors and more precise weaponry, OEF's success would have still hinged on the ability of allied forces to be able to rout out the foreign elements of the Taliban's forces and crush al-Qaeda. The fact that the United States failed to introduce and deploy adequate numbers of ground forces

to cut off al-Qaeda during ANACONDA is the key lesson of the campaign, and a conclusion that Dr. Friedman does not adequately address.

What he did do well was recognize that the “most important lesson of Afghanistan is probably that we cannot predict where serious national crises may arise in [the] future.” We cannot envision the where or even the type of conflict. Ultraterrorism and unconventional forms of warfare will only add to the litany of conflicts that Marines must be prepared to face. Our goal for transformation should focus on producing a 21st century professional military that is more adaptive and agile than our adversaries. This requires continual judicious reflection about the future of warfare and rigorous examination of potentially powerful concepts like NCW. At the end of the day we will probably find out that we do need to embrace the advantages of NCW, but we will also find that we cannot look inward at our supporting systems or processes; rather, we need to focus on what we are trying to achieve operationally. Viewed in this sense, it may be better to think of OEF as a test

of network “enabled” warfare, and realize that we have not yet brought the benefits of technology down to the right level. OEF revealed the potential of network enabled warfare—if we can draw the right lessons and work at enabling our maneuver forces to fight more effectively across a range of tough situations.

Dr. Friedman's fine book stands as the only product that covers the entire spectrum of events from the crash of the World Trade Center towers on 11 September to the fall of Kabul. It's a lucidly written overview that military and civilian policymakers should seriously ponder as today's Pentagon moves forward with its transformation for tomorrow's conflicts. America's “new way of war” must enable its military to deal with a wide range of contingencies and adversaries. Our enemies cannot be permitted to outstrip the march of our intelligence, imagination, or resolve.

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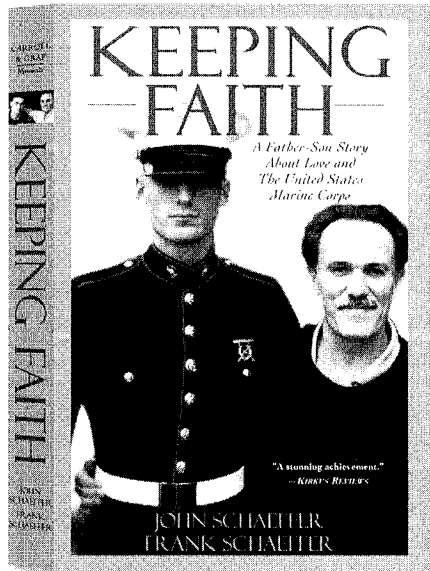
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