

REVIEWS

Tommy Franks with Malcolm McConnell, *American Soldier*
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A MODERN MAJOR GENERAL

It is the flip side of the celebrity culture: prominent figures in various walks of life—entertainment, sports, big business, politics—bask in the adulation of the unwashed and inhabit a rarefied world of privilege and deference. But their entrée into that world is highly contingent, requiring that they continue to meet the capricious, even whimsical expectations of their adoring fans. Fail to deliver and the accounting can be as abrupt as it is brutal. Ask the movie star who bombs on successive pictures, the high-priced quarterback who somehow cannot win the big ones, the corporate executive who, for one too many quarters, falls short of ‘market expectations’. Ask Al Gore.

But one highly visible segment of the American elite has been largely exempt from this rule. Ever since the Persian Gulf War of 1990–91, when by common consent the United States established itself as The Greatest Military Power The World Has Ever Seen, those entrusted with commanding us forces have enjoyed a protected status. As newspapers once treated the local archbishop with kid gloves lest they invite the charge of being insufficiently respectful of the Church, so in recent years otherwise free-swinging critics have generally given generals and admirals a pass lest they appear to violate that ultimate diktat of present-day political correctness: never do anything that might suggest less than wholehearted support for our men and women in uniform. As a consequence, those who occupy the uppermost ranks of the armed forces have become the least accountable members of the American

elite. Or perhaps more accurately, members of this exclusive club are unique in being accountable only to their peers.

Consider: when Lieutenant General Ricardo Sanchez assumed command of coalition forces in Iraq in 2003, the first stirrings of an insurgency had begun to appear; his job was to snuff out that insurgency and establish a secure environment. When Sanchez gave up command a year later, Iraq was all but coming apart at the seams. Security had deteriorated appreciably. The general failed to accomplish his mission, egregiously so. Yet amidst all the endless commentary and chatter about Iraq, that failure of command has gone all but unnoted, as if for outsiders to evaluate senior officer performance qualifies as bad form. Had Sanchez been a head coach or a CEO, he would likely have been cashiered. But he is a general, so the Pentagon pins a medal on his chest and gives him a pat on the back. It is the dirty little secret to which the World's Only Superpower has yet to own up: as the United States has come to rely ever more heavily on armed force to prop up its position of global pre-eminence, the quality of senior American military leadership has seldom risen above the mediocre. The troops are ever willing, the technology remarkable, but first-rate generalship has been hard to come by.

Tommy Franks would dispute that charge. To rebut it, he would cite his own achievements as the senior field commander during the us-led incursion into Afghanistan in 2001 and the invasion of Iraq in 2003. In each case, a brilliantly conceived plan—*his* plan, implemented under *his* direct control—resulted in decisive victory, gained with economy and dispatch. Indeed, the whole point of *American Soldier* is to stake out Franks's claim to being one of history's Great Captains. Readers predisposed to see Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom in glowing terms may well find the general's efforts to sustain his case persuasive. Those alive to the fact that Iraq has become a full-fledged quagmire and Afghanistan only slightly less so will find the general's claim to be ranked among the immortals less compelling. But even they will profit from reading *American Soldier*. For the account that Franks provides is as instructive as it is revealing. Given the vast pretensions and militarized nature of present-day us foreign policy, this is a document of genuine significance, as timely as it is troubling.

In terms of its overall composition, *American Soldier* adheres to, and therefore helps to legitimate, an emerging literary tradition: the military memoir as narrative of national redemption. As the wars, excursions and alarms of the post-Cold War era have piled up, so too have the published remembrances of senior American military leaders. In its latter-day form, this genre comes in two distinctive variants. Those falling into the first category are easily identified: in every instance, two-inch-tall letters on the dust jacket identify the author as Tom Clancy, who has actually never served a day in uniform. Underneath the author's name, almost as an afterthought

in much smaller type, comes the acknowledgement that Clancy penned his account 'with General Johnny So-and-So (ret.)'.

For the better part of a decade Clancy, who achieved fame and fortune writing techno-thrillers, has been churning out these military chronicles with the same regularity that he produces best-selling novels. There are now four such volumes, the first three—*Into the Storm* (1997), *Every Man a Tiger* (1999) and *Shadow Warriors* (2002)—co-written, respectively, with Generals Fred Franks, Chuck Horner and Carl Stiner, who all occupied senior command positions in Operation Desert Storm. The most recent was produced in conjunction with the marine officer who preceded Tommy Franks as head of United States Central Command, or CENTCOM, with an area of operations spanning East Africa, the Middle East and Central Eurasia. This is *Battle Ready* (2004), by Tom Clancy with General Tony Zinni (ret.) and Tony Koltz—the addition of a third collaborator/ghost writer making it more difficult still to know exactly how much credence to give to these concoctions. The books give the impression of being not so much written as assembled—which is a shame: Zinni is, in fact, a thoughtful and interesting man who has emerged of late as an ardent critic of the Bush administration's conduct of its so-called global war on terror. But whether or not the critique expressed in *Battle Ready* actually qualifies as his own is anyone's guess.

The second category of modern-day senior officer memoir is the one into which *American Soldier* blessedly falls. Although typically written with outside assistance, these books manage at least to retain a semblance of authenticity. The Norman Schwarzkopf of *It Doesn't Take a Hero* (1993) may be a somewhat sanitized version of the real Stormin' Norman. Certainly, the account of Operation Desert Storm forming the core of his narrative is self-serving. But the overall product bears at least some similarity to the genuine article. Much the same can be said about Colin Powell, who describes his military career in *My American Journey* (1995), or Wesley Clark, who in *Waging Modern War* (2001) recounts a journey to high command that culminates in the struggle for Kosovo.

Whether of the manufactured or handcrafted variety, virtually every one of these narratives conforms to a prescribed formula. The protagonist, after an upbringing spent acquiring a profound appreciation for American values, joins the armed forces and serves as a young officer in Vietnam. This war becomes the pivot around which all else turns—Franks, for example, titles the chapter describing his own Vietnam service 'The Crucible'. From his experience in a lost war, the protagonist derives certain essential truths that he vows to apply if ever called upon in some future crisis to serve in a position of authority. Upon returning home from battle, although dismayed to see his countrymen shunning those who served and sacrificed, he soldiers on, rising through the ranks during a lengthy apprenticeship.

When his moment finally arrives, he orchestrates a great victory, by implication showing how Vietnam *ought* to have been fought. In vanquishing the enemy, he also helps heal old wounds at home, promoting both reconciliation and national renewal. Somewhat less loftily, in recounting this triumph the protagonist also makes use of every available opportunity to settle scores with old enemies and critics.

In *American Soldier*, the initial elements of this sequence stand out as clearly the best. The adopted only child of loving, working-class parents, Franks tells the story of his hardscrabble upbringing with wit and charm. Growing up in small town Oklahoma and Texas meant 'living the American dream': exploring the outdoors and playing ball, rebuilding motorbikes and drag racers, chasing girls and drinking beer. When too much of the latter resulted in Franks flunking out of college, he enlisted in the army and in 1967 earned his commission through Officer Candidate School. Soon thereafter, the green-as-grass second lieutenant was off to Southeast Asia. Franks describes his year of combat as a field artilleryman in vivid detail. Cool-headed, courageous and resourceful, he took to soldiering with the same alacrity as he had the carefree pursuits of boyhood. Although in joining up Franks had viewed the army as a detour eventually leading back to fraternity row, he found in military service a life that soon became a calling. When he returned from Vietnam in 1968 and contemplated the prospect of attending school alongside 'guys who'd used student deferments to protest the war', he wasted little time in deciding to make the military a career. In the Cold War army of the 1970s and 1980s, he excelled. Franks sought out tough, demanding jobs and then delivered results. He was an ambitious officer who loved his family, but put his career first and steadily climbed the ladder of success. The Gulf War of 1990–91 found him a brigadier general. Ten years later, now wearing four stars, he assumed command of CENTCOM.

All the while Franks had cultivated a rough-around-the-edges, country-boy persona—the kid from west Texas professing amazement at how far he had come. 'I had learned over the years that sometimes it's useful to operate behind a self-deprecating façade', he observes in an aside. Behind that façade, now Franks wants it known, was an erudite student of his profession and an original thinker. (Sensitive as well: Franks writes poetry, and *American Soldier* includes several unfortunate excerpts of his verse.) During his apprenticeship, he 'had read about both war and peace: the accumulated wisdom of Sun Tzu and Clausewitz, Bertram [sic] Russell and Gandhi'. Moreover, Franks insists, right from the outset he had been a 'maverick' who found himself as a consequence 'frequently on the outside of the Army's conservative mainstream'.

In fact, Franks presents precious little evidence of free-thinking as he made his way to the top. Although he sprinkles his tale with quotations from long-deceased Chinese and German philosophers (none from the mysterious

Mr Russell), his observations about war and politics do not rise above the pedestrian. Franks writes knowingly of 'a continuum of interaction between nations, factions and tribes'. But he then translates that insight into his 'Five Cs' theory of international politics, in which all interstate relationships fit into one of five categories: Conflict, Crisis, Co-existence, Collaboration or Cooperation. And although as a junior commander or staff officer, Franks on occasion tinkered gingerly with military orthodoxy, he remained at all times comfortably within the system. In short, whether for good or for ill, by the time he ascended to command of CENTCOM in 2000, Franks had become the archetype of the Modern Major General.

That means among other things that Franks carried with him all the grudges that the officer corps had accumulated in Vietnam and has nursed ever since. In *American Soldier* these grudges emerge intact, with Franks piling on a few more of his own. Thus, several times in the course of this account, he lets fly at the media for what he describes as inaccurate, biased and explicitly anti-military reporting. He takes swipes at 'the intellectual arrogance' of civilian officials back in Washington, who imagine that air power alone 'could kick open a door, through which exiled Iraqi opposition groups would march triumphantly to liberate their country'. Such notions, writes Franks, were 'absurd', as were expectations that Iraqi exile Ahmad Chalabi—a fraudulent 'Gucci leader'—would be able to unite Iraq's various ethnic and religious factions.

Among the civilians that Franks scorches are Richard Clarke, the former White House anti-terrorism czar, dismissed as an impractical blowhard, and Douglas Feith, Undersecretary of Defence for policy and 'the dumbest fucking guy on the planet'. He likens these amateurs to 'McNamara and his Whiz Kids [who] had repeatedly picked individual bombing targets and approved battalion-size manoeuvres'. Franks refuses to tolerate any such meddling. 'My name is not Westmoreland,' he growls during the Afghan campaign, 'and I'm not going to go along with Washington giving tactics and targets to our kids in the cockpits and on the ground.'

Nor does the general spare his own fellow professionals. He rails against the 'ill-informed, disgruntled leakers finishing a dead-end career in some Pentagon cubicle' who presume to second-guess him. He derides the 'mother-fucking tv generals', many of whom 'were much better tv analysts than they had been military officers'. But he reserves his most ferocious salvo for the four-stars assigned as service chiefs. Advice proffered by the Joint Chiefs of Staff amounts to nothing more than 'parochial bullshit'. Franks expresses unmitigated contempt for the 'Title Ten motherfuckers', who by law have no command authority and, hence, should refrain from nitpicking the plans of 'warfighters' such as himself.

There is more here than histrionics. Sustaining the case for the general's induction into Valhalla requires that he demonstrate that he, and he alone, bears responsibility for the victories won in Afghanistan and especially Iraq. Franks wants to ensure that anyone finding fault with his performance does not get much of a hearing. But he also wants to make sure that no one horns in and claims laurels that he views as rightly his own. Yet in this regard, Clarke, Feith, the tv generals and even the Joint Chiefs are comparative small fry. In imperial America, despite all the trappings of democracy, a relative handful of people exercise real power. (The imperial reference is not gratuitous: at one point Franks compares his role to that of 'the Roman proconsul [Marcus Aemilius] Scaurus'; elsewhere he toys with the image of himself cloaked in 'a purple-trimmed toga and a laurel wreath'.) Depending on the issue, but especially in matters related to national security, decision-making at the summit involves as few as half a dozen serious players. To show that when it came to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq he was really in charge, Franks must demonstrate that in the strategic interaction at the top *his* was the dominant voice. Franks must show, in short, that his role involved much more than simply following orders.

As Franks knows but does not acknowledge, contemporaneous reporting had suggested otherwise. The press had credited Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld with devising the methods employed in Afghanistan and Iraq. In his own inimitable style, Rumsfeld had nudged, cajoled and browbeaten a plodding theatre commander into embracing a novel approach to warfare that on successive occasions produced spectacular results—so at least the story went. Not so, Franks insists. From 9/11 on, he was the one driving the train: 'CENTCOM "pushed strategy up", rather than waiting for Washington to "push tactics down".' At great length—this book gives substantially more attention to campaign planning than to fighting as such—Franks explains how he patiently educated the President and the Defence Secretary about contemporary warfare and brought them around to his own vision for how best to take down the Taliban and Saddam Hussein.

Although Franks professes to hold George W. Bush in the highest regard, the commander-in-chief emerges from this account as an affable, cliché-spouting airhead. Bush cheerfully presides over various briefings, offers a few random questions, and wraps things up with pithy admonitions like 'Great job, Tommy. Keep it up. We will do what we have to do to protect America.' Rumsfeld comes off as a more formidable interlocutor, repeatedly testing his field commander's patience and kept in line only through the most careful management. But Franks leaves no doubt that at the end of the day the twin invasions of 2001 and 2003 were fought his way.

The Franks vision, one that placed a premium on speed, surprise, deception, precision weapons and the integration of all services into a fully unified

fighting team, put him, he states categorically, 'way outside the box of conventional doctrine'. The upshot: two remarkable wins, the second of which Franks describes as 'unequaled in its excellence by anything in the annals of war'. But great as these accomplishments are, Franks wants it known that they possess a significance that continues to reverberate well beyond the battlefield. At home, victory triggered the revival of a 'constant, deep patriotism by those who salute the flag, and by those who wave the flag'—Americans returning to those enduring values that young Tommy Franks had imbibed back in 1950s Texas. More substantively, the campaigns over which Franks presided constituted 'a true revolution in warfare'. The victories won in Afghanistan and Iraq thus provide assurances of us military supremacy as far as the eye can see.

Yet in making such spacious assertions as both field commander and architect of a radically new American way of war, Franks puts himself in a fix not unlike that of Douglas MacArthur at the end of 1950. When, in September of that year, us forces at Inchon turned the tables on the North Koreans and instantly transformed the Korean War, MacArthur wanted no doubt left that the brilliance displayed was his and his alone. But in remarkably short order the masterstroke of Inchon gave way to the shock of Chinese intervention, with the tables turning again. Try as he might, MacArthur could not claim ownership of the first without also being tagged with responsibility for the second.

Franks retired from active duty shortly after the well-televised toppling of Saddam Hussein's statue in Al Firdos Square, and thus cannot be held directly responsible for all that has transpired since in Iraq and Afghanistan; but neither can he ignore those developments. His efforts to explain them away, however, are feeble at best. With regard to the war against Saddam, Franks claims to have anticipated all along that the so-called Phase IV—the occupation and rehabilitation of Iraq—would be the most difficult and protracted. He states repeatedly that he expected the occupation to last several years and to require up to 250,000 coalition troops—although his own plan did not provide for anything close to that number. (Nowhere in *American Soldier* is there mention of the prescient pre-war estimate by one of Franks's Title Ten colleagues that the occupation might well consume several hundred thousand troops.)

Although Franks had speculated that 'postwar Iraq might be modelled on post-World War II Japan or Germany', he shows little indication of having grasped the political or economic challenges that nation-building might entail. *After* the fall of Baghdad, Franks was on the phone to General Richard Myers, the JCS chairman, offering up bright ideas: 'Dick, we need a major donor conference—hosted in Washington—to line up support, money and

troops, as rapidly as possible.' But by then it was too late; events were already outrunning the ability of the United States to control them.

Conditions have only worsened since. But for his part Franks remains stubbornly upbeat. Phase IV, he insists in surveying recent developments, is 'actually going about as I had expected'. Despite the 'daily parade of negative headlines', Iraq is well on its way to success. Brushing aside the Abu Ghraib torture scandals as the work of a few bad apples and expressing confidence that the violence will soon taper off, he predicts that 'a year from now, Iraq will be a different country'. With us deaths climbing toward 1000, with some us troops involuntarily extended in the combat zone and others returning for a second tour, and with the Washington-installed Iraqi government looking wobbly, it is difficult to share Franks's breezy optimism. One might even say that he is beginning to sound a bit like a tv general.

But forget all that and grant Franks his Inchon: his headlong thrust on Baghdad splintered Iraqi defences and swiftly overturned the Ba'ath Party regime. No one can dispute that. Ironically, however, credit for this success is due at least in part to the fact that the principal rationale for the entire enterprise—Saddam Hussein's stock of chemical and biological weapons—turned out to be a chimera. Again and again, Franks emphasizes his certainty (and that of his bosses) that Saddam possessed weapons of mass destruction and thus posed a dire threat to the United States and its interests. In fact, of course, the Iraqi dictator had no such arsenal and posed no real threat other than to his own people. Franks shrugs off the error—as if it were simply an honest mistake—without bothering to consider the extent to which his reputation for military genius hangs on his having been so wildly wrong in estimating the enemy's capabilities. Had Saddam actually possessed usable WMD, it is reasonable to speculate that 'major combat operations' would have gone less swimmingly well. If so, the story that General Franks would be telling today would be considerably different.

Nor, it must be said, does Franks's effort to portray the Iraqi army of 2003 as a formidable force—at one point he compares the Republican Guard to Hitler's *Waffen SS*—stand up to close scrutiny. The fact is that Saddam's army never recovered from the drubbing that it endured in 1991. More than a decade of economic sanctions and diplomatic isolation, plus aerial bombardment from 1998 onwards, had made any such recovery impossible. Thus, although Franks does not mention the fact, by 2003 Iraq for all practical purposes did not possess an air force—no small matter in an age when air power has come to dominate conventional warfare.

Franks asserts that 'there's never been a combat operation as successful as Iraqi Freedom'. Only the narrowest definition of success makes that claim sustainable. In fact, the tangible benefits accruing from America's victory over Saddam Hussein have been few. In a sense, the us-led invasion of Iraq in

2003 bears comparison to Germany's invasion of Norway in 1940 or its lunge into Yugoslavia the following year. At the moment of execution, each seemed to affirm impressions that the German military juggernaut was unstoppable. But once the dust had settled, it became apparent that neither victory had brought the Nazi regime any closer to resolving the main issue. Each had saddled the Wehrmacht with burdens that it could ill afford to bear.

Then there is the almost forgotten matter of Afghanistan. The aim of Operation Enduring Freedom had been to 'squeeze into extinction' the terrorists and terrorist-sympathizers present in that country. By the end of 2001, Franks declares, 'we had accomplished our mission'. But this is palpable nonsense. To be sure, the us intervention in Afghanistan damaged Al Qaeda and ousted the Taliban regime—hardly trivial accomplishments. But Operation Enduring Freedom came nowhere near to destroying either organization. Of equal moment—although the point receives scant attention in *American Soldier*—both Osama bin Laden and Taliban leader Mullah Omar managed to elude the forces that Franks commanded. Three years after they first arrived us troops find themselves engaged in an arduous, open-ended effort to maintain even the most tenuous stability. They will not be going home anytime soon. In Afghanistan, General Franks no more accomplished his mission than did the younger von Moltke when he took the German army partway to Paris in 1914. Franks wrote *American Soldier* in hopes of securing his place in history. But in both Iraq and Afghanistan, history appears to be moving in directions not helpful to his cause.

Finally, no one even remotely familiar with recent trends in military affairs will find persuasive the general's efforts to portray himself as an out-of-the-box thinker. The belief that information technology is transforming force from a blunt to a precision instrument of unprecedented versatility—among other things, providing commanders, Franks writes, with 'the kind of Olympian perspective that Homer had given his gods'—has been a shibboleth for the past quarter-century. At most, Franks appropriated the ideas of others and nudged us military doctrine further along the path down which it was already headed—completely oblivious to the possibility that this path like any other just might lead into an ambush.

As to denunciations of service parochialism and calls for greater 'jointness', they are today about as fresh (and as brave) as politicians speaking out against racial bigotry. At least since the days of Eisenhower, senior Army commanders have been touting the imperative of inter-service cooperation. Over the past twenty years even Air Force generals and Navy admirals have climbed on the jointness bandwagon—though, as with old-school politicians from the Deep South proclaiming their devotion to racial harmony, the depth of Air Force and Navy conviction may on occasion be in doubt. In short, the author's claim to being a bold original is bogus.

Yet even if the victories that Franks won have lost some of their initial lustre, and even if he was never quite the innovator he purports to be, *American Soldier* retains considerable value. Indeed, even if a decade from now the ambiguity that has come to surround General Schwarzkopf's once-famous liberation of Kuwait envelops the liberation of Afghanistan and the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, students of American globalism will still find in *American Soldier* a treasure trove of insight, if they read the book with the care it deserves. For these pages shed considerable light on one of the great unanswered questions of the day: how is it that over the past decade-and-a-half, as us forces have gone from one storied triumph to the next, the security of the United States has become ever more precarious? Why, when we flex our military muscles on behalf of freedom and peace, does the world beyond our borders become all the more cantankerous and disorderly? Madeleine Albright irritated Colin Powell by famously asking, 'What's the point of having this great army you're always talking about if we can't use it?' From our present perspective, a better question might be: 'What's the point of using this great army if the result is Fallujah, Najaf and Karbala?'

Of course, these are perplexing matters for which there is no neat, tidy explanation. Greed, envy, miscalculation, sheer stupidity, ideological blinders, the nature of the international system, the sins of past generations coming home to roost, the hubris of militarized civilian elites, the iron law of unintended consequences: all of these deserve mention. But in *American Soldier* we see on vivid display one additional factor: the political naïveté and strategic ineptitude of military officers selected and presumably groomed for high command. Far from being a maverick marching to his own drummer, Franks embodies a set of convictions and prejudices common among officers of his generation. Ever since they returned from the jungles and rice paddies over thirty years ago, members of that generation have been engaged in a project that aims, as it were, to put right all that the luckless William Westmoreland got wrong. In essence, they want to reverse the verdict of Vietnam.

More specifically, they have sought to purge war of politics, reconstituting the conception of war as the exclusive province of military professionals. Throughout *American Soldier*, Franks makes it abundantly clear that he views political considerations as at best a distraction, if not an outright impediment. (Discussing the understanding he reached, 'soldier-to-soldier', with Pakistan's Pervez Musharraf in the run-up to us operations in Afghanistan, Franks writes that such a partnership could have been forged long before, were it not for the 'diplomatic envoys in business suits [who] had hectored soldier-politicians such as Musharraf about human rights and representative government'.) Never having forgiven Robert McNamara, he and other members of his generation instinctively view civilians as troublemakers,

constantly straying onto turf that rightly belongs to soldiers. Averting such unwelcome encroachments constitutes a categorical imperative.

Keeping civilians where they belong and reasserting a professional monopoly over the conduct of warfare requires drawing the clearest possible line to prevent politics and war from becoming tangled up with one another. Whereas Westmoreland, remembered today as too much the political general, allowed the Whiz Kids to intrude in matters that belonged under his purview, the subalterns who experienced the frustrations of defeat but then stayed on after Vietnam to revive American military power have vowed never to let that happen again. They insist that the conduct of war be recognized as *their* business and theirs alone. Hence, the general-in-chief who (like Franks) experiences combat vicariously in the comfort of an air-conditioned headquarters nonetheless insists on styling himself a chest-thumping ‘war-fighter’. He does so for more than merely symbolic reasons: asserting that identity permits him to advance prerogatives to which the officer corps lays absolute claim. This is *my* business; the suits—Franks would likely employ coarser language—should stay out.

It is the sort of sharp distinction between war and politics that Douglas Haig or Erich Ludendorff would have appreciated and understood. But what gets lost in drawing such distinctions—as Haig and Ludendorff lost it in World War I—is any possibility of strategic coherence. Fighting is, of course, integral to war. But, if in ways not always appreciated by or even agreeable to those who actually pull triggers and drop bombs, war is also and always profoundly political. Indeed, if war is to have any conceivable justification and prospect of utility, it must remain subordinated to politics. Effecting that subordination lies at the very heart of strategy. In the tradition of which Franks is an exponent there is a powerful tendency to resist this formulation. Thus, although the author of *American Soldier* mouths Clausewitzian slogans, when it comes to the relationship of war and politics, he rejects the core of what Clausewitz actually taught. And in that sense he typifies the post-Vietnam American officer.

Clausewitz sees the nature of war as complex and elusive; generalship requires not only intensive study and stalwart character, but also great intuitive powers. For Franks, war is a matter of engineering—and generalship the business of organizing and coordinating materiel. Thus, the Franks who reduces international politics to ‘five Cs’ offers up a similarly schematic notion of strategy. When first directed by Rumsfeld to begin planning the invasion of Iraq, Franks sat down, legal pad in hand, and sketched out what he calls his ‘template’ for decisive victory. The resulting matrix, which *American Soldier* proudly reprints in its original handwritten form, consists of seven horizontal ‘lines of operation’—enumerating us capabilities—intersecting with nine vertical ‘slices’, each describing one source of Saddam

Hussein's hold on power. At select points of intersection—thirty-six in all—Franks drew a 'starburst'. For purposes of further planning, these defined points of main effort.

There is nothing intrinsically wrong with generals sketching out 'lines and slices'. Commanders no longer wage war by pointing their swords at the enemy and hollering 'Charge!'. Campaign planning requires checklists and schedules, readily identifiable priorities and unambiguous lines of authority. If a seven-by-nine matrix can lend order to the process of gearing up a force for war, that is all to the good. But even a casual examination of Franks's sketch shows that it does not even remotely approximate a strategy. It is devoid of any political context. Narrowly focused on the upcoming fight, it pays no attention to the aftermath. Defining the problem as Iraq and Iraq alone, it ignores other power relationships and makes no provision for how war might alter those relationships, whether for good or ill. It is completely ahistorical and makes no reference to culture, religion or ethnic identity. It has no moral dimension. It fails even to provide a statement of purpose. But according to Franks, it is an exquisitely designed example of what he terms 'basic *grand strategy*' (emphasis in the original).

Here we come face to face with the essential dilemma with which the United States has wrestled ever since the Soviets had the temerity to deprive us of a stabilizing adversary—a dilemma that the events of 9/11 only served to exacerbate. The political elite that ought to bear the chief responsibility for formulating grand strategy instead nurses ideological fantasies of remaking the world in America's image, as the Bush administration's *National Security Strategy* of 2002 so vividly attests. Meanwhile, the military elite that could possibly puncture those fantasies and help restore a modicum of realism to us policy instead obsesses over operations. Reluctant to engage in any sort of political–military dialogue that might compromise their autonomy, the generals allow fundamental questions about the relationship between power and purpose to go unanswered and even unrecognized.

Into this void between the illusions of the political class and the fears of the generals disappears the possibility of establishing some equilibrium between ends and means. Instead, the United States careens ever closer to bankruptcy, exhaustion and imperial overstretch. The us today has vast ambitions for how the world should operate, too vast to be practical. It wields great power, though not nearly so much as many imagine. But there exists nothing even approaching a meaningful strategy to meld the two together. In *American Soldier*, Tommy Franks helps us understand why.