

Intelligence in Public Media

The Field of Fight: How We Can Win The Global War Against Radical Islam and Its Allies

Lt. Gen. Michael T. Flynn with Michael Ledeen (St. Martin's Press, 2016), 180 pp., notes, suggested reading, index.

The Pivot: The Future of American Statecraft in Asia

Kurt Campbell (Twelve—Hachette Book Group, 2016), 349 pp., notes, bibliography, index.

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Presidential election years often breed several national security-related books. These works can give insight into the substantive security issues at stake and help intelligence professionals prepare to serve the next administration. This time in particular, two books lay out competing objectives that will feed into how the Intelligence Community (IC) prioritizes its resources in support of the next administration.

Lt. Gen. (Ret.) Michael T. Flynn's *The Field of Fight: How to Win The Global War Against Radical Islam and Its Allies*, co-written by Michael Ledeen, and Kurt Campbell's *The Pivot: The Future of American Statecraft in Asia*, lay out starkly contrasting strategies for dealing with counterterrorism and the rise of China, respectively. As long-serving national security professionals, Flynn and Campbell's works highlight two issues intelligence professionals will need to continue to address through collection, operations, and analysis. Each makes an impassioned case for prioritizing his area of interest and calls for whole-of-government approaches. Both fall short, however, by not articulating how the IC fits into their strategies and by failing to consider the key premises underlying their recommended courses of action and the implications.

The Field of Fight and *The Pivot* also serve to remind intelligence professionals how difficult it can be to array intelligence resources against different kinds of national security issues. *The Field of Fight* focuses on our immediate counterterrorism fight, a functional intelligence issue like counternarcotics, counterproliferation, cyber activities, and illicit finance. Such issues transcend specific states or geographic regions. In contrast, *The Pivot* addresses the implications of an emerging threat stemming from an assertive China and its effect on East Asia's security dynamics—a regional, state-based issue.

The Field of Fight demands the fight against terrorism be recast as a struggle against what Flynn calls "radical Islam." Flynn, who led the Defense Intelligence Agency from July 2012 to August 2014, castigates the Obama administration for lacking the will to fight ISIL and losing the broader initiative against terrorism. Flynn argues his unique experiences—many of which come from his combat tours in Afghanistan and Iraq, and his tours with the Joint Special Operations Command—allow him to "get in to the heads of our enemies," based on many hours he spent debriefing captured terrorists (11, 50–52). His book asserts China, Cuba, Iran, North Korea, and Russia are in an alliance with ISIL and other terrorist groups to destroy the United States (28, 76–78).

Flynn's strategy—akin to the thinking behind the "Global War on Terrorism"—emphasizes a military solution in black and white terms. He lays out four strategic objectives: mobilizing all national power under the command of a single leader accountable to the president; killing or capturing terrorists wherever they are; compelling state and non-state supporters of terrorists to end their activities; and waging an ideological war against radical Islam. (117–118) Embedded in these objectives are sub-points that include building up the capabilities of states that are unable to aid the United States with its strategy; cutting or curtailing US diplomatic, economic, and military ties with states that fail to follow international norms and international law; and improving the use of social media tools, like Facebook and Twitter, to repudiate terrorist doctrine. (121–122)

The Field of Fight offers little perspective on US policy in the Middle East or against counterterrorism, covering only about the last 15 years of the United States's decades-long history of engagement there. It argues ISIL presents a severe ideological challenge to democracy, but

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offers no data to support this assertion. Flynn also fails to back up the assertion that China, Cuba, Iran, North Korea, and Russia are colluding to destroy the United States or to show how this alliance is operationalized. A review of the imperatives of US national security interests in the Middle East, a discussion of the breadth and drivers of Islamic terrorism, and consideration of why fighting terrorism in the Middle East, Africa or Europe should be the United States' paramount national security concern would have strengthened his argument.

Flynn's view that the counterterrorism fight will be a protracted, multigenerational struggle is shared across a wide spectrum of observers. In contrast to Flynn's approach, many argue the problem is one the United States should seek to manage rather than solve, in part because ISIL has lost some territory in the last several months.^a *The Field of Fight* offers little insight into how the current counterterrorism fight relates to other national security issues, the costs and benefits of pursuing the strategy it advocates, or alternative approaches to its proposals.

The Field of Fight is the kind of work that Campbell would see as "drown(ing) out reasoned arguments for a more balanced understanding of America's national interests." (2) Campbell asserts in *The Pivot* that the Asia-Pacific region "exerts an undeniable and inescapable gravitational pull" (5) and he puts forth an argument for a "necessary course correction for American diplomacy, commercial engagement, and military innovation during a time of unrelenting and largely unrewarding conflict." (2) Campbell reviews the impetus, challenges, and interpretations of the policy he himself largely crafted in 2009, under then-Secretary of State Clinton. From this angle, the book is a valuable resource for anyone interested in United States-Asia relations because it recounts major diplomatic, economic, and military changes in US policy toward the region under the Obama administration, placing these in the context of the last 230 years of United States-Asia interaction. *The Pivot* offers a range of useful statistical data about the region's key demographic, economic, environmental, political, and security issues to support its claims.

Campbell, who served as assistant secretary for East Asia and Pacific Affairs from 2009 to 2013 and has held several civil servant positions at the Pentagon—including deputy assistant secretary of defense for Asia and the Pacific—puts his years of experience on Asia to good use. *The Pivot* does not provide a chronological narrative, but reviews eight historical themes in United States-Asia ties: geographic distance, cultural differences, economic relations, the role of missionaries in early relations, military conflict, Asia as a "second tier" issue for US diplomacy, lack of consistent US regional focus, and efforts to promote democracy. (82–83) With this context, Campbell portrays Asia today as at a decisive inflection point where the region "is being pulled in two contradictory directions toward two contrasting futures—a promising one consistent with American objectives, and a more perilous one at odds with US interests and intents." (153)

Campbell details a 10-point strategy designed to enable the United States to shape Asia's path forward. The first step, similar to *The Field of Fight's* proposal, is for the president to articulate a whole-of-government approach and to mobilize the American public to support the focus on Asia. The remaining objectives are to strengthen ties to existing US allies Japan, South Korea, Australia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Singapore; to shape China's rise by placing it within a larger Asia policy framework; to increase ties with partners Taiwan and New Zealand, while cultivating relations with India, Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Pacific Island states; to expand free trade agreements, bolstering regional institutions and organizations; to overhaul US military capabilities deployed to the region; to promote democratic values; to support educational and cultural exchanges; and to collaborate with European states to shape Asia's direction. (198–200)

The Pivot indirectly points to China as the United States's main rival in the region. Campbell offers several points for each aspect of his strategy, which in a broad sense combines bilateral alliances and partnerships and multinational institutions with economic, political, and military threads woven throughout. Campbell uses a separate chapter to address challenges to this grand strategic plan, such as a fractured US policy community, defense spending shortfalls, public fatigue with foreign entanglements, and continuing Middle East troubles. *The Pivot* fails to address, however, the tension inherent in Campbell's strategy that simultaneously seeks to preserve

a. John McLaughlin, "ISIS Is Hurt but Its End Is Not In Sight," *The CipherBrief.com*, 28 July 2016; Kimberly Dozeier, "US Officials Are No Longer Talking About 'Defeating' ISIS," *The Daily Beast*, 1 August, 2016.

the status quo, challenge China's rise, and bolster US ties to the region. *The Pivot* also does not address two key questions embedded in its strategic intent. The first is whether US engagement in another Asian war is an option as the United States pursues its policy goals. The second is whether China's continued rise is inevitable, which is the central assumption underpinning Campbell's logic. Finally, *The Pivot's* analysis would have benefitted from some attention to crisis planning—such as unplanned conflict in the East China or South China seas or a rapid collapse of North Korea.^a

Surprisingly, neither *The Field of Fight* nor *The Pivot* offers a vision for how the IC fits into the whole-of-government approach both propose. Intelligence collection, analysis, and operations can help achieve policy goals, but intelligence is no guarantee of policy success.^b The IC

a. For example, see David C. Gompert, Astrid Cevallos, and Cristina L. Garfola, *War with China: Thinking Through the Unthinkable* (Rand Corporation, 2016).

b. See George Tenet, *At the Center of the Storm: My Years at the CIA* (HarperCollins, 2007); Richard Helms, *A Look over My Shoulder: A Life in the Central Intelligence Agency* (Random House, 2003); and James Igoe Walsh, *The International Politics of Intelligence Sharing* (Columbia University Press, 2010).

provides an additional conduit through which to pursue diplomacy and operations and provides policy support through collection and analysis. *The Field of Fight* disparages the intelligence bureaucracy and offers little about how IC resources should be used against terrorists. *The Pivot* is mostly silent on the role intelligence cooperation, analysis, or operations play in its proposed strategy. This is unexpected, given Campbell's years in government and exposure to and knowledge of US intelligence capabilities.

Evaluating relative threats and developing strategies for countering them is inherently difficult. Understanding the divergent viewpoints in *The Field of Fight* and *The Pivot* aids the kind of strategic thinking that could shape how national intelligence resources are used. Both books offer intelligence officers and national security professionals the opportunity to scrutinize hidden assumptions within key national security goals and to think hard about the kinds of intelligence support policymakers need. At the same time, whatever foreign policy goals the United States seeks to accomplish, the IC also needs to lean forward and plan for crises that emerge beyond policy plans.

