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Editor's Shelf

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Editor's Shelf

There was a time when the next war began where the last war left off. Historians admonished us to be cognizant of how wars ended so we might be prepared for what was to come. The threats that our nation faces today are as distinct and remote from that antiquated advice as one can imagine. No longer can America focus its attention on a single region, movement, or threat in its efforts to achieve peace. Our focus on events surrounding the Middle East and threats to homeland security is certainly justified, but while remaining a nation at war we can ill afford to forget our interests in and relationships with “Old Europe” and former Warsaw Pact countries.



To aid us along the path of remembrance is one of America's foremost experts on Central and Eastern Europe, Dr. Jeffrey Simon. A Senior Fellow at the National Defense University's Institute for National Strategic Studies, he has written three extremely readable and informative books examining the post-Soviet era and the transition of several Central and East European nations to the goals and objectives represented by Euro-Atlantic institutions, e.g., NATO and the European Union. The first in the series, *NATO and the Czech and Slovak Republics: A Comparative Study in Civil-Military Relations*, is a four-part examination of the Czech and Slovak Republics' successes and challenges in their quest to become NATO members. What makes this and the other volumes in the series so rewarding is the fact that Simon is writing about events he helped create. He traces the Czech efforts to obtain their initial invitation to NATO in 1997, discusses the preparation for accession in 1999, and concludes with the government's interaction with its military during the first four years of NATO membership. In the same precise and exacting style, the author dedicates the third part of the book to an examination of the Slovak experience on its road to NATO. Although no startling revelations appear, Simon's position as an insider provides the reader with a candid understanding that both nations suffered from numerous political distractions as they pursued their newly defined national objectives. Part IV, “Coming Full Circle: Civil Military Relations,” finds Simon at his best, providing a conceptual framework of civil-military relations drawn on the many lessons-learned from the post-communist transition throughout the Central and East European region. Dr. Simon follows the same theme and methodology in *Hungary and NATO: Problems in Civil-Military Relations*. Charting the successes and failures faced by the Hungarians in their quest to join NATO, the author again displays his comprehensive knowledge of civil-military relations in the region. *Poland and NATO: A Study in Civil-Military Relations* is the third book in the series, and as with the previous two volumes, the book provides insight based on the author's firsthand research regarding the relationships between Poland's political and military leader-

For details on publishers and prices of books mentioned, see “Off the Press” in this issue or call *Parameters* at 717-245-4943 (e-mail: Parameters@carlisle.army.mil).

ship as they pursue a mutual, if sometimes divisive, national objective of NATO membership. No author is better qualified, based on his detailed research and his experience, to tell the story of the emerging post-communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe than Jeff Simon.

The tension between the military and civilian sectors of government is not restricted to emerging democracies. Professor Thomas S. Langston provides a detailed examination of civil-military relationships following major conflicts involving the United States in *Uneasy Balance: Civil-Military Relations in Peacetime America since 1783*. Langston presents two case studies examining the conflict between the political and military factions of government in the perennial struggle to realign and reorganize the military following major combat operations. The author chooses what he terms “two near disasters” on which to base his study, the post-Civil War era and the period following Vietnam. He challenges conventional wisdom and builds a thesis based on the belief that balance between these two competing institutions is the desired goal, with neither side deserving to be preponderant. Langston’s examination of these post-conflict periods provides the reader considerable insight regarding the question, “Is American military policy balanced today?” He answers “no,” but with the emphasis provided by 9/11 the author believes we may well be on the path of developing a military that can be victorious in time of war, while possessing the traits and capabilities critical to civilian leaders in times of peace. It is truly unfortunate that because of the timing of the book’s publication the author was not able to incorporate operations in Afghanistan and Iraq into his study. This work, however, provides a major contribution to the greater understanding of the challenges nations face in preparing their military for the future.

Another author examining the relationship between the military and the society it serves is Richard A. Lacquement, Jr. His book *Shaping American Military Capabilities after the Cold War* is resultant of the author’s doctoral thesis and provides a detailed analysis of American military capabilities and force structure since the end of the Cold War. It is obvious, at least to this reviewer, that Lacquement takes great pride in his research. Whether due to the insistence of his dissertation committee or simply because of excellent scholarship, he has provided a book that touches on each of the seminal events and documents that helped shape the American military during the past decade. From the Base Force of the 1990s through the 2001 Quadrennial Defense Review, the author provides a detailed description and explanation of defense policies regarding the selection and exercise of military capabilities in the post-Cold War era. He concludes that although it has been more than a decade since the fall of the Soviet Union, American forces are nothing but a smaller version of their Cold War predecessors. Lacquement attributes this failure to the bureaucratic inertia of comfortable military elites that dominate the defense policy debate. This is a must-read for anyone concerned about the evolution of America’s military and its capability to meet the threats of the 21st century.

The publication of books related to the war on terror and operations in Afghanistan and Iraq is growing at an incalculable rate. There are, however, a few among these that particularly deserve our attention. Leading in that category is Victor Davis Hanson’s controversial little testament, *Between War and Peace: Lessons*

from *Afghanistan to Iraq*. Certain to be a winner among conservative readers, Hanson's book denounces Arabs, Europeans, the United Nations, and Islam, while praising US and Israeli policy in the Middle East as the sole pennants of democracy in a barren land. Hanson heartily endorses America's efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq and asserts, "Syria should be next." Unfortunately, the basis for the book is the reprinting of 39 essays by the author, most of which previously appeared in the *National Review Online*. If scholarship and objectivity are a prospective reader's expectations, this is not the book. On the other hand, if the reader wants to feel better about America's role in the Middle East and the supporting rationale, Dr. Hanson's collection conveys some unique and revealing thought.

For a more focused view on the terrorist threat, readers might want to consider Jason Burke's latest effort, *Al-Qaeda: Casting a Shadow of Terror*. Burke, the award-winning reporter for the *London Observer*, has provided a classic analysis of al Qaeda and the extremist Islamic organizations that support it. Burke has conducted firsthand investigations in the terrorist camps of Afghanistan, so he knows about what he speaks. In what many have termed the best book written to date on al Qaeda, the author paints a complex picture of the organization as a loose amalgam of groups that share the same worldview—a dedication to the ideals of Islamic fundamentalism and a devout hatred for the West. Critical to the author's thesis is his belief that Osama bin Laden is less central to al Qaeda than most of the world realizes, and, in fact, the movement has existed for some time in the Middle East. Burke warns that our (American) overemphasis on bin Laden and al Qaeda is misguided and ultimately a waste of time that has the prospect of creating more bin Ladens. He concludes that only a battle to "win the hearts and minds" of the Islamic world will guarantee the peace we seek.

One more book related to the ongoing war in Iraq is Al J. Venter's *The Iraqi War Debrief: Why Saddam Hussein Was Toppled*. One might think he or she has heard all the media and government reports regarding Saddam Hussein's supposed weapons of mass destruction programs required to make an informed conclusion—not so. Al Venter, reporting on this part of the world for *Jane's International Defence Review* for over a quarter century, has provided a searching and critical review of Iraq's political and military role in the Middle East during the reign of Saddam Hussein. Venter goes beyond, but does not ignore, the huge armory of weapons of mass destruction Saddam was said to have accumulated. The author outlines for the reader all the evidence of how a small country like Iraq could accumulate enough chemical, biological, and nuclear assets to threaten the security of an entire region. He presents irrefutable evidence that at some time Saddam possessed a series of substantial chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons programs. Of course, the author leaves us with the conundrum as to where they went. Not least, Venter also deals with other nations involved in the process of acquiring weapons of mass destruction: Syria, Iran, and North Korea. If you believe you know the direction American policy in this region should be tending, you might want to read Al Venter's critical look at Iraq and Middle East developments. Even if the reader cannot agree with the author's conclusions regarding Iraqi weapons of mass destruction, the unique and detailed appendices related to ongoing security issues east of the Suez make the book well worth the reader's investment. — RHT □