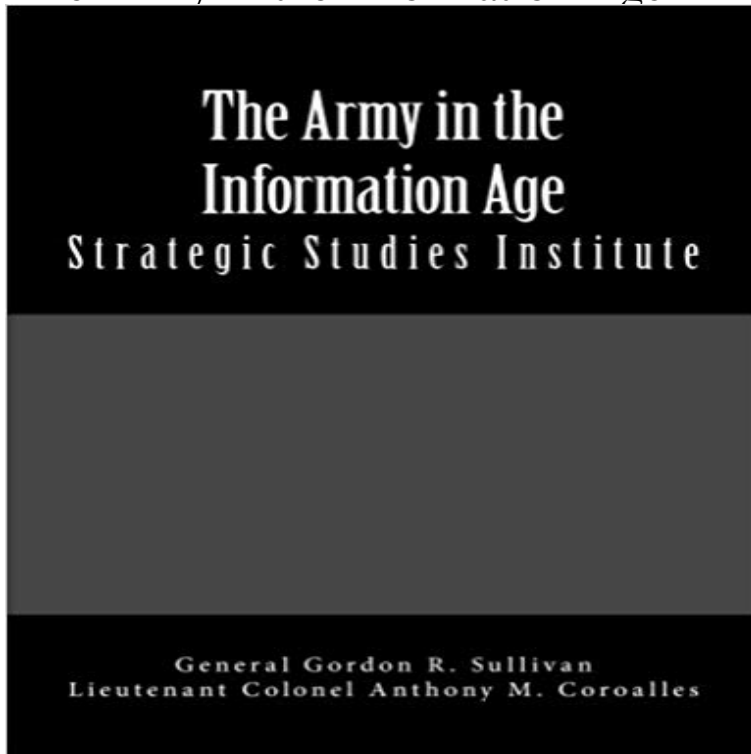


The Army in the Information Age



Times of change, times of turbulence, and times of uncertainty are inherently interesting periods. The element that makes them so is unpredictability. Unpredictability also compels many people, including military professionals, to fear and to want to avoid such times. Certainty, stability, and calm are conditions that we find much easier to deal with in our daily lives. Given a choice, these are also the conditions that most nations and institutions would prefer as characteristic of their strategic environment. Yet neither the Army nor the nation seem to have a choice in the rapid pace of change that is swirling around us as the 20th century draws to a close. Indeed we live in interesting times. Two powerful conditions define the environment in which the United States Army operates today: the collapse of the Cold War strategic environment and the dawning of what futurists Alvin and Heidi Toffler have described as the Information Age.¹ In November 1989 the Berlin Wall came down, and with it tumbled the central strategic focus of the United States. From the end of the Second World War until the collapse of communism in Central and Eastern Europe and in the Soviet Union, our world view had been filtered through the lens of the Cold War confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union; a stable and certain strategic focus. From 1948, when American and Allied forces stood firm during the Soviet blockade of Berlin, and simultaneously showed their determination over Greece, the United States and the Soviet Union were locked in a worldwide, political, economic, military, and ideological struggle; a struggle we correctly perceived as a life-or-death contest between diametrically opposed socio-political, economic, and ideological systems. The U.S. Army went to war in Korea in 1950 and American troops faced off with Soviet and East German soldiers at Checkpoint

Charlie during the Berlin crisis in the summer of 1961. The armed forces of this nation stood ready for what might have been the final conflagration as the John F. Kennedy administration stared down Nikita Khrushchev and Fidel Castro during the Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962. The Army, Air Force, Navy and Marines fought a long and bitter war against communist insurgents and North Vietnamese aggression in Indochina in the 1960s and into the 1970s.² In the 1980s, Washington supported resistance forces in Nicaragua and Afghanistan while standing by our traditional allies in NATO and our friends in the Middle East. All of this was done under the rubric of containment with one goal in mind: to stop the spread of Soviet communism. The Cold War was America's third most costly war; 100,000 Americans gave their lives in this effort.

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