



The Day After: Why America Wins the War but Loses the Peace

by Brendan R. Gallagher.

Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 2019. Pp. xi, 308. ISBN 978-1-5017-3962-0.

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The elegance of the tactical-operational-strategic framework for understanding war lies in simplicity. However, the difficulty is in conceiving mental models to link actions to achieving operational objectives to gain strategic objectives. Many military histories concentrate on battles and their outcomes with little attention to prewar strategic planning. Lt. Col. Brendan Gallagher (PhD, Princeton) devotes *The Day After* to explaining why some prewar planning efforts succeed in achieving political ends while others fail. Although not involved in the operational and strategic planning he analyzes here, he was deployed seven times to Iraq and Afghanistan.

The book focuses on three conflicts: Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq. Gallagher argues that post-conflict success hinges on competent prewar planning. Absent a clear idea of what combat operations are intended to achieve, operational and tactical matters lack overarching purpose other than enemy-specific targeting or improvisation. This can yield tactical success in a narrow sense, but it does not, Gallagher argues, typically achieve strategic victory. He asks why the rapid tactical successes in the three operations he discusses did not always translate into strategic success.

Gallagher identifies three prerequisites of successful post-conflict planning: identify a clear and achievable political goal; anticipate and mitigate foreseeable problems, and mobilize resources aligned with the political goal. Failure to execute these tasks leads to four pathologies: wishful thinking, deficient learning, underuse of the National Security Council (NSC), and cross-cutting US domestic political pressure. Victory, Gallagher maintains, requires that the withdrawal of combat forces must be followed by a progression towards democracy and stability that endures for at least a decade. Using Gallagher's criteria, Kosovo is a success while Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya are failures.

Kosovo benefited by the international effort to separate warring ethnicities and religious groups. After the breakup of Yugoslavia, Albanians pushed for more autonomy from the Serbian government. Both the Serbs and the Albanian Kosovo Liberation Army committed war crimes in 1998-99 that brought international attention and the interest of NATO states. Gallagher points to the concerted efforts of the Pres. Bill Clinton administration to use the NSC to get defense and diplomatic planning groups on the same page. Additionally, Clinton set the political goal of ambiguous autonomy rather than outright independence or unification with Serbia; this provided a goal that, if not ideal, was at least acceptable to both sides. The importance of this sort of political end state, according to Gallagher, was that it kept the Russians and Chinese from intervening while giving European states a policy they could support.

In stark contrast to Kosovo, neither Iraq, nor Afghanistan, nor Libya fit Gallagher's definition of victory. Three of his chapters attribute this failure to the inability of the respective planning staffs—military and civilian—to execute the three tasks outlined in the introduction.

In Afghanistan, Gallagher argues, the problem lay with the inability of the Pres. George W. Bush administration to coalesce around the policy of creating a democratic Afghanistan. Gallagher stresses the resistance of Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld to nation building. Though Bush came to realize that the United States needed to create a democratic Afghanistan, Rumsfeld resisted the long-term robust troop presence that such a large-scale mission required.

Besides the strategic problems, Gallagher argues that the NSC never seriously tried to assign responsibility for formulating a strategy for Afghanistan. Between the 9/11 attacks and the start of Operation Anaconda, the large-scale operational campaign after the fall of the Taliban government, the NSC focused on Iraq and counterterrorism. Gallagher argues that this meant Operation Enduring Freedom began without a clear idea of a goal, other than destroying Al Qaeda and removing the Taliban. Without a unified vision of what the war was to achieve, it was hard to anticipate problems or marshal the resources needed to reach stated objectives.

Similarly, in Iraq and Libya, the failure of the three tasks led to strategic failure. The prewar planning processes in each conflict made optimistic assumptions about the efficacy of force without any real analysis about the implications of large-scale political objectives. The book's concise and narrowly focused coverage of each of conflicts allows readers to understand the application of the framework. But it comes at the expense of a more thorough account of the broader contextual environment that influenced the planning process.

As for Iraq, the chapter title "The Worst of All Worlds" says it all. Gallagher emphasizes the growing divide between Pres. Bush's wishes and his Secretary of Defense's intentions, especially with regard to nation building and creating a democratic Iraq. Bush increasingly wanted to make over both Iraq and Afghanistan as liberal democracies. Rumsfeld continued to push planners to assume the Iraq invasion would be short and require a small number of troops. This dichotomy came to a head when the Army Chief of Staff Eric Shinseki testified to Congress about his understanding of the scale of the invasion.

The public rebuke of General Shinseki's preinvasion comments that postwar Iraq might require "something on the order of several hundred thousand soldiers" reflected this strong desire to pitch the war as a breeze. Once our initial invasion seemed successful and President Bush's approval ratings climbed, his famous speech aboard the USS *Abraham Lincoln* then seemed to move the goalposts outward, toward democratization, in apparent recognition of his expanded domestic latitude. Our guiding war aims seemed to loosely coincide with the shifting tides of public opinion, and this exacerbated the already mammoth challenges involved in developing a consistent strategy. The fluctuating moods affected the morphing political aims, further undermining the chances of any coherent approach. (142)

According to Gallagher, Bush's change of political aims complicated the post-conflict planning effort. However, on 10 Aug. 2002, about six months before the invasion, senior administration officials from both the State and Defense departments met with Iraqi opposition leaders who pledged to build a democratic Iraq. If the goalposts shifted, Gallagher alleges, planners would still have half a year to reconcile the policy of a democratic Iraq with prior assumptions of a small footprint invasion force deployed for a short time. He does not analyze why President Bush was unable to lead his administration to plan and execute his desired strategy effectively.¹ FTN

In his conclusion, Gallagher outlines what he considers to be the way ahead in terms of actions to take and myths to dispel. In the first place he contends that a revitalized NSC could en-

1. See Michael Gordon, "Iraqi Opposition Groups Meet Bush Aides." Available online.

sure better planning. But the NSC exists only to serve the president. Congress cannot compel an administration to use it as Gallagher recommends.

The author stresses the split in the Bush administration over the best policy in Afghanistan. But once Bush clearly articulated his nation-building objective, either ineffective executive leadership or insubordination prevented the cohesion necessary for the Department of Defense to support the president's plans. Also, the limited chronological scope of Brendan Gallagher's book prevents him from investigating whether these were recent changes in US strategy and its approach to war or enduring aspects bespeaking deeper social, cultural, and political imperatives. Exploring this question would have enabled the author to better clarify the difficulty of remedying the problems he identifies.