



Next War: Reimagining How We Fight

By John Antal

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Reviewed by LTC (Retired) Jesse McIntyre III

Retired Army COL John Antal, best-selling author and thought-leader in military affairs, has written one of the more thought-provoking works about future warfare in *Next War: Reimagining How We Fight*. In it, Antal examines recent conflicts — to include the Second Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict (2020), Israel-Hamas War (2021), and Russia’s invasion of Ukraine (2022) — and offers sound advice to survive and win on tomorrow’s battlefield. His work goes beyond the traditional futuristic description of warfare in providing sound analysis of the changing methods of warfare and advice for making the transition now.

Antal begins with introducing the reader to nine disrupters that are changing the methods of war: Transparent Battlespace, First Strike Advantage, Artificial Intelligence and the Tempo of War, Top Attack, Fully Autonomous, Super Swarm, Kill Web, Visualize the Battlespace, and Decision Dominance. He describes how modern sensors can see targets in the optical, thermal, electronic, acoustic and seismic, and quantum realms, creating a transparent battlespace where nothing can hide or avoid being targeted. On 11 July 2014, Russian drones were able to identify Ukrainian forces and then conduct a three-minute Russian fire strike that virtually destroyed two Ukrainian mechanized battalions near Zelenopillya, Ukraine. He informs us that ubiquitous sensors and precision attacks are the future of warfare and that multi-domain masking is essential if we expect to survive and win on future battlefields.

The tempo of war is accelerating exponentially due to technological advances and artificial intelligence that provide the ability to overwhelm an opponent’s ability to counter friendly forces’ actions and exploit short windows of opportunities on the battlefield. Antal describes how Azerbaijani forces quickly neutralized Armenian terrain dominance by mobilizing first, striking first, achieving air dominance, and then using loitering munitions and precision fires. The author warns us that China will strike first in any conflict on Taiwan and that we must be prepared.

The emergence of drone warfare in current conflicts is the reality of future warfare. Antal uses examples from both the Second Nagorno-Karabakh and Russia-Ukraine conflicts in describing how drones with loitering munitions are changing the tactical battlefield with strategic consequences. Unmanned combat aerial vehicles (UCAVs) provide the warfighter both real-time aerial reconnaissance and robotic missiles and bomb launch platforms. Furthermore, UCAVs can stay airborne up to 18 hours, providing warfighters the ability to engage multiple targets across the battlespace and any emerging targets of opportunity. Antal further elaborates how UCAVs provide the ability to strike first and strike hard against an adversary. Readers will find his chapter titled “The Super Swarm” extremely insightful on the massing of drones in large swarms to eliminate key targets on the battlefield.

Antal informs us as weapons become more autonomous, military forces will transition from a traditional kill chain to an artificial intelligence kill web that connects sensors and shooters to automatically execute targeting at machine speed. He elaborates how this will transform warfare as we know it with weapon systems becoming fully autonomous to give warfighters a distinctive advantage over their adversaries. Antal warns that western militaries are at a historical watershed. If they fail to learn the lessons from current conflicts and understand how forces can disrupt our traditional methods, they will not get a second chance.

His chapter "Command Post Rules" may be the most instructive portion of his work. Recent conflicts demonstrate that one of the biggest challenges facing our military in a future conflict is the vulnerability of our command posts (CPs). In their current configurations, our CPs are nearly impossible to mask and difficult to defend. Antal has developed 18 rules to assist us in creating CPs that are masked, survivable, and share an all-domain common operational picture.

Next War's final chapter, "Forging Battleshock," brings all of its concepts together. Antal defines "Forging Battleshock" as operational, informational, and organizational paralysis induced by the convergence of key disrupters on the battlespace. In essence it is overwhelming an adversary through the pace, scale, and scope of activities, preventing them from adapting or responding to one's actions. Here he elaborates how we need to lead, design, train, fight, support, and win to generate battleshock in an adversary.

Next War's strengths are Antal's ability to explain complex concepts and technology in a way that is easy to understand. His writing is clear and concise. Each concept is presented in a short, readable chapter that builds the foundation for its conclusion. It is a clarion call for the threats we will face and actions we must take in winning the first fight of a future conflict. This book is a must read for any commander's professional reading list, policy makers, and military professionals of any grade or service. *Okinawan Reckoning* contains many grainy graphics that may require readers to use outside sources to gain an understanding of battle lines and geographical locations. However, this book remains a must for any combat leader's reading list and would make an excellent addition to the library of any historian or student with an interest on the subject.