



SMALL WARS

JOURNAL

The Long Telegram of 2050

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Prologue

E Ring, The Pentagon, Washington, D.C., 1730hrs, December 7th, 2049

I arrived at the Pentagon's main entrance on a bleak, cold and snowy evening. The sun's last rays lit the building's façade in an unearthly light. Pulling the collar of my overcoat up over my neck, I grabbed my travel worn leather briefcase and opened the limousine's door against the cold. Thanking the driver, I stepped out of the vehicle and ascended the hard marble stairs to an entrance normally reserved for the military's most senior leadership. As I hastened up the stairs to the doors, I wondered why was I, a passed over about to retire Army lieutenant colonel, doing here. The phone call from the Pentagon was cryptic enough – an anonymous voice ordered me to “report to the Chairman's office immediately in the provided car.” I barely had time to throw on my dress uniform before the driver arrived at my apartment. The short ride afforded a few moments to contemplate the purpose of my visit. I knew the Chairman by reputation alone. Amongst those in the know, the Chairman was invariably described as an honest and brilliant man who suffered no fools. My normal duties as an Army staff planner were well outside his usual orbit. What could he want from me? But here I was, handing over my Biometric and Retina Identification Card (BRIC) to a Marine guard. As the Marine scanned my BRIC, I threw a glance at his companion sentry, a vaguely dog shaped robot nicknamed the Kaiser. Capable of running at nearly 80 kilometers per hour over uneven terrain while carrying 150 kilograms of gear, the Kaiser was DARPA's latest contribution to the military. This model sported a number of non-lethal weapons systems including sonic disrupters, microwave emitters and a high voltage Taser. Their sensor suite was equally impressive given its ability to see more broadly across the electromagnetic spectrum than even the new bionic eye enhancements tested at the 75th Ranger Regiment. First reports from operations in Afghanistan, a renewal of my Dad's own war after 9/11, indicated the Kaiser was also an effective counter IED system. The sentry returned my BRIC, saluted and buzzed me into the building's foyer where another impeccably dressed Marine directed me to follow her to the Chairman's office.

Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Washington D.C., 1743hrs, December 7th, 2049

The Chairman lived up to his reputation. He was seated behind a large oak desk in his surprisingly Spartan office. He did not shake hands nor ask me to sit.

“Do you know why you're here, Colonel?” he asked.

“No sir,” I replied.

“What I am about to tell you is a little known secret. Three hours ago, I was in the Tank with the service chiefs. The Chinese military overthrew their Premier in Beijing. Early reports indicate they were unhappy with his attempts at détente with our own government. We believe one of the senior PLA generals, likely an old school hardliner, is leading the coup. It looks like the Chinese are mobilizing their military on a global scale. We may be facing a major conflict. The media are just beginning to get word from their own sources in country. The White House will expect us to provide options. We are still neck deep in Afghanistan... will that war ever end... and have several smaller operations in Africa and the Pacific. I am fighting another battle with Congress over funding on the Hill. You wrote a paper on the future of warfare a few years ago while you were at Leavenworth, right?”

“Sir, I wrote a brief monograph on the subject. That was some years ago. The strategic environment has changed. But Sir, you have a staff of experts with access to better information. Why me?”

The Chairman ran a hand over his chin in contemplation. “Frankly, I need an independent look at our national security situation untainted by politics... or my own influence on the staff. You retire in less than two months so you’re fireproof. It’s time for a second edition of that paper. I want you to focus your update on two key questions. First, I need to know the fundamental changes in demographics, economics and geopolitical conditions that will radically change the conduct of military operations. Second, I want you to analyze the fundamental changes in the character of war and warfighting technologies that will radically change the conduct of military operations. My aide will show you to an office. You have two hours to make your report.”

I saluted smartly and followed the Chairman’s aide to an adjoining office. It was a short walk, really just a matter of a few steps. The aide placed her thumb on the biometric pad and opened the door. I stepped into the office and placed my dress uniform jacket and briefcase on a chair. The office was minimally furnished with just a desk, two chairs, a 4D smart view screen, a digital whiteboard and the latest military secure touchpad computer. Loosening my tie, I sat at the desk and placed my old pocket watch on the desk. I had two hours. Time to get to work.

Déjà Vu, All Over Again

While the situation described above is entirely fictional, it is not without precedent. Following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, a relatively unknown Army staff officer named Brigadier General Dwight D. Eisenhower received a similar summons to report to Army Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall. Eisenhower’s task was no less daunting - namely to plan the broad strokes of the American response to Japanese aggression. War is man’s oldest profession. While we might aspire for peace, the exigencies of our world demand we prepare for war.

The Need For a New Long Telegram

Beginning with the so-called peace dividend following the end of the Cold War, the United States lacked a codified, long term and whole of government approach to protecting our vital national interests. From the Clinton administration in the 1990s and continuing to the present day, our government operated in the absence of a national security plan with the foresight, longevity and effectiveness as George Kennan’s famed Long Telegram. Published in 1948, that prescient document served as the basis for US national and international endeavors for nearly 50 years. Without a centralized strategic plan, the United States government too often created foreign policy approaches on the fly without fully understanding their associated second or third order effects. For example, during his Congressional confirmation hearing to assume duties as the AFRICOM Commanding General in June of 2016, US Marine Lieutenant General Thomas Waldhauser was asked by Senator John McCain if the United States had a plan for Libya. Waldhauser’s blunt response neatly encapsulated the need for a new Long Telegram when he replied, “I

am not aware of any overall grand strategy at this point.”

But what form should a new Long Telegram take to meet the challenges found in the brave new world of 2050? Simply recreating Kennan’s vision fails to address the numerous operational environment changes in the geopolitical, economic and demographic spheres. Any new attempt to develop a comprehensive and lasting document must begin with military theorist Carl von Clausewitz’s sage advice that, “First, the supreme, the most far reaching act of judgment that the statesman and commander have to make is to establish by that test the kind of war on which they are embarking; neither mistaking for, nor trying to turn it into, something that is alien to its nature. This is the first of all strategic questions and the most comprehensive.” We must expand Clausewitz’s theorem beyond the narrow binary statesman-commander relationship to a broader, whole of government – ideally a whole of society – approach to national defense. In other words, while the military will play a major role in future national policy questions the uniformed services must be fully integrated and invested with the other elements of national power found in the Diplomatic, Information, Military and Economic model (DIME) in the planning and decision processes. Failing to adhere to this theorem will, in the best case, lead to an uneven approach to policy decision making. A worst case scenario, where elements of national power operate in a wholly decentralized approach, could very well create a situation where the United States fails to achieve victory in war.

Clearly, the United States requires a lasting, forward thinking and inclusive grand strategy to protect our vital national interests. Such a policy must be flexible enough to account for the unforeseen changes in the world of 2050, provide multiple courses of action on the entire spectrum of conflict while simultaneously ensuring the United States retains the initiative on a global spectrum. Additionally, such a strategy must eschew short term political objectives aside to focus upon the greater good of defending our nation. War in the 21st century will require strategies built upon the long game with little margin of error for those too short sighted to recognize that fact.

Demographics, Economics and Geopolitical Conditions Impacting Military Operations

Wars of the 20th century were primarily fought between nation states over opposing ideologies such as democracy, communism, fascism or imperialism. In other words, man fought war over what he *believed*. War in 2050 will be much more pragmatic. Man will find his *casus belli* primarily over *basic human needs* such as national identity and resources. Wars of national identity may be categorized in two broad and potentially related categories: reaction to immigration of refugee populations into First World countries and independence movements seeking their own sovereign nation states. While neither problem set is new, the associated frequency of their occurrence and scale of violence will increase as we approach 2050. The regional Eurasian refugee crisis following the Arab Spring of 2010 will be but a harbinger of the larger refugee movements the United States government should anticipate in 2050 as people depart their home nations en masse seeking prosperity elsewhere.

Refugees will primarily attempt to cross into Europe, the United States and first world Asian nations such as Japan. Europe and Japan already face falling birth rates leading to a decline in their native populations and limiting their ability to compete in the global economy. Their governments will be forced to choose between opening their borders to refugee immigration, with the potential loss of national identity, or suffering further economic decline. Choosing the former may create the conditions for unrest between native and immigrant populations leading to internal civil war supported by outside power brokers. Economic decline, on the other hand, may force government leaders to utilize warfare to obtain much needed resources they cannot produce or obtain through commerce.

The desire for independent homelands, another form of national identity, is the second primary cause of

war in 2050. On a global level, nationalism is on the rise as evidenced with multiple separatist movements ranging from First Peoples movements in the America's to Kurds seeking an independent Kurdistan in present day Iraq and Turkey. While many of these movements are generally peaceful in nature, some have incorporated violent action into their plan to achieve their desired end state of a home country. The apparent success of breakaway movements like Kosovo in the Balkans or South Ossetia in Georgia will only increase the likelihood of more attempts to effect such change in the future. Countries formerly deemed stable, including key US partners in NATO or the Pacific Rim, may very well not exist as we know them today with the potential for breakup along historic or ethnic lines. Will the special relationship with the United Kingdom, for example, still exist in 2050 with a newly independent Scotland or a reunited Ireland? Will French policy views align with those of the EU, NATO or the United States if that country's Muslim population continues to grow or will Paris realign with North African and Arab nations? These demographic shifts must be given due consideration. If the trend of voters favoring nationalism over globalism continues, international economic treaties such as the Schengen Agreement, the Trans-Pacific Partnership, the North American Free Trade Agreement and mutual defense agreements like NATO or SEATO may also become defunct.

Nations, non-state actors, and hybrid organizations exhibiting characteristics of both will also wage war over resources. Conflict over resources in the past was primarily waged over materials required to operate a modern nation such as oil and gas or avenues of commerce like roads, canals or rivers. Resource warfare in 2050 will be fought along these lines, but will also expand to conflict over more basic human needs like food and water. A 2014 Pew study found the world's population will approach 9.6 billion people by 2050 with most living in the Third World. Bluntly, those people will need to eat. Many will lack access to basic human needs including food and clean water but will increasingly expect a standard of living similar to the developed world. Their governments may prefer to obtain desired resources through legitimate commerce but may be forced or choose to utilize military action to provide an expected standard of living for their citizens. Nations unable to provide for their citizens will face internal strife ranging from protests to outright civil war. Such instability may rapidly expand beyond their borders into regional war and increased refugee movements creating a further demand on an already overburdened infrastructure.

Having addressed the operational environment changes impacting warfare in 2050, we now turn to the fundamental changes in the character of war and technologies that will change how war is actually fought. The low casualty count of 382 American dead and short duration of actual combat during Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm in 1990 and 1991 forever changed the way the United States viewed war. Later operations in Iraq and Afghanistan claimed approximately 7,000 American lives over a 15 year period. They expect war to be painless. Given that less than 1% of Americans were serving in uniform, the vast bulk of the United States citizenry were untouched by the Global War on Terrorism and its greater, but still low by historical comparison to earlier conflicts, 7,000 casualties. Americans in general support, but do not understand, their military. They do not know the personal burden of military service nor the fiscal requirements associated with operational readiness, training or research and development. More alarmingly, they are unprepared to confront the realities and the human cost of war should, nay when, the United States faces a peer competitor on the battlefield. Their inability to contribute to the wars of Iraq and Afghanistan could very well mean American voters may be unwilling to join the larger effort required of a national mobilization akin to World War II. Finally, if America's economy does not improve for the voting middle class they may be unwilling to choose "guns over butter" leaving the military ill prepared to deploy, fight and win.

At the start of the century, the United States military enjoyed a significant technological advantage over any likely combatant including peer and near peer competitors. However, by 2050, the performance gap between the United States and potential enemies will have closed and it is entirely possible American

military prowess will have fallen behind particularly in the domains of cyber, space, drone and bionic warfare. The declining performance of American school aged youth in the science, technology, engineering and math fields to say nothing of our burgeoning rates of obesity, should give strategic level leaders grave concern about our collective ability to operate across all dimensions of combat. American R&D is also hampered by archaic procurement procedures which limit cooperation and efficiency.

Ironically, America's technology edge is also something of an Achilles heel. The United States' overreliance on next generation digital systems in every aspect of our daily lives, to say nothing of military operations, creates an exploitable weakness. Take away the electricity from any business, government entity or military unit and you effectively shut them down. By 2050, the institutional knowledge of how to operate using manual calculations, paper maps, handwritten orders, typewriters, and voice powered communication systems, analog instruments or the proverbial stubby pencil. Indeed, most if not all, of the military platforms extant in 2050 will not function without an assured electric power source leaving units unable to perform the basic functions of shoot, move and communicate. While the USAF reintroduced celestial navigation in 2015, the absolute need to allocate valuable time to "archaic" systems training is not universally understood by the uniformed services. Failure to incorporate analog redundancy into every facet of military operations could spell disaster on the battlefield.

American leaders should anticipate state and non-state actors will show greater willingness to develop and employ weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in the future. The world learned a key lesson from Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003, namely Iraq's lack of nuclear weapons allowed US conventional forces to invade and dominate the battlefield. Every potential US enemy now desires an atomic weapons program to provide an additional measure of security against regime change. While our competitors may not employ such weapons in a first strike capability, they will retain them to deter or limit US foreign policy options. However, the Rubicon, so to speak, of WMD use has already been crossed numerous times in recent history by the Japanese in WWII, Saddam Hussein in Iraq and Bashir Assad in Syria. Non-state actors, such as radical terrorists groups, will also seek their own WMD systems but with the expressed intent of first strike use against major civilian population centers and key military-civilian infrastructure locations. They will also target symbols, holidays and celebrations associated with a country's national identity. Obviously, the United States and our allies will continue measures to prevent their enemies from obtaining or using WMDs. However, the question surrounding WMD use is not a matter of "if" as much as a question of "when." One can only roll so many sevens at the casino's crap table and the house has to win but once.

Conclusion

E Ring, The Pentagon, Washington, D.C., 1955hrs, December 7th, 2049

Rubbing my eyes, I rolled the ergonomic chair back from the desk and checked the time on my pocket watch. I hit print on the touchpad and gathered my items from the office. Buttoning my dress uniform jacket, I retrieved the report from the printer and closed the office door. Unsurprisingly, the Chairman's aide was waiting for me in the hall. I handed my report to the aide who placed it in a biometric sealed folder embossed with a classified coversheet. She said, "The Chairman is unavoidably detained in a meeting, but expresses his appreciation for your work. A Marine guard will show you out." As if on cue, yet another recruiting poster Marine stepped from an alcove and motioned for me to follow him. We walked the now familiar path to the main entrance and I stepped out into the cold winter's night.

The opinions expressed in the article are solely those of the author and do not reflect those of the United States Government, the Department of Defense, or the United States Army.

About the Author



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Lieutenant Colonel Christopher J. Heatherly graduated from Monmouth College in 1994 with a double major in Business Administration and Environmental Studies. Upon graduation, he enlisted in the United States Army and later earned his commission via Officer Candidate School in 1997. Lieutenant Colonel Heatherly's operational experience includes deployments to Afghanistan, Iraq, Nigeria, Mali, Kuwait, Germany and South Korea. His military awards include the Bronze Star Medal, the Meritorious Service Medal, the Afghanistan Campaign Medal, the Iraq Campaign Medal, the Army Parachute Badge, the Air Assault Badge, the Canadian Parachutist Badge, the Bahrain Parachutist Badge and the Mali Parachutist Badge. A career military intelligence officer, LTC Heatherly holds master's degrees from the University of Oklahoma and the School of Advanced Military Studies. He is also an occasional author with nearly 60 publishing credits.

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