



Brave New War: The Next Stage of Terrorism and the End of Globalization

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The counterterrorism expert John Robb reveals how the same technology that has enabled globalization also allows terrorists and criminals to join forces against larger adversaries with relative ease and to carry out small, inexpensive actions--like sabotaging an oil pipeline--that generate a huge return. He shows how combating the shutdown of the world's oil, high-tech, and financial markets could cost us the thing we've come to value the most--worldwide economic and cultural integration--and what we must do now to safeguard against this new method of warfare.

Brave New War: The Next Stage of Terrorism and the End of Globalization Details

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From Reader Review Brave New War: The Next Stage of Terrorism and the End of Globalization for online ebook

Ryan says

I had a hard time reading this as straight current events; I kept slipping into reading it as a Ballard-ian dystopia or as business strategy. Robb is a kind of thinker that I relate to. Driven by analogy, ricocheting across different domains without respect for boundaries, less compelled to work out the messy details that form close the loop than seeding something crystalline and letting the expansion happen through aggregation. In a sense, this process is at the root of his case for the evolution of "terrorism" and it's more or less applicable to all systems or organizations: a simple rule set based on homogeneity and openness leads to loosely coupled ad hoc networks that over-run purpose built systems. These networks are lightweight, durable, innovative. Think of the robustness of weeds and rhizomes (though he never references Deleuze, it's very Deleuze-ian) versus nurtured plant strains ... or desktop oriented companies versus the horde of web companies actively looking to outmaneuver or interdict them ... or, perhaps more common, passively doing so without concern for their position. The hierarchy is irrelevant; command and control is passe.

War has its trends and they tend to follow large scale economic trends and, therefore, map well to cultural transformations that are also economically impacted. Welcome to open source warfare ... War 4.0.

Alex says

Very interesting book, and this is backed up by a lot of the changed thinking coming out of the Pentagon after running essentially two failed large-scale counterinsurgencies.

The gist of the book has to do with Fourth Generation Warfare 4GW, the blurring of lines between politics, war, civilians, infrastructure. And also has to do with the increasing empowerment of small groups through things like ad hoc networks, emergent intelligence, open source warfare.

The bottom line is this is something worth watching as it develops, since even the US is vulnerable. There are large and growing numbers of potential insurgent groups, from teabaggers to right wing militias to drug gangs to eco terrorists. The fact that they don't share common ideologies is irrelevant in 4GW. Like the insurgency in Iraq, groups with extremely different agendas are all pursuing a similar strategy, under a complete absence of leadership.

The thing to watch isn't mass protests or voting out incumbents or even spectacular attacks. When they start targeting infrastructure for disruption you can lay odds the US will become a failed state like Iraq in short order. They don't have to drop the US electrical grid either. Periodically interrupting regional infrastructure, whether it's the electrical grid, communications networks, energy deliver, or transportation can cause massive economic damage and bleed the state dry. And this requires very few people to conduct successfully.

This book is really ground breaking in a lot of ways. I think some parts of it, such as his description of the US economic model aren't quite on track. The book was published before the 2008 financial crisis, which discredited a lot of the conventional wisdom up until then.

The end recommendations of decentralizing and building smaller, self-sufficient, sustainable communities based around resilience is very sound. This is becoming a theme recommendation among a wide variety of groups from survivalists to environmentalists.

Steven Peterson says

This is an interesting little book. I think that it may promise more than it delivers, but its lesson is right on. The Foreword relates a key part of the book's thesis (page ix): "[Examples:] involve the idea of turning the complexity and power of a developed modern economy from strengths to vulnerabilities."

For one thing, terrorists can use relatively inexpensive techniques to create huge problems. For instance, it cost al-Qaeda about \$500,000 for the 9/11 attacks and cost the American economy about \$500 billion worth of damage--in the author's words (page x) "a million-to-one payoff ratio."

Other examples: cheap techniques (explosives) have cost Iraq millions upon millions of dollars in lost oil revenue, as pipelines are destroyed and income lost. The book itself is about (page xiv) "rapid chaotic and unexpected events. . . . 'black swans--events so different from what we know, so unpredictable and hidden by uncertainty, that they are impossible to predict with accuracy."

The book talks about the ability of terrorists to learn and use this learning to advantage against state actors. They tend to be more nimble and this provides an advantage. So, complex globalization presents an attractive target for simple responses by terrorist organizations.

An interesting argument. However, there are some questions that arise because of recent developments in Iraq. Robb believes that the antipathy of a variety of actors to the United States is doom. Whether or not the "surge" ends up working in the long run (it seems to have accomplished some success in the short run), though, it is clear that many Iraqis who formerly fought against Americans are now working with them against, for example, al-Qaeda. Will this last? or will the formerly antagonistic and currently cooperative groups just outwait Americans? Who knows? But the current situation suggests a more fluid situation than the author depicts.

Only time will tell the outcomes in Iraq and against terrorists worldwide. The book has an interesting and even powerful logic. But we must wait to see what the evidence tells us in the future.

Jack Donovan says

I've been following John Robb's blog Global Guerrillas for a few years, and while I was able to absorb some of his prescient thinking online, I just recently finished Brave New War. It's written the way all books concerned with big ideas should be written. Straightforward, unpretentious, no-nonsense. Brave New War is as fast, loose and effective as the open-source networks of insurgents and transnational gangs Robb describes. It's a tight notebook and a quick read. While many of Robb's examples are drawn from his analyses of US adventures in Iraq and the book was published in 2007, his observations will be cutting edge for most readers even in 2012. So many of us are still thinking about war the old-fashioned way--the way that is so over it almost seems quaint.

Ryan Holiday says

I first read this book in 2007 as research for Robert Greene's address to a class at West Point and it's stuck with me and stood up better than almost all the books I've read on technology since then. Brave New War is an examination of Fourth Generation Warfare, or the war of networked groups against states. Think: Al-Qaeda vs US. Mujahadeen vs Russia. Anonymous vs Scientology. Bloggers vs brands/companies/celebrities. In retrospect, a handful of Robb's predictions turned out to be a bit overstated but the essential premise of the book has been proven correct hundreds of times since its publication date. Both the book and his blog on the subject have turned out to be incredibly helpful to me both in understanding current events and in my actual professional life. It's a short, straightforward read (unlike most war books) and 100% has to be on your shelf.

James says

90% outstanding and 10% really coming up short... I'd have given this 5 stars if the author, John Robb, had done as good a job in the last section as in the rest.

He did a superb job analyzing the flaws in conventional military thought, and in the current administration's strategy or lack thereof, when it comes to dealing with Al Qaeda, Iraq, and modern guerrilla and terrorist movements in general. A lot of the content of this book is in line with General Rupert Smith's thinking in *The Utility of Force*, which has earned the respectful attention of military professionals worldwide.

The place where Robb fails is in his proposed solution, which amounts to simply decentralized pure capitalism applied to counterinsurgency. There are two problems with his vision. The first is that it offers nothing in the way of safety or quality of life for the vast majority of the world's population who happen to be poor; his vision of a world of self-sufficient enclaves leaves out everyone who isn't rich or at least upper middle class, and those categories make up a distinct and shrinking minority. The second problem is that although he pays lip service to the need to convert our energy economy to renewables, he ignores the fact that we're already past the point where we could have created enough renewable energy technology before the fossil fuels run out to sustain us in the lifestyle to which we've gotten accustomed.

I would like this book a lot better if Robb acknowledged the existence of a social contract or of any sense of mutual obligation by which we had a responsibility to help each other out, even those who don't have deep enough pockets to pay for an equal share of security. And after all, although Robb makes no mention of it, it's generally accepted that reducing the hardships of widespread poverty would do a lot, though not all that's needed, to reduce the population of those willing to become guerrillas or terrorists in the first place. I also wish he'd been more realistic about the impact of peak oil (followed closely by peak natural gas, peak coal, and even peak uranium) on the other factors he considers.

Ramberto says

John Robb has an intimate understanding of guerrilla networks and global terrorist/criminal organizations, but makes light of the security reality of highly armed states threatening their neighbor states via conventional war (North/South Korea, China/Taiwan, India/Pakistan). His examples are dated and ignore the real security gains earned in Iraq over the last 18 months. While loose networks are difficult to defeat kinetically, winning the contest of wills is not impossible if a state is willing to commit the necessary resources to win the hearts and minds of the people in the guerrilla's key operating area. That population is the key terrain in upcoming confrontations.

Sajid Ali says

I came across John Robb by reading his blog global guerrillas. The book is a condensed version of the topics he keeps referring to often in his blog. The book primarily deals with fourth generation warfare and explains why we will not see wars between nation states anytime soon. There is a lot of original thinking, though in some areas he predicted radical change to occur by 2016 which has not quite happened but the underlying currents have been predicted correctly.

more at :[https://thefutureofhumanhistory.wordpress...](https://thefutureofhumanhistory.wordpress.com)

Iluke says

started out like dated futurism, but got more interesting as the book went on. i like the idea of building community-based systems resilience, ala prepping "lite".

Mike Gogulski says

Essential reading for its perspective and analysis, regardless of one's stance on Robb's motivations, predictions and prescriptions.

Graham says

I had the pleasure of reading John Robb's Brave New War: The Next Stage of Terrorism and the End of Globalization over the last week. I've been familiar with his excellent blog, Global Guerrillas, for some time now, but reading the framework that he's constructed for his own analyses has added a great deal of depth to my own understanding of his philosophy.

Brave New War is broken into three parts: "The Future of War is Now," "Global Guerrillas," and "How Globalization Will Put an End to Globalization." The first is devoted to examining the present security situation. This includes the origins and motives for a number of global non-state actors, as well as the American experience in Iraq. This is also where the history of Robb's terminology is explained: fourth-generation warfare, effects-based operations, etcetera. He covers a number of other military engagements: the Gulf War, the Chechen War, and others. It's all very plainly written, and definitely where to start if you haven't read his blog or anything else on the subject.

The "Global Guerrillas" section is clearly Robb's baby. He has put a good deal of effort into explaining the dynamics of these groups, and why they're able to act so effectively. It's here more than anywhere else in the book that Robb draws on systems and network theory to better understand the dimensions of global guerrillas. It's here that the book really takes on a coherent shape, and to a certain extent takes on a flavor of business. From the "long tail" and returns on investment to the shadow economy and transnational gangsterism, we truly see why it's globalization driving the new revolution in asymmetric warfare.

The third section is a little different. Rather than explain why the Iraqi oil pipelines are as vulnerable as they are, he turns to networks in the United States to see where our own weaknesses lie. At the outset, Robb clearly states that he's not really writing in order to proscribe a solution, but rather in order to point out the significance of our problems and vulnerabilities. He certainly excels at that, but what struck me were just how good his limited suggestions were. They are as simple as they want us to be, and that's really the core: simplicity. Resiliency, self-sustainability, and general preparedness are really the watchwords of Brave New War. That's not to say we should all be survivalists living off the grid; rather, everyone should be both taking from and contributing to the grid, through local agriculture, family solar power units, and other 'green' developments.

The last part, particularly, was the piece I had missed when trying to follow Robb's other work. His near-apocalyptic claims of the coming collapse of the state are a little overwrought, but even when he slips into hyperbole, there's still an important kernel of truth underlying it. The state is weakening, and in no small part it now falls upon its citizens to maintain their own security.

Mostly, I hope that he's wrong. But in the likely event he's not, then this book will serve as the how-to manual for living in the network-centric world after statehood.

Tom F says

I will first state that I agree with the quote on the front of the book, it is "a fast thought-sparking book."

I started reading John Robb's blogs a few years ago. I have come to appreciate his thinking on community self-sufficiency and his thoughts on security, terrorism, and such.

I wish I could say that I think the West will quickly and painlessly adapt to the current threats it faces. If anything, the current election seems to show we haven't even realized the problems. The book is ten years old, and we seem to have gone further in the knee jerk reactionary police state phase, especially with the Apple encryption case and similar.

The age of the book brings me to another thing, I would like to see an update in the next few years, mostly for an appendix that gives Robb's opinion on where we are now, what has changed, and if he wants to amend any sections.

Finally, I especially like the concluding chapters. I think terrorism is largely something we are going to have to adapt to, it isn't going away. Sustainable communities rather than overarching nation-states seem the best way, and the healthiest way, to adapt, and lead to a better future either way.

Guille says

Prescient and thought-provoking. A great introduction to the concepts of resiliency and inter-disciplinary system dynamics on human organizations and terrorism to prompt further reading and research. Robb is not exactly 100% in his predictions (especially those with a time attached to them) but that's the nature of predicting.

Nicholas says

This book is about 4th Generation Warfare; distributed systems of independent groups acting in concert to leverage their both their size and the size of their enemy. The idea is that with the increasing interconnectedness of the world, small carefully planned actions can send shocks through the system. This can give small groups a return rate of over 1000 fold on their money. This is Systems Disruption.

The global system cannot handle this. It is too brittle and too susceptible to Black Swans.

The only way to respond to this is for the defender to become more decentralized than the aggressor.

Attacks like 9/11 are already obsolete. Such symbolism becomes increasingly worthless. The idea is that the same economic damage can be wrought on the system with fewer people and less money than ever before. And this is only the beginning.

Open Sourced War: insurgents are becoming increasingly sophisticated as they rapidly communicate through the market. The innovation is astounding. An army run by bureaucrats cannot even get close to beating this. It will constantly adapt. Also, insurgents are beginning to show signs of emergent intelligence. Fucking shit.

The nation state is increasingly unable to satisfy the needs of the people. Borderless groups will being to fill this gap.

Traditional war will become nearly extinct as it is too damaging to everyone. You can't kill the people who keep you alive. Now it will be proxy wars everywhere. Funding different groups.

Nation building has failed. It creates more disorder than it eliminates.

Quotes:

"The insurgents in Iraq lack a recognizable center of gravity-a leadership structure or an ideology-they are nearly immune to the application of conventional military force."

"Sabotage that targets critical infrastructures and markets rather than a slavish focus on body counts."

"An organization that could wage war globally like a state, without the limitations necessitated by the administration of territory. This new organization, once established, is now in competition with the states as an equal and now as a successor."

"1. Mass warfare. The objective: to defeat the enemy by massing more firepower on the field of conflict. Its roots: the Napoleonic War; the U.S. Civil War.

2. Industrial warfare (World War I). The objective: to wear down the opposing state through greater mobilization and firepower. Its roots: the U.S. Civil War.

3. Blitzkrieg (World War II). The objective: to take down an enemy army and state through maneuver, deep penetration, and disruption. Its roots: late World War I infiltration tactics."

"The extreme productivity enabled by systems disruption creates the potential for nonstate forces to adopt the strategies of maneuver and attrition in addition to those of moral war."

"The nation-state is now bound up in a straitjacket of constraints. The core of its strength, its ability to marshal resources and take actions that exceed the power of any smaller organization, has been made

increasingly impotent."

"Partial disruption:

Complete collapse would create total war.

Partial disruption delegitimizes the state.

Partial disruption maximizes economic attrition and provides the illusion that the situation is manageable."

"You can't kill their leaders, because they don't need them. You can't reliably prevent further attacks, because they're small scale, dispersed, and unpredictable. You can't outmaneuver or outsmart them, because their innovative organization system makes that nearly impossible. Welcome to open-source war."

April says

I felt this book kept repeating itself and could have told me in about a 3 page journal article what it did in a 188 page book. I didn't finish the last 35 pages because I just couldn't read it anymore. I did find it interesting about the smaller attacks on infrastructure, rather than taking out the leader and calling it a day. It's also a little unnerving just how fragile every country really is.
