

FDD's Washington Forum 2015

- Conversation with **Andrew Marshall**, four-decade director of the Pentagon's "internal think tank," the Office of Net Assessment.
- Introductory Remarks by **Andrew D. May**, Office of Net Assessment
- Moderator: **Samantha Ravich**, FDD CSIF board member and former Deputy National Security Advisor to the Vice President

MAY:

Good morning. My name's Andrew May. I work in the Office of Net Assessment in OSC and for the last 15 or 20 years I've had the great honor and privilege of working for Andy Marshall. Just want to say a couple of words to introduce him before I turn it over to Mr. Marshall and Dr. Ravich who have a brief conversation for you.

First, I'd like to thank Mark Dubowitz and Erin Blumenthal and for Secretary Schultz for the opportunity to be here and to say a couple of words about Andy and to help us celebrate the contributions he's made over his career. I think it's worth noting just very briefly that everyone talks about Andy Marshall as being the Director of Net Assessment, which he was for 43 years, which is an amazing tenure. But it's worth noting that he had another career 25 years before that at the RAND Corporation as an analyst there out of Santa Monica.

I mean, 25 years in one corporation many people would consider itself a full career, and for him it was really just Act I, warming up for the subsequent four decades at Net Assessment. So really we're talking about a career of over seven decades, all of which really dedicated to the defense of this country. And I think if you look at those seven decades, you could try to measure its impact in a lot of ways. He's written some of the most influential studies ever to go to presidents and secretaries of defense. We have old copies of these. You can see (inaudible) from secretaries like Harold Brown and its clear the impact that these studies had.

You could also look at during his time at Net Assessment the hundreds of thousands of studies and war games that he designed and sponsored and the way in which he was able to use those things to bring knowledge and insights and expertise into government that would otherwise have been locked out and we would be a dumber government but for his efforts. But I think while those two measures are both very useful, the real way to measure his impact that I find most compelling is the investment he has made in people and the tremendous body of people who have come through that office that he has helped to cultivate.

And you look across successive generations of officers and civilians and you see a body of work in a sense that Mr. Marshall has contributed to that has made this country stronger. And I think he's done this in two main ways and they show that it's no accident that this didn't just happen as a consequence of being in business for 70 years. It was a strategy on his part.

One, he always has placed a special effort on projects that are group projects that bring a lot of people in from different parts of the department and expose them to new ways of thinking. Some of these people might just pass through very quickly, but they get a little taste of this. And we

had this come up a couple of weeks ago--a month ago now. We were under the gun. We were very unpopular with a number of people, and I was being asked if I could show how net assessment was valuable. And I said, "Well, how would you like me to illustrate that?" And they said, "Oh, an Excel spreadsheet would be perfect."

So I was trying to figure out how to do this, and we had a visit from a three-star general who I had never heard of and I don't think Mr. Marshall knew. And we sat down with him and he said, "I just want you to know that about eight or ten years ago I went to one of your studies, and it changed forever the way that I think about strategy and I think about the future of the Army. And now I have a young O5 working for me and I think this guy is going to go all the way. And I want him to go to one of your studies so he can have that experience so that he'll be a better general officer in another eight or ten years." And that, I think, is really the value of the Office of Net Assessment and the value of Andy Marshall and it's no accident that he has spent seven decades cultivating officers in that way.

He also--for people who work with him, near him would spend hundreds of hours working in painstaking detail through any written material you might be working on, gradually shaping, cultivating, forcing your work to become better, not through dictatorial assertion but more through inspiration, encouraging you, inspiring you to write better. And once you have had that experience of writing something for him, you come out and you're never the same person again.

You've had forever impressed upon you a way of thinking about asking first order questions, about doing the hard research work that is really going to be first-rate, not being satisfied with easy answers to easy questions but taking six, seven, eight years to launch a really long-term effort against a really big problem that's worth taking on. And I think that's how people make a contribution and that's how countries become stronger, not through a set of studies and not through a set of commissions but through a long-term effort to grow better people. And it's the people that Mr. Marshall has invested in and grown over generations that's going to make this country stronger and continue to defend democracy, and that's why it's my great pleasure to introduce him as the recipient to the George Schultz Award for Distinguished Service. And, Andy, thank you very much.

(APPLAUSE)

RAVICH:

Thank you. When FDD asked me to lead this discussion, I was absolutely tickled. I was so excited. I realized that I have known you for 18 years which is, in the circle of Andrew Marshall, a newcomer. But you spoke at my graduation--my PhD graduation from RAND all those years ago. And when I was thinking back upon that time and I was a graduate student at RAND, one of the books we all read was Herbert Goldhamer's *The Advisor*. It is a classic work. I'd recommend it to everyone, and he chronicles the role of the policy advisor over the last 2,000 years.

And I was looking through the book again in preparation and thinking about this, and I came across this long quote from the book, that "the Advisor as a friend and companion, as admonisher or keeper of the King's conscience and his eyes and ears plays roles supplementary to what are

generally viewed as his principal functions. He is, above all, a provider of justice, wisdom, analytic and professional skills with the ability to apply these talents to policy. This may involve a two-fold task: advice on specific problems in policy and education that seeks to improve the ruler's own judgment and knowledge and to generalize advice beyond the occasion of the moment.

Secondly, the adviser may operate as a sounding board for, and perhaps a critic of, the ruler's own ideas and plans." And he went by that rule and he's always been willing to challenge conventional wisdom, whether it came from the ruler, the advisers around the ruler, his general public, academia.

So let's talk a little bit about where that research has taken you and where you see it going in the future. So looking back--let's look back first. What are some of the important things that you have focused upon and you have supported in your research? A few of those things that you want to mention.

MARSHALL:

Well, one thing I think is when we (inaudible) to look ahead maybe five or ten years and to provide an analysis given to the secretary or other top level people a better basis for thinking about the direction of the future of the U.S. (inaudible). But as long as you do that (inaudible) to look back 20 or 30 years and find out in much greater detail than is normally done. How did we get to the current situation and what were the underlying--some of the important trends that were underway that we otherwise might not have noticed? That might lead to putting a high value on historic (inaudible). That was especially true in the late 80s or early 90s.

We were looking at this notion of Soviets (inaudible) military, that we were entering a new period of a major change. And, again, one of the things to do was to look historically at what those periods are, where there are big changes. How long did they last? What happened? Why do some countries do very well and other people--other countries do poorly? Can you get any insight as to why some countries do well?

RAVICH:

And so the concept of net assessment--I mean, this wasn't done--was it done? I don't think so--before you really took a (inaudible) and it's hard to see it being done in other avenues. But the idea of a net assessment on balance of all the economic and the military diplomatic affairs as a country.

MARSHALL:

Well, the idea was around that you might want to do that. And there had been attached to the NSC--it started in 1953--a net evaluation subcommittee. And what they did--they looked ahead five years and looked principally at the damage that could be done to ourselves and the Soviet Union in a major nuclear war. And when it was decided to initially establish such an effort at the NSC. I don't recall that work. But it seemed to me that it would give you a kind of score and if you did it repeatedly over several years as it was done, you'd get an idea of the increasing

damage. But it did give you a lot of insight as to the direction we might want to take our forces. And so especially when the office transferred to defense and Schlesinger was very active and interested in having such an office, the focus changed away from just if we have a war who's going to win to providing analysis that would provide a much better basis for thinking about it and the directions they want to go.

And that led you in some sense to an effort to understand more fully, not just what the outcome would be but since you're engaged in a kind of longer term competition with, in that case the Soviet Union, we want to know a lot more about it than just the outcome and some arbitrary date. What's the nature of the competition? What are their strengths and weaknesses on both sides? And it gets you into looking at doctrine, tactics.

One of the things actually that turned out to be very interesting in the case of the Soviet Union was the way in which they had to try to make up for the fact that they have a conscripted force, which they, for a variety of reasons, wanted to have. But it was drawn from a population with much lower skill levels than were true of our populations. And that meant they had to compensate for this. And so they had to do maintenance different because they didn't have people who drove a motorcar. They had to teach people to drive, and they compensated all the way. In the end, they were tactical and attentive than we were. Of course, they had to buy a lot more equipment. They bought two sets of equipment for tanks so they would have one that was not used up or had maintenance problems, whereas the American Air Force buys one and a quarter for every place you need an aircraft (inaudible).

Well, that's only one event. But the command control structure is entirely different, highly centralized of all (inaudible). So the whole thing, while superficially you look at--they have so many divisions. We have so many divisions. Their divisions are very different. They operate in a totally different way.

RAVICH:

And you served for many, many secretaries of defense and we've had this conversation before about how the information and knowledge base that you were creating and supporting to be created kind of blown up to influence policy. For time--and I know that there's been a back and forth on do we even want to influence current policy or is it to create a body of knowledge upon which now and future generations can build better policy but not necessarily of the day and of the moment?

MARSHALL:

And it's dependent a lot on the secretary. I was very fortunate I think. The first three secretaries were very interested in (inaudible), and I was fortunate because in the beginning we didn't actually have much to really offer anybody. I mean, it took a lot of time to build the appropriate databases and do studies. So there was one to two assessment areas where there was some immediate value, but it was really Harold Brown that was the first secretary that we could produce things that I would give something like a "B" to. Very few "A"s.

RAVICH:

We're going to take a question or two from the audience and also ask Mr. Marshall about trends he sees into the future. One of the wonderful things that Mr. Marshall and the Office of Net Assessment is he doesn't work on Washington time. Long term in Washington is to the next election. Long term in the Office of Net Assessment is 20 years, 30 years, 50 years into the future. So is there a question in the audience?

(UNKNOWN)

How do you think the situation with Ukraine will end? Will the Russians be able to keep Crimea?

MARSHALL:

Yes. I heard that. I'm not so good at answering questions, but I think that--I mean, they clearly have a strong position in the eastern part of Ukraine and they do have I think strong motives. In fact, just over the last couple of days I've been reading this George Friedman recent book, "Flashpoint." He has a number of interesting things to say about that.

ROBERT MCFARLANE:

What a blessing you have been to our country. A long time ago when you worked for Dr. Kissinger and NSC, there was a moment at which he asked, "What does strategic superiority mean? What do you do with it?" Well, I think it has a relevance today. What if there were a nuclear Iran? What would we do with it? Superiority. What should we worry about and what might we do about it?

MARSHALL:

Well, one thing I would say is Iran is clearly highly motivated to get nuclear weapons. There's a lot of reasons to think that one of the main motives is just survival--long-term survival of the regime. But the question of what they would actually do beyond that, what use would they make, and a lot depends on what happens in the region because I think one of the things that has already been looked at is the likelihood that that will then trigger a number of the other countries to obtain nuclear weapons. The Saudis, the Turks, the Egyptians perhaps. So it would change the whole region and it would change things for us and stationing forces in the region. But I think the questions you asked I think was very good. I don't think anything like enough work has been done on thinking more about what countries, what use they would make of these weapons, other than status or the protection of the regime. When it's clear in other cases like the Russians, who have been speaking or writing for certainly 15 years and maybe more about their need for a new generation of tactical weapons to use in the defense of their territory and they have a doctrinal development of they are not the last resort to de-escalate some kind of challenge. And I think a lot more needs to be done to try to understand the motives and the thinking of a variety of countries who already have nuclear weapons or who might get them. It's very underdeveloped in these areas.

RAVICH:

Your work on scenarios and futures, of course, has not only been on threats that might present themselves for our country but also opportunities that near allies (inaudible) can take advantage of and exploit for good. What are some of your thoughts on future opportunities that are there?

MARSHALL:

Well, maybe it's not exactly an opportunity but it's part of the effort to understand strengths and weaknesses of other countries. And clearly we paid a lot of attention to demography, to long-term economic growth.

RAVICH:

Energy revolution.

MARSHALL:

Well, we tried to persuade the people maybe 15 years ago or so that there really was a lot of petroleum. Not just petroleum but methane and so on in the earth's mantle and crust. And maybe this is very much more (inaudible) that these are not fossil fuels. They are generated in the mantle. I had a very interesting man come to see me who had this story to tell that in the aftermath of World War II, Stalin was very concerned that the Soviet Union be self-sufficient in petroleum and it did not look like that would necessarily be the case. And so a major scientific effort was put together to look at that, where they could find more petroleum. And they had some first-rate physicists in their group and they looked at the molecules who said these cannot be produced under the normal situation in which fossil fuels are produced. It requires far more heat and pressure to create these molecules. And so they actually-- they thought it was produced in ethyl and, in fact, Mendeleev around 1895 there's a big argument about where did it come from, and previously they had argued that was the case and that the Soviets pursued that and it's related also to plate tectonics and where the mantle is in some way there are cracks and so on where the petroleum can come up. Now, I have no idea whether this is right. It was not a view that was very popular in the West, although my friend Jessie Olsendale at Rockefeller tells me that this is gradually winning scientific acceptance.

RAVICH:

Stories like this make it very obvious why policy analysts like myself and a whole huge crew here in Washington and throughout the country will follow you anywhere because asking these kinds of questions--energy, key to our economy. So let's ask questions about it. How do we secure it? Where did it come from? How do we preserve our strategic interests? And these kinds of ways to look at a problem. You're an original and a remarkable fellow. I can't believe that the time is up. This is absurd and and this could go on for a decade more--this conversation. I want to give you the last word, but I cannot miss my opportunity to ask you. One, have you ever actually seen Star Wars? And, two, what do you think about your constant comparison to Yoda?

MARSHALL:

Well, I have seen one or two of the Star Wars, but very late after the most the general culture. And I was puzzled. I had no idea who Yoda was.

RAVICH:

Well, I have one list from him: "Through the Force, things you will see, other places, the future, the past. So now you know why he gets referred to as Yoda..

(APPLAUSE)

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