

# Exo-Strategy

As I watched the new hit movie “Iron Man,” starring a guy in a flying armored suit, I asked myself: Why don’t we fight our wars like that? You know, so that we win,

using the maximum amount of technology, suffering the minimum amount of bloodshed? After all, the nuclear-powered protagonist, played by Robert Downey Jr., wipes out the bad guys in Afghanistan yet barely gets a scratch, safe inside his weaponized rocket-man outfit.

So what does Hollywood know that the Pentagon doesn’t? Even audiences seem to be way ahead of our Cleveland Park Clausewitzes.

The whole point of war technology is to turn a fair fight into an unfair fight. Remember that scene in the first “Indiana Jones” movie, in which the menacing Arab swordsman tries to dazzle our hero with his deft juggling of a giant scimitar? Whereupon Indy just pops him with his revolver? That’s the way to do it. Indeed, the success of colonialism in the late 19th century could be explained in Hillaire Belloc’s couplet: “Whatever happens, we have got / The Maxim gun, and they have not.”

Arthur C. Clarke once observed, “Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic.” So it’s hard for us today to imagine what it must have been like to be a Third Worlder back then, when the white people showed up with their steamships, rapid-fire weapons, and then, even more amazingly, telegraphs and airplanes. It was obviously an overwhelming experience—for a time.

But the Japanese, to name one leading non-Occidental example, quickly got the hang of things. And with a few bumps along the way, they have been improving

their techno-technique ever since. So maybe history is about to repeat itself, on the other foot. When I saw the news about a Honda robot, the Asimo, conducting the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, I thought, “Are we sitting here in America, slackjawed in wonderment at others’ technological achievement, clueless as to the military significance of what we are seeing—as Japan plots its revenge for Hiroshima?” Just asking.

History is pretty decisive on one point: every technology is dual-use. It can lengthen your life—or shorten your life. So it’s best if you have the instruction manual written in your language.

History is also decisive on another point: most people never learn from history. As the real Clausewitz wrote nearly two centuries ago, “The first rule is therefore to enter the field with an army as strong as possible. This sounds very like a commonplace, but still it is really not so.”

Indeed, it is not so. Fast forward to the hubris of our own Donald Rumsfeld, whose signature combination of arrogance and incompetence will merit its own chapter in some future compendium of anti-Clausewitzian thinking. Waving away concerns that perhaps the U.S. wasn’t up-armored for Iraq, and otherwise up-equipped, Rumsfeld famously la-de-da’d, “You go to war with the Army you have.”

There you have it, ladies and gentlemen of the high courts martial of history jury. The Feithian Special Planners at DOD spent years plotting ways to install a *Weekly Standard* reader as their Man

in Baghdad, but in their haste for regime change, they neglected technological evolution.

In World War II, when we had a president who really wanted to win and who knew what he was doing, we mobilized our entire country for victory. And the results of that mobilization were the weapons and the weapons-making complex that won a hot war, as well as the Cold War that followed. Winning a hot war is cool, but winning a Cold War, without world-historical levels of casualties, is much cooler.

Meanwhile, our friends the neocons speak grandly of a bigger Army but not really a better Army. Their vision is lots more low-tech boots on the ground, speaking, of course, Arabic and Farsi. And if those boots get IED’d on a regular basis by ungrateful locals? Well, that’s what guest-soldiers are for, to ease the pain—for the rest of us, that is, as we relax at home with the *Journal*.

So back to the value of pre-emptive technology. Years into two sandy quagmires, the U.S. Army has finally unveiled a kind of robot suit, a mechanical exoskeleton made by a Salt Lake City firm called Sarcos. It weighs 150 pounds and works to amplify the speed and strength of human movements.

That’s good, but we needed those machines, complete with armor, five years ago.

Where have you gone, Vannevar Bush? During World War II, as director of the Pentagon’s Office of Scientific Research and Development, you gave us everything from the proximity fuse to the A-bomb. Today, our low-tech nation at war turns its eyes to you—mourning the loss of thousands whose lives could have been saved. ■

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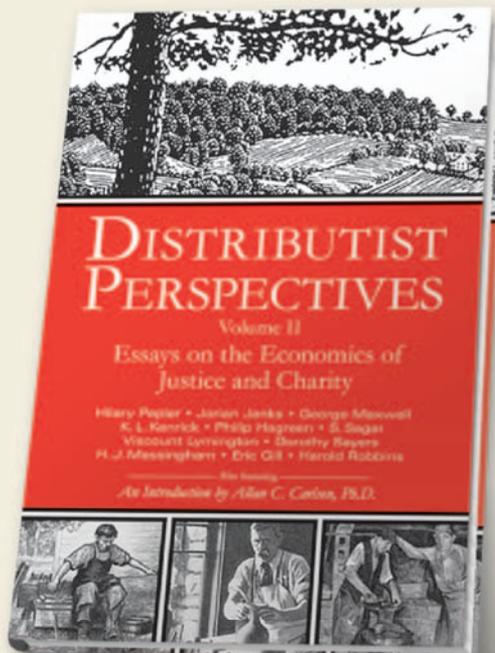
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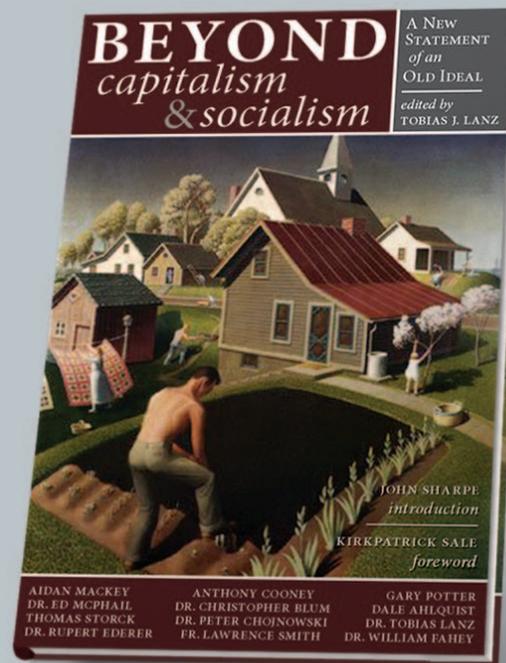
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