

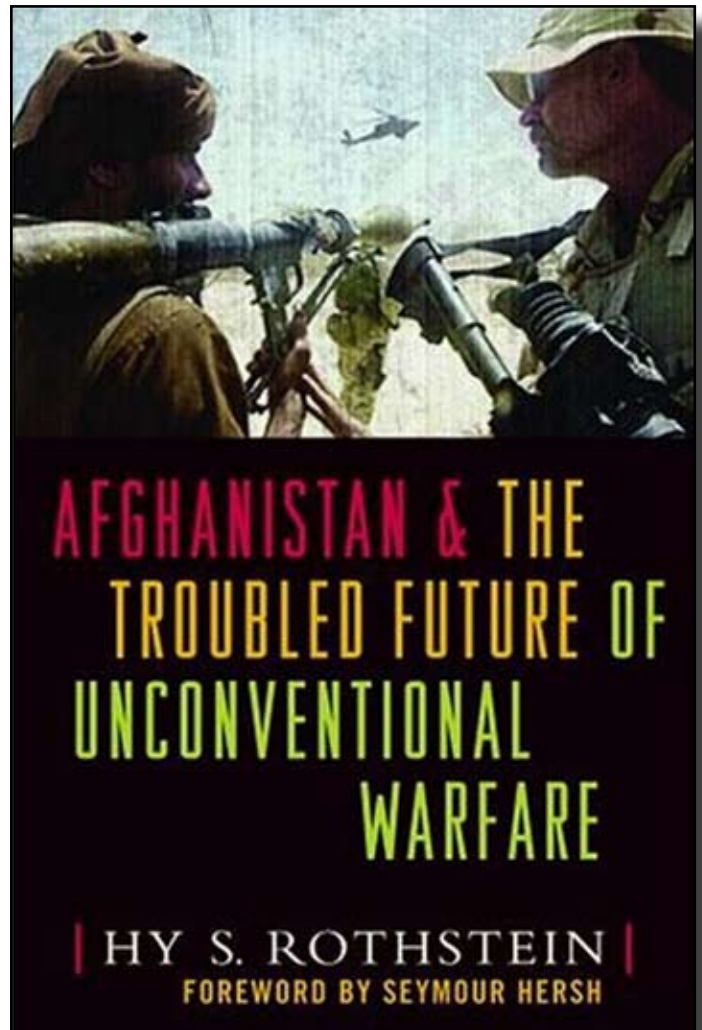
Professional Reader

Afghanistan and the Troubled Future of Unconventional Warfare by Hy S. Rothstein

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Afghanistan and the Troubled Future of Unconventional Warfare is an examination of why the U.S. Military has difficulty conducting Unconventional Warfare (UW) despite the increased funding and attention given to special operations and intelligence used in conducting UW operations. The author, Hy Rothstein, is a former career Special Forces officer who currently teaches at the Naval Postgraduate School. He argues that the types of operations that include UW and stability operations are not necessarily best conducted by conventional means although, in Afghanistan for example, a conventional approach is what has been taken. In order to support the author's perspective, the first one-third of the work is organized into chapters that focus on the historical context of UW. These early chapters describe how special operations have evolved to meet the challenges of these types of missions. This background is both informative and contextually relevant for those professionals who deal with the complexity of UW to include Conventional Troops and Special Operations. The author focuses on Special Forces although Psychological Operations and Civil Affairs are also discussed at length.

Of the many bureaucratic obstacles facing Special Operations are organizational constraints and a failure to develop processes of innovation in the army. Rothstein thus utilizes the remaining two-thirds of his work in a progression that moves from theoretical to practical considerations. First, he focuses on Organizational Theory and how the concept of Contingency Theory could be a more successful model for the organizational structure of the high-



est levels of military decision making. For example, Rothstein argues that the Department of Defense (DOD) is not organizationally structured to allow for options that fall outside of conventional warfare paradigms. Contingency Theory, however, could potentially guide DOD decision making in a more appropriate direction for the types of future conflicts that will invariably be unconventional by definition and difficult to predict in nature. As the author notes, "Organizational scholars have concluded that Weberian-type bureaucracy found in many large, modern organizations is ineffective in coping with the demands of a dynamic and uncertain environment. Additionally, standardized procedures, a fundamental tenet of bureaucracy, inhibit innovation and the flexibility necessary to effectively operate

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under conditions of uncertainty. Contingency theory is the alternative organizational model for environments where Weberian Bureaucracy falls short.” Further, Rothstein spends a great deal of effort in demonstrating how and why UW must not be diluted by focusing on the attrition end of the spectrum of operations, a fact that is of great importance when conducting stability operations. The Special Forces, it is argued, is being over-used for direct action (DA) operations (due to there being many other assets that can conduct DA) and it needs to be tasked more usefully as practitioners of UW, a niche skill unique to special operations.

When stability operations are considered in the context of the War on Terror, urgency is added as American public support is needed to continue political support for the army’s work in Iraq and Afghanistan. Rothstein supports the view that success in those campaigns must be measured by the confidence of the host nation populace:

“The war on terrorism requires the use of Special Forces teams, and Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations units, all tasked to do UW. Success in this war will require an emphasis on winning local cooperation. Conventional and DA forces are least likely to elicit this, while UW forces are most likely to.” The dichotomy, as described by Mr. Rothstein, of how conventional and unconventional capabilities conduct stability operations elicits a historical comparison of stability operations with the Gordian knot. How to best metaphorically unknot that classical enigma may be through the type of organizational structure that best utilizes Contingency Theory. However, it may also be the type of organization that is structurally aligned with that theory but still possesses the flexibility to incorporate conventional capabilities and forces. In sum, Mr. Rothstein’s work poses important questions that may guide decision making and organizational structure for conflicts, in Afghanistan and elsewhere, that require UW capabilities. ✨

