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## Review Essays

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# Review Essays

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## How We Did Not Go to Nuclear War, And Where We Go from Here

**WILLIAM F. BURNS**

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One of the persistent phenomena of the age is the assumption that military leaders favor nuclear weapons. Although the coercive power of nuclear weapons has been amply demonstrated and the deterrent power of such weapons of mass destruction has been taken almost as an axiom of the post-World War II era, the American senior military leadership has been conservative in its approach to both the development and potential use of nuclear weapons and their subsequent reduction.

After observing decisionmaking in the confines of "the Tank" for much of the 1980s, I have concluded that the Joint Chiefs and their Joint Staff over the years appreciated both the opportunities and limitations that surround the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons. The monograph on this subject is yet to be written. Perhaps the era of the nuclear arms race is too vivid, too close an historic epoch, and still too sensitive for such a work to be accomplished with any depth. Yet, in recent months several books have been published that shed some light on how the major powers have managed nuclear weapons in the past and avoided the final confrontation leading to nuclear war. They also suggest some ways to manage events to avoid nuclear conflict in a future, perhaps even more complicated, world.

In 1995, a small book crucial to the understanding of the Soviet Union's nuclear decisionmaking process was published in the United States. Surprising to me, Aleksandr Savel'yev and Nikolay Detinov's work, *The Big Five: Arms Control Decision-Making in the Soviet Union*, has received little attention. It is based on the experiences of the authors, both as arms control delegation members in Geneva during the 1980s and as key players in the decisionmaking process in Moscow throughout most of the nuclear arms control era. In his Foreword, Ambassador Paul Nitze points out that Lieutenant General Detinov and Dr. Savel'yev "have opened to us the inner workings of the Soviet mind in arms control."

For five crucial years I had the professional satisfaction and personal pleasure of working closely with General Detinov in Geneva. Even during the most difficult times, he remained the true professional and military gentleman. This book is to be believed; it reveals 30 years of policy formulation by the Soviet government, often admittedly at cross purposes with that of the United States.

Roger Hilsman, in *The Cuban Missile Crisis: The Struggle Over Policy*, examines US decisionmaking at a crucial turning point in the nuclear age. With his usual keen insight and from his vantage point as an active participant in the crisis, he argues that both Kennedy and Khrushchev recognized early in the process that even the smallest chance of nuclear war was to be avoided. For the first time, the two sides recognized the limits of the coercive power of nuclear

weapons when both sides had the bomb. Concepts of nuclear deterrence that had begun to be formulated in the 1950s were given added credence, and the shape of the nuclear confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union was defined for the next 30 years.

An often ignored aspect of the nuclear age is the rise of other nuclear powers in the shadow of the superpowers. The United Kingdom, France, and China each determined to develop an independent nuclear arsenal in the 1950s and early 1960s. These nuclear forces were legitimized a quarter of a century ago in the original Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, and the legitimacy of five declared nuclear powers has been maintained ever since. The United States and the Soviet Union viewed these nuclear capabilities in different lights as the political and economic battles of the Cold War were waged. Both recognized that deep reductions in the huge nuclear arsenals of the two sides would be possible only if the nuclear forces of the other three were, in some way, taken into account. Bruce D. Larkin makes a major contribution to an understanding of these three secondary nuclear powers in his new book, *Nuclear Designs: Great Britain, France & China in the Global Governance of Nuclear Arms*. His well-researched work is filled with data heretofore found only in multiple sources. He addresses both the national styles and political imperatives that encouraged the first era of nuclear proliferation after World War II. Larkin identifies the difficult policy choices the nuclear powers face in the second era of potential proliferation following close upon the heels of the Cold War. He deals specifically with the factors that motivate states equipped with the necessary technical and scientific base to embark on a nuclear weapons course.

A fourth book and an equally timely anthology, edited by Jeffrey A. Larsen and Gregory J. Rattray, elucidates a more traditional arms control thesis from the experience of the recent past. In his Foreword to *Arms Control: Toward the 21st Century*, my successor as Director of the US Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, Ambassador Ron Lehman, argues that arms control "has a place in dealing with the new concerns of advanced weapons proliferation, regional instability, and economic and environmental security." This is true. The question, however, is "what place?" Just at the time when tools and methodologies perfected in the fires of the final throes of the Cold War have proven their worth, political challenges to the process come from all sides.

General Detinov urges that the capital developed by the arms control experience of the 1970s and 1980s should neither be abandoned nor squandered by either side. Yet he points out that the first steps in this arena by the new Russian Federation government in 1992 and 1993 were characterized by "lack of in-depth planning and coordination." In the Larsen-Rattray anthology, Jennifer E. Sims attacks the problem of US decisionmaking. She points out that the "arms control imperative" may be weakening, causing the policymaking apparatus to be less responsive and more cumbersome. This is characterized by staff reductions and the threat posed both in the executive and legislative branches to the continued existence of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency.

The arms control establishment built for and by the Cold War will certainly be modified, wisely or otherwise, in an attempt to meet the needs of the future or simply in a misguided attempt to save money or to rearrange the furniture of the Washington power structure. It is safe to say that the lessons of arms control learned in the crucible of the Cold War will continue to have application and will be forgotten at our peril.

It seems to me that the principal lesson to be derived, aptly illustrated by these authors, is both the necessity for and fallibility of arms control. This fallibility is not necessarily derived from imperfections in policy formulation, lack of will by the national participants, or competition among negotiators. Arms control offers no panacea, but it suggests an ever-expanding web of controls which, if properly formulated and observed, gives increasing assurance that certain weapons will or will not exist, certain actions will or will not happen. A verification regime that accomplishes this can never be expected to be perfect, and political leaders must weigh its imperfections in light of what level of risk is acceptable. The Achilles' heel of arms control is the ability to know, to understand, and to assimilate. The "fog of war" is matched in arms control by the "fog of analysis." The network of arms control measures established by a number of international agreements requires more and more information and its accurate interpretation in less and less time.

Take, for example, the issue of the range of the Pershing II missile. Early in the Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) negotiations, the Soviet side asserted that the Pershing II missile had a range of more than 2000 kilometers. Such a range would permit the system not only to strike the western reaches of the Soviet Union, but also to strike near Moscow itself. The United States asserted a range of 1800 kilometers which would not permit a strike on Moscow. An

*Aviation Week* article shortly before the negotiations began erroneously suggested a range in excess of 2000 kilometers, which possibly gave Soviet assessors the impression of the extra range. US Army tests of the system were never in excess of 1800 kilometers, and the system, in fact, had no capability to deliver warheads accurately beyond that range.

Today, General Detinov mentions the difficulty raised by Soviet analysis of Pershing II range estimates. He admits that, in retrospect, the Soviet estimate of range was an overestimation. Soviet propaganda of the era, however, made much of the imputed ability of the Pershing II to strike Moscow. Even today the misinformation continues, as Larkin remarks on the effects of the banning of intermediate range missiles in the INF Treaty: "Further, the Pershing II could strike Moscow only minutes after firing."

The question of the future of nuclear weapons is more pressing than ever; none of the four books addresses it directly. It became a mantra of the Cold War that "nuclear weapons cannot be disinvented." On the face of it, this is a truism, of course. But is it foolhardy to examine the circumstances that might exist in the future to determine if nuclear weapons, like chemical weapons, bacteriological agents, and dumdum bullets, could be so circumscribed that they can be safely eliminated as weapons of war?

The Stimson Center in Washington, D.C., has embarked upon a project to examine the future of nuclear weapons. In its latest report, it suggests that a phased reduction from present agreed levels between the United States and the Russian Federation is possible and desirable. An international effort, the Canberra Commission Report issued in August 1996 recommends more strongly that steps be taken now to permit the ultimate elimination of nuclear weapons, without specifying a timetable for such reductions. And the Committee on International Security and Arms Control of the National Academy of Sciences will complete a project in early 1997 to address both technical and policy issues involved in the drastic reduction and ultimate elimination of nuclear weapons.

None of these studies is likely to resolve all the complex issues involved in the radical reduction or potential elimination of nuclear weapons, and none of the books described herein gives a clear road map through the minefield of nuclear policies left after the Cold War. Certainly, the United States and the Russian Federation have a vital role to play. Continuing reduction of their nuclear weapons to levels well below those of START II, verification systems that provide a very high assurance of accountability for nuclear warheads of all types, mutually supervised destruction of stocks of weapons above the minimum level, and increased transparency in all nuclear operations are essential.

Other nuclear states, both declared and undeclared, must be involved after the two Cold War superpowers reduce to minimum levels. The issue of nuclear guarantees provided by nuclear powers over the past decades must be resolved long before nuclear weapons can be reduced to zero. Since nuclear weapons can be built again by a determined state of even modest means, the continued virtual existence of such weapons may require a small, residual nuclear deterrent controlled in ways not yet identified. The crucial issue of strategic defenses, as well as battlefield defenses against potential nuclear delivery systems in regional conflicts and their relation to the ABM Treaty, have yet to be addressed definitively.

The authors of the four books considered in this review have begun the slow and careful process of examining the past and analyzing options for the future with regard to nuclear weapons. Much remains to be done before policymakers can sift through the political, economic, and social detritus of the Cold War to determine directions for the future. That future, of necessity, must resolve the most dangerous bequest in the legacy of that Cold War, nuclear armaments.

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Alexsandr' G. Savel'yev and Nikolay N. Detinov, *The Big Five: Arms Control Decision-Making in the Soviet Union* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1995.)

**The Reviewer:** Major General William F. Burns (USA Ret.) headed the US Arms Control and Disarmament Agency during the last year of the Reagan Administration and early months of the Bush Administration. President Bush sent him to the former states of the Soviet Union shortly after its fall to negotiate US support for the dismantlement of former Soviet nuclear weapon systems. He is a Distinguished Fellow of the US Army War College, and he chairs a study group preparing a report on the future of nuclear weapons for the National Academy of Sciences.

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## Review Essay

### Don't Kill the Messenger: Vietnam War Reporting in Context

HENRY G. GOLE

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What follows is a soldier's appreciation of how journalism evolved in the 1960s and 1970s, and how the craft affected attitudes of professional soldiers about the media. It is specifically directed at media critics, particularly the veteran of combat in Vietnam who is prepared say: "OK, it's been a long time. Show me that the media wasn't and isn't a pack of lyin', flag-hatin', pinko SOBs." It is written by an old sweat who, despite his aversion to the worst aspects of journalism--back-fence gossip and hyperbole posing as protection of our first amendment rights--recognizes the need for an independent media, even an imperfect media. Somebody has to watch the guys with the weapons, those with fingers in the till, and those who make rules for the rest of us. Even a flawed tool is necessary to perform those vital functions. This essay offers observations about published reflections by journalists who have something interesting to say about the craft and about Vietnam reporting, and an insight into the attitudes of Army War College students of the 1980s regarding the reporting of the American war in Vietnam.

#### Journalists on the War

It might have helped, but probably not much, had soldiers appreciated the hypercritical predisposition journalists bring to their observations of the universe, including their own craft. They are quick to praise and to damn. Morley Safer, in one paragraph of his *Flashbacks: On Returning to Vietnam* (1990), calls his employers "the comintern that ran CBS" and praises colleague Charles Collingwood as one of Murrow's Boys: "He was a scholar when broadcasting no longer wanted one, amused more than appalled by the contract-crazed chorus girls and boys who've taken over the podium."

Safer's admiration of Collingwood might be dismissed as a lamentation for the passing of the good old days by one himself growing long in the tooth, but he is not alone in recognizing that Vietnam was the first television war. "First television war" rolls off the tongue too easily today, reflecting the sophistication of viewers who have had wars and peace operations with their evening cocktails for more than a quarter century. It is hard to recall how profoundly--as well as how quickly--the new medium affected both its subjects and the journalism it produced. At one point in *Dispatches* (1977)--the hip, psychedelic, surrealistic reporting of the war that is the next-best thing to having been there--Michael Herr cites a comment by a Marine in a skirmish line assaulting a dike from a rice paddy in (almost) these words: "I don't like this flick at all."

The American public saw scenes from a war on TV. It also saw its soldier-actors seeing themselves in scenes from a war on TV. Some soldiers saw promotions, or fame, or both. In *The Camera Never Blinks* (1977), Dan Rather describes a Colonel whose "eyes lit up like the jackpot on a pinball machine. He said with a kind of gasp, 'Television!'" when he spotted Rather and his cameraman. "He liked reporters and he knew the value of a tough reputation." The Colonel, a regimental commander, seemed fully prepared to stage a shoot'em-up, showing his brave troops zapping bad guys, the combat analog of "leaking." Whenever a media representative reports a close-hold

government policy that some noble soldier, appointee, or civil servant has leaked, no doubt for some enlightened reason, censure of the reporter is not unusual. Isn't it remotely possible that the leaker had a dog in the fight?

Unfortunately the actual combat film obtained at risk of life and limb by brave or crazy photojournalists, while authentic, often distorts and misleads. Tim Page's *Page After Page* (1989) suggests that he might fall into that latter group of journalists; Frenchman Alex Bauer, on the other hand, who was both brave and combat-smart, is credited by Dan Rather with keeping them both alive despite hairy adventures in the bush. According to Peter Braestrup's *Big Story* (abridged edition, 1978), which offers a comprehensive account of the press coverage and an objective interpretation of the 1968 Tet offensive, what usually got on the air was "US GIs in combat." That's what "New York" wanted. Little reporting was done on the ARVN, so "the general cumulative impression given was that it was an American war." Braestrup adds that the function of the TV network correspondents in Vietnam--and around the world--differed radically from that of their colleagues in the print media. He demonstrates that while it is true that the camera doesn't blink and action footage was the hot stuff desired by the three networks, what generally happened was that 48-hour-old footage was married to a few sentences stitched together in New York by a busy network editor whose text was in fact the latest AP and UPI dispatches from Saigon. The "nightly news" was a cut-and-paste job of two-day old film and new stuff from the wire services that did not really wrap up that day's news. Avuncular Walter Cronkite's authoritative sign-off, "And that's the way it is," wasn't quite the way it was.

Braestrup, a veteran journalist (*Time*, *The New York Times*) and chief of *The Washington Post's* Saigon bureau during Tet, concludes that the network approach was not to produce news in the sense of fact-finding and interviewing. The film vignettes were used in one-to-two-minute "snippets" (his word) with commentary that, given the TV format, purported to be representative, typical, or a microcosm. In fact, what the cameraman got was a dramatic part of some larger situation that the network producer sandwiched into a tight 24-minute program. Out of context, there was no way to know if what viewers saw was in fact unique or typical. Braestrup opines that the process produced material more personal and conclusive than anything permitted newspapermen or wire-service reporters.

An appreciation of what makes a big-time journalist tick and how a successful media career is made can be gained from a few books written with flair, charm, and insight by three well-known media professionals, two of them print journalists, one a TV reporter who subsequently became a celebrity network anchorman. Russell Baker of *The New York Times* provides a warm and likable account of his journey from blue collar newsboy in Baltimore to bureau chief in London, to White House correspondent, to *Times* columnist in two engaging books: *Growing Up* (1982) and *The Good Times* (1989). Ben Bradlee's *A Good Life* (1995), a witty, honest, and crisply written autobiography, takes the reader with Bradlee from prep school, Boston, and Harvard to World War II service as a junior officer on a destroyer in the Pacific and ultimately to the top of the journalistic heap as managing editor, from 1966 to 1991, of *The Washington Post*. His part in the publishing of the Pentagon Papers, in the Watergate affair, and in other big stories puts the reader in the shoes of a newspaperman conscious that he is writing "the first draft of history." Rounding out the short list is Rather's *The Camera Never Blinks* because of the sense of the subtitle, *Adventures of a TV Journalist*, and because it is an honest book. Rather, younger than Baker and Bradlee, grew up with TV and brings a perspective flavored by modest Texas roots, an undistinguished college, and local TV station experience before making it to the big time in The Big Apple and eventually ascending to the throne vacated by Walter Cronkite.

Turn now to another short list: Vietnam books by journalists who offended a generation of American soldiers. Neil Sheehan, David Halberstam, and Peter Arnett brought unambiguously bad news to their readers early in the American war in Vietnam, even before the commitment of large American formations to the war. Their message had in common a variety of themes:

- Political leadership in Hanoi promised sacrifice, unification, and the ejection of the imperialists, while Saigon promised corruption, palace coups, and endless muddle.
- North Vietnamese army troops and Viet Cong auxiliaries were skilled and prepared to die for their cause, while the Army of the Republic of Vietnam was inept, unwilling, and unlikely to improve.
- Neither the American Embassy nor top US military leadership in Saigon had a clue about the war in the boondocks (because they did not get out of Saigon), while competent US advisers in the boondocks had to bribe reluctant Vietnamese officers to conduct operations with poorly motivated and poorly trained troops.
- The enemy's willingness to endure the uncongenial physical and psychological environment of close combat

contrasted sharply with a wish--by Saigon and American senior advisers--for a *deus ex machina*: helicopters, armored personnel carriers, people sniffers, electronic gadgets.

In brief, energetic young journalists went on combat operations with the advisers they admired, made their observations, and then heard accounts of those operations from Saigon warriors whose information had been sanitized to make good news of bad news as it was passed up the chain of command. Halberstam, fresh from combat reporting in the Congo, noted the acrimonious relationship between the press and the military immediately upon his arrival in Vietnam in 1962. The message that the war was being lost did not endear the callow messengers to the responsible graybeards running the war from Saigon and Washington.

The 1963 battle at Ap Bac at once illustrates and characterizes the chasm separating the press and military, one that was not bridged in the course of the war, and that would eventually find almost all soldiers on one side and the media on the other in confrontational stances. Neil Sheehan, in *A Bright Shining Lie* (1988), calls the battle of Ap Bac a "climactic humiliation of the Saigon side." David Halberstam, in *The Making of a Quagmire* (1964), emphasizes in describing the battle that despite superior numbers and firepower, a combination of tactical and helicopter air support, and the mobility afforded by the M-113 armored personnel carriers, a demoralized ARVN lacked leadership and the will to fight while the enemy demonstrated determination, skill, and great courage. In *Live from the Battlefield* (1994) Peter Arnett says of the Battle at Ap Bac that it was the biggest story he had covered in his then-six months in Vietnam because "It convinced the Saigon press corps that either the authorities were unaware of the full dimensions of the insurgency, or the discrepancies were being concealed from us." The Americans got the set-piece battle they had always wanted with an elusive foe. That foe performed much better than expected, ARVN was a disgrace, and official America in Saigon reported success.

Another event--a series of events, really--only added to the growing discord between soldiers and the media. Analysts generally regard the Tet offensive of 1968 as an operational failure for the Viet Cong and the NVA--even a disaster--because the Viet Cong infrastructure, so long in the making, was destroyed in the fighting. But the same analysts saw the event as a strategic success for the enemy. Their seeming omnipresence--South Vietnam lit up like a pinball machine, and the enemy was in the American Embassy--caused America to lose its stomach for the war. America's professional soldiers blamed the media for stressing the enemy's Tet successes while overlooking the loss of infrastructure that had taken generations to build. Ergo, bad media, true to form, undermined the noble efforts of American soldiers and Marines.

But Peter Braestrup's erudite *Big Story*, dedicated to the memory of 43 named foreign journalists who died in Indochina in 1961-75, blames President Johnson and General Westmoreland for the Tet debacle. He asserts that Johnson and Westmoreland knew from intelligence sources throughout South Vietnam that the enemy planned a big show, but for reasons still unclear, they failed to prepare the American people for what was about to happen. One assumes they were confident. Happy news was reported, and unhappy news was suppressed. The American public had every reason to believe that all was going well in 1968 when the bottom seemed to fall out. Both the press and the American people were shocked at the intensity and duration of enemy activity. Before Tet there had been a sense that the tide had turned, that America was on a course to victory. After Tet there was a general sense that the best course of action was to get out. Leadership, not the media, had failed to prepare the nation.

### **Attitudes of Army War College Students in the 1980s**

As one who had served tours in Vietnam in elite units in the salad days of 1966 and in the generally unhappy days of 1970-71, your current writer closely observed Army War College students of 1980-84 and 1986-88 as a faculty member. Those students knew that they were the first generation of American officers to lose a war. The lost war produced a profound demoralization within their ranks--a demoralization that was generally unappreciated by the public. A Chief of Staff of the Army even declared that our Army was "hollow." Among themselves the officers lashed out with uncharacteristic passion at everything external to the brotherhood.

These officers were typically 42-year-old lieutenant colonels or newly minted colonels, still in competition for stars; they had at least 20 years in uniform, and had served in Vietnam once or twice as junior officers in the 1960s and early '70s. And they were angry. They almost unanimously despised journalists and made no effort to conceal their

attitude. Those students held Congress and civilian leadership in low regard and resented the apathy and ignorance of the American public about national security and matters martial. But they reserved a special venomous attitude for "the media," a term more sneered than spoken.

Despite efforts of commandants and faculty to inform class after class of the proper role of the media as a safeguard against tyranny, the need for an informed electorate in a democracy, the high standards of the best journalists, and the competitive culture of the craft, successive classes remained adamant in their aversion to journalists. In 1988 a distinguished journalist for a prestigious newspaper privately observed that he was fed up. After fighting the good fight by regularly participating in the annual "media days" that brought the craft's best practitioners to Carlisle Barracks for discussions with the students, he suspected that a generation of soldiers would go to their graves hating all journalists for the Vietnam reporting of some. He was right. Some 20 years after their experience in Vietnam, student attitudes toward the media were overwhelmingly negative and seemingly permanent, at least in that generation of embittered officers.

## Conclusions

Perhaps the war in Vietnam attracted a wider range of journalistic talent than had earlier wars. It has been alleged that the price of an airline ticket to Vietnam allowed adventurers lacking training, experience, maturity, and judgment to catch on with the Saigon press corps as go-fers, stringers, or freelance photographers. Some later even got bylines. But a similar lament was heard among professional soldiers about the range of talent in the US Army. It has been suggested that Lieutenant Calley of My Lai infamy was commissioned because the Army had to dip to the bottom of the barrel. Few Ivy Leaguers were storming the recruiter's office, and repeated tours in Vietnam exhausted the supply of junior leaders, especially infantry officers and NCOs and helicopter pilots. OCS churned out second lieutenants; "shake and bake" leadership courses produced instant sergeants without the benefit of the traditional five to 15 years of experience with troops; and young men in their late 'teens and early 20s, whose older brothers in the 1950s had buzzed around the town square in hot rods, found themselves piloting helicopters over the jungles of Vietnam. While huffing and puffing about those who ducked military service during that war, old soldiers will recall that many a career NCO extended his tour in Vietnam to get out of a rifle company and into some rear area job. Some gung-ho officers of the peacetime Army bailed out when it became obvious that regulars would serve repeated tours in Vietnam. Talent, courage, and a deep sense of professionalism were unevenly distributed in both the media and the military during the war in Vietnam.

TV can be charged with some distortion of events as it went through growing pains while reporting war in a new medium, but did the United States need TV to make a mess of it at the policy, operational, and tactical levels? At the policy level we conducted a limited war while the foe, apparently prepared to fight to the last man, engaged in total war; at the operational level, "search and destroy" became the equivalent of mosquito-hunting with a sledge hammer; at the tactical level we sent amateurs to fight pros because our military personnel system supported the war with peacetime habits. Apprentice US privates had to learn their trade the hard way, as we sent bush-wise journeymen home at the end of a year, just when they had learned their deadly business. (S. L. A. Marshall, in *The River and the Gauntlet* [1953], offers the same lesson from the war in Korea.) And the criteria by which the military personnel system assigned commanders in Vietnam did not include: "This officer has demonstrated great skill at effectively commanding in combat *at this level*, and he is very good at accomplishing missions while keeping his soldiers alive."

The Department of Defense and our Army have come to grips with media-military relations by adopting a policy of openness limited only by operational security and individual rights to privacy. Journalists now can get the story out by the technical means available to them; they can get to all but the most remote corners of the earth unaided; they will be on the scene in ever-increasing numbers, sometimes before our deploying troops arrive, and censorship will not be the US policy toward the media. Media representatives have participated in training for peace operations, and journalists destined for Bosnia had the opportunity to prepare themselves for mines, cold weather, and survival skills by training alongside US troops in Germany and subsequently deploying with them. One suspects that a reporter enduring a cold wind in his face while standing ankle-deep in mud rapidly becoming ice could be kindly disposed--perhaps to the point of admiration--toward blue-fingered engineers slopping in a river day and night to assemble a bridge. Openness characterizes the media policy of the 1990s.



Is it not, at last, time for the true believers of the 1960s to admit that the media generally had it right about Vietnam, and that *we* crew-cut, spit-shined, flag-lovin', professional soldiers were on a fool's errand?

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## **Review Essay**

### **Strategic Reading on Latin America: Long on Quality, New Rumbles from the Left**

**RUSSELL W. RAMSEY**

In the post-Cold War era the need for rational consideration of ends-means linkage and the possible use of military force in the Latin American region is unclear. Ironically, the strategic literature on Latin America in 1996 is much better in quality than at any time during the Cold War, even though the Cold War produced a menu of issues that most national security analysts considered to be more truly "strategic."

An admittedly arbitrary menu of books and articles for 1996 can be organized into four categories: interpretive, US policy, anti-drug war, and Cuba and the radical left. This article is an update on previous offerings by your reviewer in *Parameters*: "Strategic Reading on Latin America" (Summer 1994), and "Strategic Reading on Latin America: 1995 Update" (Winter 1995-96).

## Interpretive Works

The best starting point for analyzing Latin America's post-Cold War boom in privatization and democratic pluralization is the unheralded 1974 volume *Beyond Cuba: Latin America Takes Charge of Its Future*, edited and largely authored by Luigi Einaudi. Professor Einaudi et al. opined, under sponsorship of the RAND Corporation during a low point in US foreign relations, that Latin America would opt for constitutional democracy and a mixture of regulated free economies. They also held that the flamboyant militarism of the day was an evolving institution, its blatant interventionism caused by Latin America's entrapment in the Cold War, coupled with too-rapid urbanization amid weak civilian bureaucratic structures. Einaudi subsequently became US Ambassador to the Organization of American States (1989-1993) and is now a senior Latin America policy adviser. His 1974 book is to the post-Cold War interpretation of Latin America what Ambassador George Kennan's "Mr. X" article in *Foreign Affairs* was to the Cold War: seminal, prophetic, and unique.

The best one-volume summary of the Latin American region is Pierre Etienne Dostert's *Latin America 1996*, the 30th edition in Stryker-Post's excellent World Today Series. Maps, bibliography, intellectual balance, photographs, good writing, and low price all combine to make this the textbook of choice for regional introductory courses. Abraham F. Lowenthal and Gregory F. Treverton are author-editors of *Latin America in a New World* (1994). These essays do the best job of relating politics, economics, and national security issues. Scott B. MacDonald et al. are the authors and editors of *Fast Forward: Latin America on the Edge of the Twenty-First Century*. Produced in 1996 at the Washington (D.C.) Center for Strategic and International Studies, these essays mix sound regional analysis with the Heidi and Alvin Toffler futuristic scenario; this volume and the Lowenthal work are good candidates for seminar textbooks at the war college and staff college levels, and for graduate programs in regional area studies. Your reviewer's piece "Latin American Military Affairs" in the March-April 1996 issue of *Military Review* evaluates several new strategic reference volumes of interest to the national security affairs student.

David Sheinin has written a 1995 work called *The Organization of American States*, a welcome addition that shows the regional organization's efforts in democracy-building, peace-making, and treaty negotiations. Another welcome and long overdue book is a 1995 collection of essays authored or edited by William H. Swatos entitled *Religion and Democracy in Latin America*. The role of evangelical Protestantism is fully evaluated, the changing nature of Roman Catholicism is examined, and liberation theology is put into a balanced context. The relationship between economic motivations and political behavior is analyzed closely in a 1992 study called *The Economics of Violence in Latin America: A Theory of Political Competition*, by Wilber A. Chaffee, Jr.

Howard J. Wiarda gives his customary balanced judgment to the politico-economic relationship in "After Miami: The Summit Crisis, the Peso Crisis, and the Future of U.S.-Latin American Relations," in the Spring 1995 issue of the *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*. Benjamin Keen presents, in 1996, the sixth edition of his distinguished textbook, *Latin American Civilization: History and Society, 1492 to the Present*. It contains beautifully edited translations of the writings of key figures throughout Latin American history. Beginning Latin American history students in the United States, however, are going to get a highly unbalanced treatment if this becomes their only textbook, for Professor Keen has chosen to include only the writings of the democratic and revolutionary political left in his section on recent decades. Finally, your reviewer sorted out recent books on Latin America into two schools of thought in an essay called "Hopeful Neoliberals, Derailed Collectivists--Emerging Paradigms on Latin America," in the January-March 1996 issue of *Comparative Strategy*.

## On US Policy

David W. Dent made a huge contribution to Western Hemispheric scholarship in 1995 by editing *U.S.-Latin American Policymaking: A Reference Handbook*. It is the first objective, systematic treatment of the US national security process as it affects Latin America, and it becomes the reference tool of choice for scholars in this field. A companion volume for the library of all institutions teaching US-Latin American relations is another 1995 offering, a collection of essays edited by John D. Martz under the title *United States Policy in Latin America*. Finally, Howard J. Wiarda's *Democracy and Its Discontents: Development, Interdependence, and U.S. Policy in Latin America* (1995) is arguably the best volume by a single author ever done on contemporary US policy in Latin America.

Four journal articles highlight strategic application of these three excellent books. Raymond M. O'Brien's "Regional Security in Latin America: U.S. Economic and Military Options," in the Fall 1992 issue of *Strategic Review*, is a Mahanist analysis. Paul G. Buchanan wrote "U.S. Defense Policy for the Western Hemisphere: New Wine in Old Bottles, Old Wine in New Bottles, or Something Completely Different?" in the *Journal of Inter-American Studies & World Affairs* (Spring 1996), and your reviewer offered "US Strategy for Latin America" in the Autumn 1994 issue of *Parameters*. These articles present US regional strategy essentially as applied military policy. Walter S. Clarke and Arthur E. Dewey crafted "Peace/Humanitarian Operations: Introducing the 'Comprehensive Campaign Plan,'" a 1996 paper based on their work in Latin America that is well worth reading.

Since the US Army took on a tutorial role with the Latin American armies during World War II, and gradually included the region's internal security forces in its doctrinal training umbrella, US policy toward the Latin American armed forces has been a critical issue for national security students. Geoffrey B. Demarest discusses the *posse comitatus* principle, under which armed forces defend the national sovereignty and police defend society, in his article "The Overlap of Military and Police Responsibilities in Latin America," in the *Journal of Low Intensity Conflict & Law Enforcement* (Autumn 1995). J. Patrice McSherry's "Military Political Power and Guardian Structures in Latin America," in the *Journal of Third World Studies* (Spring 1995), makes the case for enduring and hopelessly predatory militarism in contemporary South America. Despite five pages of footnotes, McSherry's force ratios and structural portrayals are wildly inaccurate.

Your reviewer examined the economic role of those same armed forces in the Fall 1992 issue of *Strategic Review* in an article titled "The Role of Latin American Armed Forces in the 1990s." Three other pieces by your reviewer examined the delicate issue of transmitting professional values from US to Latin American military personnel via training programs offered in the Spanish language. These are "Forty Years of Human Rights Training" in the Autumn 1995 issue of the *Journal of Low Intensity Conflict & Law Enforcement*; "U.S. Military Courses for Latin Americans Are a Low-Budget Strategic Success," in *North-South: The Magazine of the Americas* (February-March 1993); and "A Military Turn of Mind: Educating Latin American Officers," in the August 1993 *Military Review*.

Several new books critique US policy on specific thorn-in-the-side countries. Former Ambassador (to Haiti) Ernest H. Prege posits a fascinating theory about the relationship of arable land, land tenure, population, and US Haitian policy. His 1996 volume *The Haitian Dilemma . . .* was sponsored by the Center for International and Strategic Studies. Joseph S. Tulchin authored and edited with Gary Bland in 1992 the excellent study *Is There a Transition to Democracy in El Salvador?* Tentative optimism at that time required courage, and subsequent events seem to bear out the author-editors' conclusion that a genuine political democracy is slowly emerging in that once war-torn land. Saul Landau gives Uncle Sam a mighty buffet in his 1993 polemic *The Guerrilla Wars of Central America: Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala*. This book could have been written from the New York Public Library, employing the articles in *Nation* and *The Progressive* as sources; there is hardly any material on guerrilla warfare in it. Stephen C. Benz's *Guatemalan Journey* (1996) displays critical scholarly objectivity, while Victor Perera's *Unfinished Conquest: The Guatemalan Tragedy* (1995) offers a native leftist's views. While indicting the Guatemalan army for human rights abuses, Perera also blames the leftist guerrillas for dragging the indigenous Guatemalans into their bloody and unwinnable struggle.

## **The Anti-Drug War**

Your reviewer examined this melancholy literature in an essay called "Reading Up on the Drug War," in *Parameters* (Autumn 1995). Some important new writing has appeared.

Starting close to home, Timothy J. Dunn has produced a 1996 book called *The Militarization of the U.S.-Mexico Border, 1978-1992: Low Intensity Conflict Comes Home*. His work is part of the Border and Migration Studies Series, sponsored by the University of Texas's Center for Mexican-American Studies. Since a heightened US military role in the US-Mexican border scenario is an issue for the November 1996 US presidential election, the importance of this study can hardly be exaggerated. Historian William O. Walker III has written several prominent studies on US drug war policy. Now comes his 1996 *Drugs in the Western Hemisphere*, part of the distinguished Jaguar Series from Scholarly Resources, Inc. This book is simply the best in its field.

A strategy of the drug lords in Colombia for years has been to forge an unholy alliance with the leftist guerrillas; the

narco-thugs have the cash, while the guerrillas have manpower, an elegant propaganda machine, and quasi-respectability. Such distinguished entities as Amnesty International and *The New York Times* have been regularly deceived into believing that the Colombian army and National Police, plus a fictitious "right-wing militia," are the perpetrators of human rights violations. Retired Major General Miguel Sanmiguel, a highly decorated human rights hero and military historian, lays bare the defamatory plot in his article "Human Rights Violations in Colombia: Colombian Government and Military Perspectives," in the *Journal of Low Intensity Conflict & Law Enforcement* (Autumn 1995). Sanmiguel's article can be read in its original Spanish in the March-April 1995 "50th Anniversary" issue of *Military Review (Hispanic Edition)*. Easily located opinion surveys in Colombia reveal that public confidence in the Army has never wavered, but great damage has been done internationally when major US news chains allude to the "killings by the Colombian military" as if they were discussing the Salvadoran army or National Guard of 1981.

## **Cuba and the Far Left**

Your reviewer has been making the point for several years that Fidel Castro considers himself to be neither historically idiosyncratic nor erroneous. The 1962 film *El Cid* ended with the hero's cadaver strapped upon his horse in full armor, leading the troops to victory and then being cantered off down the Mediterranean beach into immortality. Charlton Heston played the role of this medieval Spaniard grandly. Fidel Castro, son of a Spanish multimillionaire, is no slouch of an actor, but neither has he any intention of being trotted down the beach into the Caribbean. US Latin American specialists have extolled and fawned over the Castro revolution since late 1960, when Professor Stanley Stein pronounced the death of constitutional democracy in Latin America before the Conference on Latin American History (*Hispanic American Historical Review*, August 1961), yet since Cold War's end they've lined up to predict his imminent downfall. The big question is how to explain his apparent staying power, and several scholars are doing it well.

Enrique A. Baloyra and James A. Morris are author-editors of the 1993 work *Conflict and Change in Cuba*, a multidisciplinary collection of essays which reveal adaptability and toughness within the beleaguered Cuban revolution. Carolee Bengelsdorf shows in her 1994 book, *The Problem of Democracy in Cuba: Vision and Reality*, that Castro has often balanced pragmatism with idealism in order to survive. Frank T. Fitzgerald's 1994 study, *The Cuban Revolution in Crisis: From Managing Socialism to Managing Survival*, makes a similar case from a different perspective. Jorge F. Perez-Lopez offers previously unknown material about recent policy shifts in Havana in his 1994 volume, *Cuba at a Crossroads: Politics and Economics After the Fourth Party Congress*.

The best literary action pertaining to Cuba is easily Mary-Alice Waters' pair of edited volumes containing Ernesto Che Guevara's essays and field notes from the Cuban (1957-1959) and Bolivian (1967) campaigns. Guevara belongs to the select company of revolutionary architects who also commanded in the field, died for the cause, and polarized the forces of history for a generation or more. Waters' books--*The Bolivian Diary of Ernesto Che Guevara* (1994) and *Episodes of the Cuban Revolutionary War, 1956-58* (1996)--create the same level of literary immortality for the Argentine apostle of neo-Marxism that US Marine Corps General Samuel B. Griffith did for the works of Mao Zedong (Mao Tse-tung), and the Roman General Flavius Arrianus did for Alexander the Great. Her two cross-referenced and beautifully annotated volumes belong in all library collections pertaining to Latin America. Your reviewer's "On Castro and Cuba: Rethinking the 'Three Gs,'" in the Autumn 1995 issue of *Parameters* evaluates several more studies and memoirs of importance on the Cuban revolution.

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