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ASYMETRICKÁ VÁLKA: SLOGAN NEBO SKUTEČNOST?

ASYMMETRIC WARFARE: SLOGAN OR REALITY?

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Abstrakt

Termín asymetrická válka byl v USA rozšířen v době následující po útocích na Pentagon a World Trade Center. Ačkoli je tento termín stále používán některými staršími členy americké administrativy, uniformované složky americké armády z větší části tuto formulaci odmítly jako doktrinní frázi. Tvrdí, že válka vždy byla, a bude z principu asymetrická; vedení války je tudíž popisováno pomocí schématu velkých bojových operací, stabilizačních a podpůrných operací a nepravidelného válčení. Jelikož se tyto oblasti překrývají a zahrnují téměř všechny vojenské operace, není použití dalšího schématu považováno za smysluplné. Stoupenci asymetrického válčení nejsou schopni nalézt stručnou a účelnou definici. Termín je však nadále používán vedoucími představiteli vlády. Tento článek pojednává o užívání termínu asymetrická válka jakožto konceptu pro pochopení současných konfliktů.

Abstract

In the United States, the title asymmetric warfare was popular in the years following the attacks on the Pentagon and the World Trade Center. While still used by some senior members of the US government, the uniformed U.S. military has mostly rejected the phrase as a doctrinal term. Arguing that warfare is, always has been, and always will be fundamentally asymmetric; they have opted to describe warfare using a construct of major combat operations, stability and support operations, and irregular warfare. Seeing these arenas as overlapping and inclusive of nearly all military operations, they see little utility in another construct. Advocates of asymmetric warfare have difficulty finding a concise purposeful definition. Yet the term continues to be used by senior government leaders. This paper explores the utility of asymmetric warfare as a concept for understanding modern conflict.

Klíčová slova

Asymetrický, nepravidelný, válka, nestátní.

Keywords

Asymmetric, Irregular, Warfare, Non-state.

Lieutenant Colonel Arthur Lynn Fremantle—late of Her Majesty's Coldstream Guards, observing for the Queen—addressing the Confederate General James Longstreet:

“Another victory today. Must say, enormously impressive, this army. Yet the Federal fellas just keep on coming. Curious. I have a bit of difficulty, you know, understanding why.”¹

Michael Shaara's narrative of the American Civil War battle of Gettysburg contains a recurring vignette about a European battlefield observer, Arthur Fremantle. While a fictional character; Fremantle represents those schooled in the art of war who seek to understand new situations.

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Arthur Fremantle would have a “bit of difficulty” with asymmetric warfare. He would not be alone.

This paper is the product of my observations after spending most of 2007 working in support of the U.S. Army’s Asymmetric Warfare Office. During that year I observed and participated in the Army’s discussions on asymmetric warfare and was actively involved in attempts to define the term. This paper is a product of that experience. The opinions and positions expressed are my own and are not an official representation of the positions of the United States Army or the Department of Defense.

INTRODUCTION

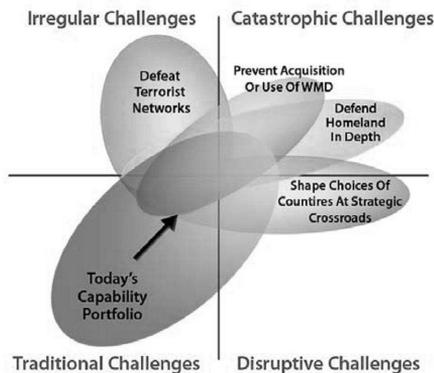
In the United States, the phrase “asymmetric warfare” has ebbed and flowed in popular usage. Recent frequency in its use has seemed to parallel successes and failures of U.S. military actions. When our forces achieve rapid success the asymmetries of warfare retreat to the background and phrases like “decisive victory” and “shock and awe” are popular. When success comes more slowly or when the enemy succeeds, the phrases Asymmetric warfare, asymmetric threats, and asymmetric methods resurface. While still used by some senior members of the US government, the uniformed military has, for the most part, rejected the term. They argue that warfare is, always has been, and always will be fundamentally asymmetric. Adversaries, they say, will always seek an asymmetric advantage. Relying on rules governing military terminology, they assert that the word “asymmetric” is adequately described in commonly accepted dictionaries. Thus, there is no merit in defining Asymmetric warfare as a unique military term. It is a curious decision given the emphasis that the current U.S. Secretary of Defense, Dr. Robert Gates, places on the term. One could discount his unfamiliarity with the rigors of military terminology if his background were purely political. But Dr. Gates is the former president of the 7th largest University in the U.S., a former Director of the CIA and Deputy National Security Advisor. In a position such as his, Dr. Gates knows the importance of words and chooses his carefully. In perhaps his most significant policy speech since becoming Secretary, Dr. Gates discussed asymmetric warfare as “prevalent” and “a mainstay of the contemporary battlefield.” Building on this central concept he went on to describe what he believed to be the national security needs of the future.²

Efforts by the U.S. to maintain military capability during a significant military force reduction provide a background to the events that brought the term asymmetric warfare back into vogue. As the Cold War ended, the U.S. public and their elected representatives, true to their heritage, demanded a peace dividend. The Army was largely redeployed from forward bases and radically reduced. Initial plans called for the Army to reduce from an 18-division active strength of 760,000 to 10-12 divisions totaling 535,500 by 1995. This was what Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Colin Powell referred to as the “base force”³. By 2000, active army strength was 54,000 lower than the Base Force goal and 63% of its Cold War strength⁴. The Defense Department (DoD) projected that it could compensate for reduced force size and still increase overall capability by embracing systems solutions and a doctrine of precise, coordinated application of force. Smaller forces would become even more effective and lethal than their Cold War ancestors through technological innovation and information superiority. This strategy was projected to achieve “full spectrum dominance”: dominance across the spectrum of conflict from peace operations to high intensity warfare. In the absence of a clearly identifiable threat, DoD also shifted from designing its forces to meet specific threats to a design based on a range of needed capabilities; what came to be called capabilities-based planning. The advent of DoD interest in asymmetry coincides somewhat with that shift.

“ASYMMETRIC” A POPULAR DESCRIPTOR

U.S law requires the Secretary of Defense in consultation with the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to conduct a Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) every four years with vision for U.S. defense strategy looking forward 20 years.⁵ The QDR of 1996, the review that ushered in the landmark Joint Vision 2010 and the goal of “full spectrum dominance” also repeatedly warned of “asymmetric threats and challenges.” The next QDR in 2001 articulated the shift to capabilities-based planning and away from potential adversaries and conflict locations. In this QDR discussions of asymmetry were reduced to 14 from the previous 24 mentions in the 1996 report. However the 2001 QDR twice discusses the need to “...identify the capabilities required to deter and defeat adversaries who will rely on asymmetric warfare to achieve their objectives.”⁶

While both of reviews warned of asymmetric approaches, challenges, threats, and means, their focus remained on the thesis of technological innovation, information superiority, and precision strikes. The first operational tests of this thesis actually preceded the QDR reports and occurred during the first Gulf War and in NATO’s air campaign against Serbia in 1999. In both cases the use of precision, and particularly airpower, seemed to validate the approach. At the beginning of the George W. Bush administration, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld accelerated the push for technological solutions to enhancing capability and permit further reductions in conventional forces.



Following the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in 2001, defense leaders sought to validate their strategy decisions through battlefield success. A 1996 National Defense University study centering on achieving rapid battlefield dominance through technology and mentored by Gulf War luminaries including Army Gen. Frederick Franks, Air Force Gen. Charles Horner, Admiral "Bud" Edney, was not only influential but also provided the name for the capstone operation. “Shock and awe” was

announced to the world as the technique that would win in Iraq. The authors of the NDU study had cautioned that as good as the strategy was, in many situations, it would not seal victory.⁷

Shock and Awe empowered by technological innovation and information superiority was supposed to shorten war and reduce casualties. But as the war progressed into an insurgency and casualties increased, there seemed to be an operative factor that had not been fully anticipated. Enemy’s success was increasingly attributed to the employment of Asymmetric warfare and the term re-emerged. The Army vision articulated in September 2004 by Mr. Brownlee, the Army Secretary and Gen. Schoomaker, the Chief of Staff emphasized the enemy’s use of asymmetric means and methods, and the Army’s need to develop new agility and versatility to deal with this change.⁸ The most visible of those asymmetric means were improvised explosive devices (IED). To deal with this threat the Army created an IED Task Force in 2003. In January 2005, the Army Operations Director directed the establishment of an Asymmetric Warfare Group (AWG) to be the Army’s lead organization in providing conventional forces with expertise in training, planning and execution of countermeasures to asymmetric warfare.⁹ In May 2006, the Army Vice-Chief of Staff chartered an Asymmetric Warfare Office within the Army Operations Directorate to serve as the Army Staff lead for all asymmetric warfare issues.¹⁰ From all of these actions, it could not be clearer that asymmetric warfare was a subject of significant interest to the Army. But there remained no consensus on what the term Asymmetric warfare really meant.

The National Defense Strategy of 2005 and the QDR report of 2006 suggested that traditional warfare was becoming less likely and that the spectrum of conflict model, used within DoD and NATO for decades, was no longer valid. Instead of a linear progression from low risk /high

probability peace operations to high risk/low probability high-intensity conflict, a new model emerged that centered on four focus areas identified by senior leaders as the most pressing problems facing DoD. It was a new view of how the capabilities-based force needed to shift its capabilities to meet a new reality. That reality was of future enemies being more likely to pose three specific kinds of asymmetric threats: irregular warfare, catastrophic challenges and disruptive challenges. Emphasis needed to shift to them and away from the traditional military challenges for which the force had been designed.¹¹ Most important among the three was the focus area of “irregular warfare” and that emphasis directly impacted the discussion on asymmetric warfare. The report asserted that “irregular warfare had emerged as the dominant form of warfare confronting the United States” and projected that “future warriors will be as proficient in irregular operations as they are today in high-intensity combat.”¹² When the Deputy Secretary of Defense directed the preparation of eight QDR Execution Roadmaps in early January 2007, irregular warfare was the first among equals and was placed under the responsibility of a powerful team of co-chairs, the Principal Under-Secretary of Defense for Policy and the Joint Staff’s Chief of Operations.

IRREGULAR OR ASYMMETRIC WARFARE?

With those steps, the idea of irregular warfare instantly surpassed asymmetric warfare in importance. By the end of the year there was an approved definition of IW in Joint Pub 1-02 and a “Joint Operating Concept for Irregular Warfare” (IW) co-authored by US Special Operations Command and the Marine Corps Combat Developments Command, and approved by Secretary of Defense Gates. The importance of the IW joint concept in this competition cannot be understated. Joint concepts drive discussion, experimentation, doctrine and ultimately the resources for U.S. force development. Formally approved concepts move ideas down the path to becoming accepted procedures.¹³ Service staffs, the Joint Staff, Joint Forces Command and Special Operations Command all put significant effort, resources and manpower behind IW concept development. At the same time the minimal advocacy that remained for asymmetric warfare experienced stiff opposition. In February 2007, the Army G-3 tasked the Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) to prepare an Army definition and concept for Asymmetric warfare. In April, TRADOC’s doctrine and future warfare element, the Army Capability Integration Center (ARCIC) responded that there was no need for an official definition of asymmetric warfare. Its use was now redundant to irregular warfare and other accepted terms. They opined that asymmetric warfare was simply a standard military operational principle. ARCIC suggested that establishing a doctrinal definition for asymmetric warfare would “likely prove ambiguous at best and confusing at worst.”¹⁴ Later in the year, the Army G-3/5/7 at the behest of its Asymmetric Warfare Office took the unusual step of asking ARCIC to reexamine the definition issue. In November, ARCIC convened a meeting with doctrine representatives to discuss the issue and ended up with the same result. A new Army G3 accepted that result. Over the course of 2007 in working to identify and frame the central area where military capability needed to shift, DoD chose irregular warfare.

But are the terms as synonymous as they appear? To determine if there remains any relevance to asymmetric warfare it is necessary to look into the ideas that have been developed to elaborate and explain irregular warfare. Over a year’s effort went into developing the concept of irregular warfare by some very talented people. This paper can only summarize the most basic components. The chosen definition for Irregular Warfare has four elements:

“A violent struggle among state and non-state actors for legitimacy and influence over the relevant populations. IW favors indirect and asymmetric approaches, though it may employ the full range of military and other capabilities, in order to erode an adversary’s power, influence, and will.”

JP 1-02

1. IW is violent. Proponents assert that violence is an inherent characteristic of war. Without violence the activity falls short of war, and falls into other categories such as competition, confrontation or conflict.

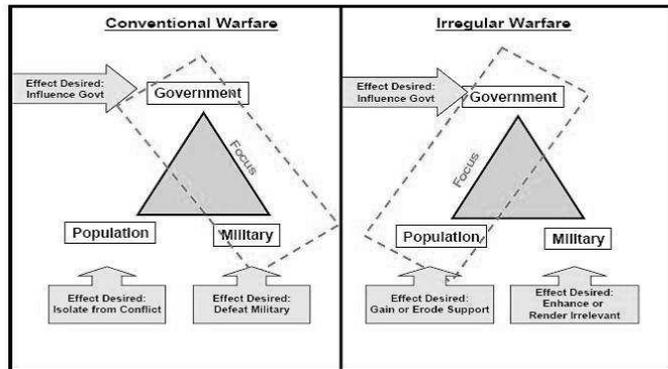
2. IW is a competition among state and non-state entities. The inclusion of non-state elements is a significant

change in war has normally been assumed to be contests between states or for control of states.

3. IW’s object is to influence people. This is the former NATO Deputy Commander, British General Rupert Smith’s, core thesis on future warfare. He asserts, “In war amongst the people the strategic objective is to capture the will of the people and their leaders, and thereby win the trial of strength.”¹⁵

The remainder of the definition is a description of the means used to prosecute the war, indirect and asymmetric approaches to erode an enemy’s power, influence and will. To describe irregular warfare, the IW JOC contrasts conventional and irregular warfare using a paradigm frequently borrowed from Clausewitz: the government, the military and the people.¹⁶ In irregular warfare, the focus shifts from the military to the people; however the goal for both forms of conflict remains to influence a government.

Contrasting Conventional & Irregular Warfare



CONTINUED UTILITY OF AW AS A DESCRIPTOR

As valuable as the IW definition and concept are, the effective work done in this area has not negated the utility of term asymmetric warfare nor has it effectively addressed the fundamental change in global competition that asymmetric warfare describes. To understand that change we should return to the comments of Secretary Gates at the Association of the US Army Convention in October 2007 and in Manhattan, Kansas a month later. Dr. Gates, the official who approved the IW concept, elaborated his understanding of asymmetric warfare in this way,

“The end of the Cold War, and the attacks of September 11, marked the dawn of another new era in international relations – an era whose challenges may be unprecedented in complexity and scope.”

“We can expect that Asymmetric warfare will be the mainstay of the contemporary battlefield for some time. These conflicts will be fundamentally political in nature, and require the application of all elements of national power. Success will be less a matter of

imposing one's will and more a function of shaping behavior – of friends, adversaries, and most importantly, the people in between.”¹⁷

The driving factors in this change have been the emergence of the U.S. as the sole global superpower, and modernity itself. Radically disproportionate U.S. military power and its ability to rapidly project that power compel adversaries to find different ways to fight and to avoid attacking the U.S. in the direct ways of the past. The United States derived its military superiority from a remarkable ability to translate economic power, technological innovation and industrial capacity into military capabilities. Still, history suggests that it would be only a matter of time until adaptive, creative opponents developed a way to counter America's success.”¹⁸

Adversary understanding of American military might was only one factor in the emergent the asymmetric environment. The terrorist attacks in Washington, London, Madrid, Bali, and elsewhere have heightened our awareness of others unique to the 21st century including the strategic impact of systems disruptions (power, fuel, water, communications and transportation), the availability of advanced technology to small groups and individuals, instant influence through information connectivity and strategic communications. These factors of modernity have resulted in the rise of effective stateless combatants and adversaries.¹⁹ The combination and compounding of these changes in the strategic environment have profound geo-political and military implications.

Non-State Challenges to the Nation-State System

Asymmetric warfare is the product of this emergent asymmetric environment. Its unconstrained nature and the ability of this “mainstay of the contemporary battlefield” to mutate makes it extremely difficult to categorize with a precise dictionary definition. General Smith asserts that, “we are now in a new era of conflict—in fact a new paradigm.”²⁰ And while I agree with him that “war amongst the people” is an important factor, it is not the defining factor. The defining factors are elements well outside of Clausewitz's government—people—military construct and the current structure of international order. It is surprising that we continue to view the world through the lens of the 17th century Peace of Westphalia and the ordered system of nation-state sovereignty that it initiated. While the nation-state remains at the core of the global system of international order, an effective and concurrent competitor has now emerged. That competitor is frequently referred to in strategic and doctrinal writings as a “non-state actor.” The name belittles their significance. These are not actors in some benign off-Broadway theater production. They are powerful adversaries and competitors for power. Some are the descendents of past irregular forces and see themselves on a long campaign to obtain the mantle of power and governance. Most, however, desire only freedom of action within a chosen domain. They are motivated by any of a number of factors: culture, religion, wealth, power, and sometimes just malice. They are led and they are leaderless, they connect when necessary, but just as often they are disconnected. They fight to extend their chosen domains or when we intrude into a domain they believe to be theirs. Those fights can range from violent engagements of forces and surrogates to creative combinations of attacks in the realms of economics, information and culture. They co-opt existing nation-states when it is to their advantage. Other nation states attempt to co-opt them.

Threats from Weakly-Governed and Ungovernable Areas

These stateless adversaries are most dangerous when they leverage weakly governed or ungoverned areas to establish a domain where they are freely to operate. When those operations impinge on the national and international interests of nation-states the resultant conflict is asymmetric warfare. Across the globe the number of weak or ungoverned areas is growing as are the number stateless adversaries that take refuge in them. The following examples are illustrative.

The geography of the Tri-Border Area or Triple Frontier (TBA) at the junction of Paraguay, Brazil and Argentina has long made it a home for organized crime, narcotics traffickers and terrorist groups. Islamic terrorist groups with a presence in the TBA include Egypt's Al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya (Islamic Group) and Al-Jihad (Islamic Jihad), al Qaeda, Hamas, Hizballah, and the Iranian al-Muqawamah (the Resistance). It is estimated that Islamic fundamentalist groups in the TBA are sending between \$300 million and \$500 million USD a year in profits from drug trafficking, arms dealing, and other illegal activities to radical Islamic groups in the Middle East. Numerous organized crime groups use the TBA for smuggling, money laundering, and product piracy. These criminal operatives include the Lebanese Mafia and Hong Mafias, syndicates from Chile, China, Colombia, Ghana, Libya, Italy, Ivory Coast, Japan, Korea, Lebanon, Nigeria, Russia, and Taiwan, as well as indigenous crime groups from Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay.²¹ The criminals and terrorists who thrive in this region are not opting to take over any of the three adjoining governments. All they desire is freedom of action within their areas of interest and cohesion where their interests coincide. While the stateless adversaries that operate in the TBA war against interests of the three local nation-states, regional security forces are inadequate to eliminate them. Local and national governments are inhibited by corrupt officials who do business with the criminal and terrorist elements, and the laws and international conventions for combating terrorist fund-raising, money laundering, and organized crime in general are inadequate. Nation-states external to the region find it even more difficult to combat adversaries who exist within the territorial boundaries of friendly nation-states. What exists in the TBA is asymmetric warfare; non-state adversaries pursuing their individual objectives, be it cultural, religious extremism or crime, operating on the seams of the boundary between the conventions of Westphalian nation-state authority and non-nation state control.



Another example is in the Pankisi Gorge in the northeastern corner of Georgia. The Gorge is a fertile valley about twenty kilometers long, which has been home to the Chechen "Kist" population for over 200 years. Thousands of Chechen refugees have relocated there since the second Chechen War began in 1999. The area served as a safe haven for the Chechen separatist leader Ruslan Gelayev and his forces. Surveys in Georgia reveal a common belief that the gorge is a center for drug trafficking, smuggling, and other illegal activities enabled by government corruption.²² In 2002, *Time* magazine referred to the Pankisi Gorge as "al-Qaeda's Georgian Refuge" and reported the operations of a "...multi-layered, interlocking, region-wide organizational structure, with decentralized planning and procurement system." This organization was believed to be closely linked to Osama bin Laden. Al-Qaeda operatives from Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Morocco, Algeria and Egypt were reported to be in the gorge. They established a communications center and were connected with other elements in Chechnya, Azerbaijan and Turkey, Britain and Germany using the internet to receive funding and recruit volunteers. While the central focus was an "Islamic International Brigade" to fight in Chechnya, these elements were feared to be part of a broader 'jihad' targeting US and western interests in Russia and Central Asia.²³ Fear that the Pankisi could become a terrorist safe haven stimulated a 2-year, \$64 million USD program titled the "Georgia Train and Equip Program (GTEP)." GTEP was to enhance Georgia's counter-terrorism capabilities and particularly its ability to address the situation in the Pankisi Gorge.²⁴ Most reports indicate that terrorist threats emanating from the gorge have been effectively dealt with. There is now even some debate about the truth of the al-Qaeda presence. Little is mentioned of the other non-state entities that continue to thrive there. The Pankisi is another

example of non-state adversaries leveraging weak non-nation state control and poor governance to achieve freedom of action.

A third example is in the border region between western Sudan and Eastern Chad. The primary non-state actor in this ungoverned area is the Janjawid Militia, a group of armed gunmen that intermittently control the Darfur region of western Sudan and who are largely responsible for the ongoing genocide. These militia are comprised largely of nomadic Sudanese fighters who contest with agrarian Sudanese for resources and land. The sovereignty of Sudan in the Westphalian tradition has proven to be a roadblock to international action. An estimated 1.8 million people have become refugees, 1.6 million Darfurians having fled to other parts of Sudan and across the border into Chad. In 2004, the World Health Organization estimated that 70,000 displaced persons had died in the previous six months from malnutrition and disease.²⁵ Despite the ongoing tragedy, nation-states, alliances and international organizations have been unable to find a way to effectively intervene against these stateless militias to end the human tragedy. The Arab League and the African Union have downplayed the human rights issues and the UN has been unable to motivate action under the Genocide Convention. The battle that rages between the culturally Arab north and the African south of Sudan is another example of non-state warriors, this time enabled and sometimes assisted by a nation state, operating at will in the absence of effective governance.

Finally as we look to the future, we need only look to West Africa to see the exponential growth of ungovernable areas, areas fertile as hosts for asymmetric warfare. The UN Office for West Africa reports that slums are the norm for more than ninety per cent of the urban populations of Sierra Leone, Niger, Guinea Bissau and Mali. Slum dwellers are deprived of landownership, suffer from poor access to sanitation, water supplies, electricity and sewage disposal. West Africa's youth, aged 30 or under, make up sixty per cent of total population of about 270 million, most of them, unemployed and with little hope.²⁶ Experts cite three demographic factors most likely harbingers of conflict; high percentages of youth (youth bulges), rapid urbanization, and declining resources. All of these are evident in West Africa.²⁷ These combined with mega-cities spanning porous borders and a legacy of weak or corrupt governance leads to a conclusion that these areas represent breeding grounds for future non-state operatives. The probability of asymmetric warfare emanating from these areas is real and growing.

CONCLUSION

Weak and failed governance will result in the growth of safe havens for powerful non-state elements; organized crime, traffickers in drugs as well as human slaves, terrorists and violent extremists. These are the fertile fields where we can expect asymmetric warfare to percolate. As non-state adversaries grow in these areas, enabled by modern technology, criminal financing and the constraints of the nation-state international system of order, we can expect them to use their power as best befits their objectives. This is the asymmetric warfare that will be the mainstay of contemporary and future battlefields. It is not just a slogan. The people who have labeled this challenge to our current system of world order, and our understanding of conflict are talking about something that is larger than our current concept of warfare. It is a battle against a 360 year-old system of international order. Attempts to solve this challenge only with military force will fail. Success will require whole of government solutions and unified international approaches. It will require a unique unity between governments and non-governmental organizations. It will need to address the causes of conflict, more than the forces that fight them.

European observers returning from the American Civil War brought with them worthwhile observations. But many returned without truly capturing the essence of changes that the industrial age had brought to warfare. Failure to identify significant change in places like the wilderness of Virginia may have contributed to tragedies like the Somme. Today major strides have been taken to

learn the lessons of the Global War on Terror. With all that is being done, a closer look at this area called asymmetric warfare would be advisable.

*Michael Shaara reports that Arthur Freemantle returned to England after three months in the Confederacy and wrote a book on his observations. It was very readable and entertaining. He predicted a certain southern victory.*²⁸

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