

REVIEW ESSAY

A NEW STANDARD FOR THE USE OF FORCE?

Lawrence J. Korb

Barnett, Thomas P. M. *The Pentagon's New Map: War and Peace in the Twenty-first Century*. New York: Putnam, 2004. 320pp. \$26.95

From the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 to the collapse of the twin towers in 2001 to the present, after the invasion and occupation of Iraq, the United States has not had a consistent national security policy that enjoyed the support of the American people and its allies. This situation is markedly different from the Cold War era, when our nation had a clear, coherent, widely supported strategy that focused on containing and deterring Soviet Communist expansion.

The tragic events of 9/11, the increase in terrorist attacks, and possible threats from such countries as North Korea and Iran that are capable of developing weapons of mass destruction make it imperative to develop a new national security strategy to safeguard the United States. In *The Pentagon's New Map: War and Peace in the Twenty-first Century*, Thomas Barnett, a senior strategic researcher and professor at the U.S. Naval War College, attempts to provide one.

Unfortunately, he does not succeed. The failure of Barnett's strategy is most vividly demonstrated by the strategic rationale he offers for the Bush administration's poorly planned invasion and occupation of Iraq.

According to Barnett, the world is divided into two parts, the Functioning Core and the Non-Integrating Gap. The Functioning Core consists of those stable

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countries in North America, much of South America, the European Union, Russia, Japan, China, India, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa. There is little threat of war or widespread violence in the Core, because its members enjoy the benefits of

globalization, specifically rising standards of living. The Gap, on the other hand, consists of areas such as the Caribbean Rim, most of Africa, the Balkans, the Caucasus, Central Asia, the Middle East, Southwest Asia, and much of Southeast Asia. In those areas there is a great deal of violence and turmoil, because they are not connected to the Core. This lack of connectivity results from the rejection of modernity by the elites in the Gap. Therefore, the members of the Gap do not enjoy the benefits of globalization, and hence these areas become incubators for terrorists.

If the United States wants to win the war against terrorism, Barnett argues, it must take the lead in shrinking the Gap. To do this, it must export security to the Gap until it is ready to integrate into the Core, or else the Gap will continue to export terrorism to the Core. Barnett calls this a “global transaction strategy.”

His global transaction strategy makes the war against Iraq a war of necessity, not one of choice. According to Barnett, the invasion of Iraq was justified because “Saddam Hussein’s outlaw regime was dangerously disconnected from the globalizing world—from our rule sets, our norms, and all the ties that bind the Core together in mutually assured dependence. He was the Demon of Disconnectedness and he deserves death for all his sins against humanity over the years.” Wow!

These words are eerily reminiscent of what President George W. Bush said on board the USS *Abraham Lincoln* in May 2003, in his infamous “mission accomplished” speech. In remarks onboard the carrier the president claimed that “the battle of Iraq is one victory in a war on terror that began on September 11th, 2001” and that the defeat of Saddam Hussein was “a crucial advance in the campaign against terror.”

It does not seem to matter to Barnett or his strategic view that the reasons the president gave for invading Iraq were spurious or that the war in Iraq represented a substantial setback in the struggle against al-Qa’ida. The unnecessary invasion of Iraq not only diverted attention away from Afghanistan, thus damaging the prospects for crippling al-Qa’ida, but created a new justification among the radical jihadists for attacking Westerners, drained the reservoir of goodwill that the United States enjoyed in the global community, and in the eyes of many Muslims transformed the war against terrorism into a war against Islam.

Instead Barnett characterizes the Bush administration’s decision as “amazingly courageous,” because “it has committed our nation to shrinking a major portion of the Gap in one fell swoop.” This decision makes the author love and admire the U.S. government and, by extension, the Bush approach to the global war on terror.

As a consequence of the framework he has developed, Barnett is also an unabashed supporter of Bush’s preemption doctrine when it comes to dealing with

actors and regimes in the Gap. There are two problems with his approach. First, it confuses preemption with preventive war. It is not only legal under international law but moral for a nation to take preemptive military action when it has what Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld calls “elegant intelligence” about an imminent threat. But this is not what the United States did in Iraq. President Bush has stated repeatedly that Iraq was not an imminent threat, yet he waged a preventive war against what he claimed was “a grave and gathering danger.” If this is the new standard for the use of force against members of the Gap, what is to prevent India from waging a preventive war against Pakistan? Or Russia against Georgia?

Second, while Barnett concedes that the traditional strategies of containment and deterrence will work against other Core states, he argues that it will not work against members of the Gap. Yet Barnett fails to recognize that while nonstate actors like al-Qa’ida cannot be deterred, even the most evil regimes in the Gap can be deterred, because their rulers wish to remain in power. The recent report of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence demonstrates that Iraq was contained and that the sanctions and American and British military pressure helped to destroy Saddam’s military machine and his capacity to produce conventional weapons and weapons of mass destruction. As Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz testified, the cost of containing Saddam amounted to \$2.5 billion a year. At the time of this writing the Bush administration has spent \$144 billion in Iraq, without making us safer.

Unlike the Bush administration, Barnett does not appear to have learned that the doctrine of launching preemptive strikes against established states in the Gap died in Iraq. Barnett wants to launch a preventive war against North Korea. According to his analysis, Kim Jong Il has become “globalization’s enemy number one following Saddam Hussein’s demise and must be removed from power.” He believes that Bush’s reelection means that such action is inevitable.

Finally, Barnett’s analysis falls into the trap of thinking that terrorists in the Gap attack the West for what it is and what it thinks. However, as demonstrated in the book *Imperial Hubris: Why the West Is Losing the War on Terror* by Anonymous (a twenty-three-year CIA veteran), America is hated and attacked for what it does—that is, the policies it pursues that impact the Islamic world, such as its support for apostate, corrupt, and tyrannical Muslim governments. He notes that “the Islamic World is not so offended by our democratic system of politics, guaranties of personal rights and civil liberties, and separation of church and state that it is willing to wage war against overwhelming odds to stop America from voting, speaking freely, and praying or not, as they wish.”

Because of these failings, Barnett’s global transaction strategy will not gain the support of the American people or its allies that containment did. Rather, the global transaction strategy is in reality an updated version of the domino

theory, which led the United States to believe that if it did not intervene to prevent South Vietnam from becoming communist, all of Southeast Asia would become part of the Soviet empire. Just as the domino theory led successive American presidents to commit national blood and treasure to a peripheral cause that was not essential to the goal of containing Soviet communist expansionism, the invasion of Iraq, even though it is a member of the Gap, was not essential to winning the struggle against radical jihadists like al-Qa'ida.

Unfortunately, these conceptual weaknesses undermine some of the sensible recommendations that Barnett makes, particularly about U.S. force structure. Yet even the best organized and equipped military will be of little use if it is employed incorrectly.

For those looking for a twenty-first-century version of containment, I recommend Zbigniew Brzezinski's *The Choice: Global Domination or Global Leadership*. The "Global Balkans," which he identifies as a source of political instability, is similar to Barnett's Gap. However, Brzezinski shows how the self-defeating arrogance of the Bush administration has undermined what must be the American goal of creating a new global system based on shared interests.