



Bob Scales. *Scales on War: The Future of America's Military at Risk*. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2016.

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Scales on War: The Future of America's Military at Risk is retired Major General Robert Scales' last book, and is his final attempt to change the American military. He argues that the United States needs to invest more in the Infantry, its close-combat soldiers, if the nation is to win its future wars. The stories of two Medal of Honor

recipients – Staff Sergeant Salvatore Guinta and Captain William Swenson – illustrate his point. Both were caught unaware in a close-combat fight, against equally equipped foes that resulted in the *unnecessary* deaths of soldiers in their unit. Given the money the US invests in its military, these unnecessary deaths are abhorrent. In the preface he writes:

The idea that the nation doesn't really care about those who do the dirty day-to-day business of killing the enemy haunts me to this very day. This will be my last book. I had to write it to atone for my sins and to try and awaken our national leaders to the need to keep those who perform the act of intimate killing alive in combat (p. x).

These “intimate killers” are responsible for the “primal challenge” that is close combat (62-63). While these Soldiers comprise only 0.02 percent of the population, they are the most likely to be killed. Scales concludes that America needs to create an effective military for future wars by spending less on “big ticket” Air Force and Navy procurements – like fighter jets and aircraft carriers – and more on technology, training, weapons procurement, and education for the Infantry. Neglecting to do so needlessly jeopardizes the lives of American Soldiers.

As the memory of the sacrifices American Soldiers made in Iraq and Afghanistan fade, Scales fears this may precipitate a collapse in the Army. “Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter recently announced that the Army will not have enough money to train above the squad level until 2020. The Army’s new Chief of Staff, Gen. Mark Miley, has stated that, regrettably, the Army cannot afford any new systems for at least a decade” (p. 16). The Army has “collapsed” following every war since Korea; Scales’ work is an attempt to halt that. This is a policy-orientated book first. To some extent, the book suffers from its composition, which features a variety of articles previously published by the author and contributes to the sometimes disjointed nature of the book. However, it does provide the reader with perspectives on American defense policy, current global threats, and the changing ways of war.

The reformed military envisioned by Scales centres upon the Infantry squad, platoon, and company:

This book is dedicated to the premise that the United States can make its small units dominant, not just better. Dominance cannot be achieved by

focusing on Soldiers in the close fight. Dominance comes only when small units have the capability to overwhelm the enemy with firepower... They need an external source, such as artillery and airpower, to overwhelm an enemy (p. 166).

The small Infantry units Scales advocates for are a break from the historic and present orientation of the Army. Since he guided American mechanized power across the Northern European Plain, the "Patton Method" has dominated the Army's approach to warfare (p. 72). "Patton's ghost still haunts the US Army. He is embedded in our Cold War culture of machine-driven ground combat... Unfortunately, the utility of big-machine warfare began to fade as soon as US military power took center stage" (p. 73). Although appropriate for defeating the German Wehrmacht, Scales believes that the small unit teams developed by General Stanley McChrystal in Afghanistan and Iraq will be the most effective in future wars. The teams of the McChrystal archetype were designed "to take down a huge, complex, adaptive, and sophisticated network like Al Qaeda [and demanded] the creation of an opposing network that shared data and strategic consciousness among all fighting elements" (p. 77). Only through highly trained and intelligent volunteers, near the level of Special Forces operators, will the Infantry be capable of dominating land warfare. Scales claims the "McChrystal Method" would provide the US with the capability to dominate land warfare. He proposes a number of ways to better prepare the US Infantry for the wars of the future. These include communications based upon the Infantry team rather than senior officers; better hand-held weapons; investment in drone support; a new Infantry carrier; improved training that maintains a high-level of readiness; picking generals based upon their strategic rather than tactical acumen; and the creation of real "interdependence" between the Army and Air Force.

Scales uses several assumptions to support his argument. The first is an analysis of the American way of war, based upon the use of machine. This has manifested itself in massed formations reminiscent of Patton's Third Army or in high-technology variants similar to the 2003 invasion of Iraq. "Viewing war too much as a contest of technologies, we have become impatient of and detached from those forms of war that do not fit our paradigms. Techno-centric solutions are in our 'strategic cultural DNA'" (p. 99). The "Patton Method" is inadequate in the face of enemies who are willing to

counter American material superiority with greater “will.” Since the Second World War, enemies that have translated “sacrifice into a national strategic advantage” by killing American soldiers have been victorious; this is the American centre of gravity (pp. 24-26).

The second assumption concerns the “Beltway” – a collection of elites within America’s defence industries, military, and politics reminiscent of the infamous military-industrial-congressional complex – which ignores the plight of and the need for Infantry to fight and win the nation’s wars. This is a result of the cultural gap between the Infantry and the elites. Scales consistently claims that the system is oriented towards supporting the Admiral or General rather than the warfighter. This manifests in a number of criticisms, including a disdain for Washington, D.C. think tanks that use forecasting models to predict future security threats that may affect the United States. These ultimately fail.

Additionally, the elites’ funding of the Army is usually dependent upon whether or not there is enough money to simply get the job done, not overwhelmingly achieve complete victory with the least cost of life (p. 146). Part of this is a result of the bias the “Beltway” has against the Army. Scales calls the Army the “Cinderella Service” because “America loves its Army, and Washington hates it” (9). The Beltway elites are more likely to fund the Navy or the Airforce than the Army. “The Air Force gets a trillion-dollar stealth fighter, the F-35; the Navy gets a new stealth fighter and carrier, as well as a new high-tech submarine fleet. The Army gets a new sight... for a tank designed to fight on German highways and in open deserts” (p. 147). Even the programs that the Army needs – like the Air Force’s unmanned aerial vehicles – are not prioritized by the other services.

Scales’ third guiding assumption is that the character of warfare is changing. Heavily armoured formations reminiscent of the Second World War and the Cold War are no longer the instruments of national power they once were. The term “post-Blitzkrieg” sums up Scales’ vision of contemporary warfare (p. 51). Relying on a diverse literature, he argues that nation-states are not the threat they once were. Instead, a range of non-state and state-based actors poses the greatest threat to America’s global interests. This includes hybrid warfare, when an “adversary that simultaneously and adaptively employs a fused mix of conventional weapons, irregular tactics, terrorism

and criminal behavior in the battle space to obtain [its] political objective” (p. 55). These include enemies throughout the Middle East, Hezbollah – what Scales calls some of the finest light infantry in the world – the Iranian Quds Force, the Islamic State, and Hamas (46-50). To problematize these trends, Scales notes the increasing power of the people relative to the state and the military in Clausewitz’s social trinity. As a result, the battle for control of a conflict’s narrative is now a powerful feature of modern conflict (pp. 83-94).

Scales on War appeals to the current political climate in the United States that rejects the “elite system” in Washington, D.C., the same feelings that supported the election of Donald Trump to the presidency. Scales also demonstrates derision for the Obama Administration’s attempts to securitize climate change, because of the possibility that this may further starve the Infantry of budgetary resources. Furthermore, and as noted in the book, Scales makes clear his association with Fox News as a commentator. The political leanings of *Scales on War* do not distract from the author’s ultimate point, however, they do need to be acknowledged.

The nearly sole focus on the Army in the book overlooks the sizeable contributions of the Marine Corps. A potential function of Scales’ service in the Army, the omission detracts from many of his policy recommendations, notably the role the Marines played in both Iraq and Afghanistan. An examination of US landpower in its entirety would have contributed greatly to his argument. The strengths and weaknesses of each service could have been compared and provided the work with a more nuanced recommendation.

Focusing on the Infantry’s role in combat omits the role they play in non-combat peacekeeping or humanitarian missions. This is reflective of the American perception that warfare is the ultimate purpose of any military force. The importance of Infantry on the streets of New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina or the role the Marines played in the aftermath of the 2015 earthquake in Nepal should have been discussed. These types of missions form an extension of American global power and represent alternative uses of military power.

The single greatest failing of *Scales on War* is the ambivalence Scales has towards pushing the Army to innovate on its own. Part of this is a result of the conclusion that

the Army does not receive a fair share of the budget, but this does not excuse his lack of critical analysis about the Army. “The Army and Marine leadership have done just about all they can within the narrow confines of their budgeting and weapons-buying authorities. It is time now for the country to pay attention and act. Our close-combat Soldiers and leaders deserve nothing less” (p. 71). The changes to the Army’s force structure and operations necessary to turn the Infantry into McChrystal-like teams start from within and require the initiative of senior leadership.

Scales does acknowledge that the Army’s culture will need to change to implement his desired reforms, yet he only pays lip service to the difficulties of altering a military’s culture. His discussion about the secretive promotion board responsible for turning a select number of Colonels into Brigadier Generals is insightful, but this is just one part of a whole host of changes necessary to bring about an Infantry-centric military.

In his attempt to prevent the Army’s collapse, Robert Scales has challenged the reader to think about military power and effectiveness in our contemporary era. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have shown the importance of ground forces – especially the Infantry – to achieve the interests of the United States. What Scales fears is that “armies break quickly and need at least a generation to rebuild” (p. 217). Scales’ work contributes to the percolating military reform debate within the US. The multi-billion dollar enterprise that is American national security is well served by Robert Scales’ insights on the contemporary situation. However, the real value of *Scales on War* is the author’s insights into the long-term trends that will come to dominate the American military. The numerous factors that Scales covers throughout the work are not its central feature, but demonstrate the complexity of defence procurement, military culture, national ways of war, political patterns and processes, and the character and nature of war.