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## Book Reviews

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## Book Reviews

### DEFENSE REFORM

# Anatomy of Post-Communist European Defense Institutions: The Mirage of Military Modernity

By Thomas-Durell Young

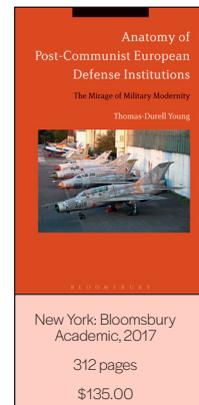
By Dr. John R. Deni, research professor of Joint, interagency, intergovernmental,  
and multinational security studies, US Army War College

American-led coalition operations in Afghanistan and Iraq have made clear over the last two decades that interoperability is a crucial alliance capability. Effective coalition military operations are made possible by common defense concepts, doctrine, tactics, procedures, and materiel. Achieving these interoperability objectives, however, has been a singular challenge of the last 25 years, as Central and Eastern European allies have sought to qualify for, join, and contribute effectively to the alliance.

Defense reform has been a critical tool for achieving interoperability across Central and Eastern Europe. Broadly, defense reforms focused initially on adopting Western democratic defense governance (what might be considered *intellectual* interoperability) and, subsequently, on developing other interoperability objectives. Unfortunately, these reforms have either failed or achieved only minimal success. According to Thomas-Durell Young in *Anatomy of Post-Communist Defense Institutions*, Central and Eastern European governments have been challenged deeply in their ability to build and maintain capable, interoperable military forces. In fact, the military capabilities of most allies have withered over the last quarter century, even as efforts to build them up have accelerated over the same period.

Why? Young argues the key reason is the inability of Western officials to acknowledge and appreciate the “malignant persistence of totalitarian norms” in Central and Eastern European countries (7). In other words, even though the formal structures of communism fell in the early 1990s, the thought patterns, psychological outlooks, and behavioral habits characteristic to a totalitarian state persisted far longer.

In the defense realm, this persistence has resulted in the retention of military concepts contradictory to Western ideas. The blame for the subsequent failure of most defense reforms, as far as Young assigns it, falls largely on the West. He contends Western officials fundamentally misjudged the state of professionalism



in Central and Eastern European militaries and mistakenly viewed the reform of former communist armed forces as a *military* problem. As a result, most of the West's defense reform efforts focused on an overly technical approach geared toward training at the tactical level.

If Young is correct, a generation of Western officials on both sides of the Atlantic fundamentally misjudged the nature of post-Soviet, post-Warsaw Pact, post-Tito societies, governments, and defense enterprises across Central and Eastern Europe, resulting in wasted decades and billions of misspent dollars, pounds, marks, and euros. This damning assessment deserves deep analysis, both to determine whether Western officials really *were* as ignorant as Young alleges and to identify accurately the key causal variable(s) behind the defense reform failures.

Interestingly, Young presents evidence to support the notion Western officials really *did* understand the shortcomings of and hurdles facing Central and Eastern European military establishments. Leaked NATO defense assessments—available to every Allied delegation in Brussels—and firsthand accounts of senior Western military officials and experts portray a clear but limited awareness, stemming from latent communist-era thinking and practices, of the challenges faced by the Central and Eastern European defense enterprise (48, 49–52). Young contends, after 1990, the West subsequently made no concerted effort to understand the “cultural conditions” in Central and Eastern Europe (53). If Western officials indeed *were* aware of persistent totalitarian norms, readers have to wonder if they *cared*, or if they were overconfident in the ability of Western-promoted defense reform efforts to succeed nonetheless.

At its heart, the book is about change in military organizations, a subject that has seen significant attention from academics and practitioners over the last several decades, particularly since Barry R. Posen's foundational *The Sources of Military Doctrine* (1984). While Young does include a brief survey of literature—he specifically references academics Leslie Eliason, Theo Farrell, Emily Goldman, Edgar Schein, and Terry Terriff—he focuses on his preferred explanatory variable: cultural norms. For example, Young compares the explanatory power of cultural norms to that of technology or of politics and strategy (explanatory tools posited by other scholars). In this way, Young seeks neither to test theory nor refine existing theoretical tools.

Instead, *Anatomy* offers a trove of evidence cataloging the transformation of defense establishments across former Soviet and Warsaw Pact republics and successor states of the former Yugoslavia. Young's expertise and wide-ranging, in-depth research shine here, allowing comparative analysis between and within the three regions. He analyzes the countries of each region, covering defense institutions, policy frameworks, defense planning techniques, national-level

commands, military decision-making processes, operational concepts, logistical support capabilities, and professional standards. The result is a comprehensive overview of defense reform across nearly all of Central and Eastern Europe.

A second major strength is Young's attention to practical and reasonable recommendations—assuming readers agree the primary reason for the reform efforts' limited success is the West's inability or unwillingness to consider persistent totalitarian cultural norms. From broad recommendations—such as promoting emphasis on achieving defense outcomes—to more regional- and country-specific recommendations, policymakers and security experts will find much utility in the book.

These recommendations naturally beg the question, do defense reform outcomes make a difference in allied and partner military operations downrange? Maybe not: even Young acknowledges, in some cases, impressive operational outcomes in Iraq and Afghanistan were not necessarily thwarted by lack of reform progress (68). Nonetheless, Young pulls no punches in noting many NATO allies in Central and Eastern Europe remain security liabilities, consuming more security than they produce (179). Considering Russia's current hybrid operations and the continuing imperative of equitable burden sharing, NATO needs *all* allies rowing in the same direction. Young's impressively detailed and well-researched book offers guidelines on how to achieve this synchronicity.

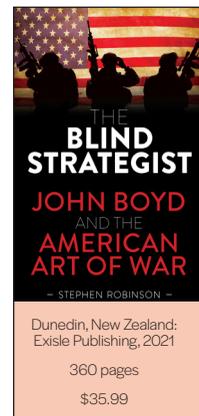
## BIOGRAPHY

## The Blind Strategist: John Boyd and the American Art of War

By Stephen Robinson

Reviewed by Colonel Jonathan Klug, US Army, assistant professor, Department of Military Strategy, Planning, and Operations, US Army War College

In *The Blind Strategist: John Boyd and the American Art of War*, Stephen Robinson unrelentingly attacks the military theory of the brilliant yet controversial John Boyd and argues “Boyd never applied the discipline of an historian to his research, he was a blind strategist trapped in the darkness of fraudulent history guided by the confirmation bias inherent within the logic of his grail quest” (301). The majority of the book is consequently an examination of the poor use or outright falsification of the history that underpins Boyd’s work, as well as the work of his supporters. Through this study, however, Robinson does a superb job providing a historiography of maneuver warfare.



For readers unfamiliar with Boyd, he was a highly influential US Air Force fighter pilot and military theorist in the second half of the twentieth century. He flew combat missions during the Korean War and his real influence began after the war when developing his military theory. His most important contribution was the observe-orient-decide-act (OODA) loop. OODA loops are tactical decision cycles, and the side that completes these decision cycles faster than their opponent will win the engagement. This theory led Boyd to write the Air Force fighter doctrine, and he subsequently was instrumental in developing the F-16 and the F/A-18. In addition, Boyd expanded the idea of the OODA loop and getting “inside your opponent’s decision cycle” from a simple tactical version to a more robust operational version—the birth of what Boyd and his supporters would call maneuver warfare (15).

In his first chapter, Robinson explores the emergence of maneuver warfare but claims it is “a temple built on sand” (16). He proceeds systematically in 10 chapters to describe the history on which Boyd based maneuver warfare. Highlights include the blatantly fabricated history of the self-promoting Liddell Hart, the *Wehrmacht* generals’ post-war efforts to distance themselves from Hitler and their failure during World War II, the mythology surrounding German stormtroopers and blitzkrieg, maneuver warfare and the defense of NATO, the absence of

maneuver warfare in the Gulf War (1991), and much more. Robinson conducted comprehensive research to support these chapters, demonstrated by an extensive bibliography and frequent footnotes. Overall, Robinson claims “maneuver warfare, was founded upon mythology, but this became apparent only after professional historians exposed the historical fraud concocted by German generals and Liddell Hart” (300).

Robinson does fine work exposing the issues with the history Boyd and others used, yet there are aspects of maneuver warfare that remain useful. Robinson depicts Boyd’s final OODA loop—which includes feedback loops and is useful for the operational level—but does not explore the broader version of the OODA loop in detail. Other aspects of maneuver warfare remain valuable and underpin the United States Marine Corps warfighting operational concept. This information raises the question of what exactly is an operational concept. In the 2001 *Army* magazine article, “That Elusive Operational Concept,” David A. Fastabend defined an operational concept as “an image of combat: a concise visualization that portrays the strategic requirement, the adversary and his capabilities, and the scenario by which that adversary will be overcome to accomplish the strategic requirement. It is a governing idealization that addresses those activities necessary to link tactical activities in a purposeful way to address the goals of strategy” (51, no. 6). While Boyd and his supporters would likely argue maneuver warfare was more than an operational concept, aspects of maneuver warfare still have merit as a visualization or set of guiding principles for successfully conducting warfare.

In the cover blurbs, scholarly experts in military theory claim Stephen Robinson’s book is a “must-read” and “Boyd’s advocates will not want to read, but should” (back cover). They are right—military professionals and historians alike should read this book and consider it deeply. Robinson makes a solid case that the history Boyd and his supporters used to support their work was based on falsehoods and even purposeful fabrications by Hart. This historical issue should give anyone considering maneuver warfare cause to reflect if our existing doctrine is built on flawed historical data. Although Robinson effectively hammers the historical underpinnings of Boyd and maneuver warfare, aspects of maneuver warfare are ideals military forces can and should attempt to achieve given appropriate circumstances. *The Blind Strategist* is an excellent catalyst for thought and debate.

## CHINA

## China Risen? Studying Chinese Global Power

By Shaun Breslin

Reviewed by Colonel Gerald Krieger, US Army Forces Command

There is a cottage industry of books and articles on China written by academics, independent researchers, and think tanks, with more published every month. Shaun Breslin's *China Risen? Studying Chinese Global Power*, assesses China's rising global power while evaluating its effectiveness in achieving its international objectives. Breslin is novel here, using Chinese sources—including academic journals considered obscure even within China—to present the vast and complex opinions within the country. His approach is instructive and parts the complex veil of its internal politics ever so slightly (225). Readers walk away understanding the characteristics of geopolitical discussions within China.



In six chapters, Breslin evaluates China's global blueprint and depicts the country's internal politics, grand strategy, ideological language, and soft power quest. Some scholars have indicated China, despite its vast economic resources, is still a partial power. While this point is still disputed, Breslin convincingly makes a case that "whatever the threshold for being a global power is China has already crossed it"—the transformation of the Chinese state is nothing short of miraculous (3).

Breslin examines various aspects of China's growing influence via hard economic power, normative power, and soft-power ambitions. Over the past few years, its quest for soft power through the popular Confucius Institutes has generated controversy in the United States and Europe. Breslin suggests China's growing influence cannot be attributed to a single source of power, given the myriad of circumstances and contemporary geopolitics. China's leaders still struggle to understand that soft power emanates from culture and industry and is not wielded like hard-power economic instruments. Breslin admits his book omits one key aspect of growing Chinese power via the military, but this topic is best treated independently.

Many analysts note China is a threat to American national security, citing its Huawei 5G program or aspirations in the South China Sea. More often than not, the threat is less clear-cut. There are many perspectives on the issue; Breslin writes: “To be sure, it is not always clear what China is being identified as a threat to; perhaps a different type of threat to different things for different people” (229). The headlines surrounding China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), implied to be an example of Chinese “debt-trap diplomacy,” is another example that captures the distortion around Chinese intentions (231).

While evidence shows several countries involved in BRI face loan repayment issues, this discovery is still not proof of a deliberate policy. Breslin suggests there are many actors in China who often act in ways that run counter to the objectives of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and “assuming a deliberate debt-trap diplomacy strategy results in a focus on the wrong drivers and at times the wrong actors” (231).

Complicating the narrative are China’s opaque lending practices, which noticeably do not conform to Western lending practices. Within China, financial support to developing nations is viewed as a way to secure national objectives, such as ensuring access to vital natural resources like copper, iron, gold, and manganese from Mozambique, Tanzania, and Zambia. Many state-owned enterprises determine whether commercial activity is designed for profit or for securing natural resources to support Chinese interests (130).

China is not the only influential global actor exerting influence in developing countries, though the point is often missed. The nations of the Pacific Islands, which typically have high debt levels, are an example. While China is the primary lender for Tonga and Japan, other multilateral institutions serve as the primary sources of loans and aid to other Pacific island countries. Breslin writes, “[i]f we are worried about the causes and consequences of debt in these countries, then China is part of the story and any potential solution. But not all of it” (233). Readers can apply this template to the world, including many of China’s BRI partners. While the CCP sets economic performance objectives and tightly controls the economy, its new financial system is not the familiar neoliberal capitalism. In the video, “Is China creating a new type of economic system?,” Barry Naughton dubs China’s new system “capitalism with steerage” (University of Massachusetts Workshop, 2021). While the CCP touts slogans and single-focused objectives, many actors pursue commercial profit-based agendas that at times conflict with state objectives, creating dysfunctional outcomes with national policies (90). It would have been helpful for Breslin to cover this newly emerging scholarship and research.

For the past several decades, countries have been quietly pushing back against an American-led Western world order but have lacked the economic clout to back up these challenges. China’s growing influence makes it the exception. Breslin

admits, “[m]aybe just not being the West is enough to make China’s world view attractive” (236). In the growing Sino-US challenge, there is ample room for a new perspective. Breslin’s detailed analysis debunks the idea the world is shifting to a global order fashioned by the CCP. A more realistic understanding of Chinese intentions underscores a multipolar world where China’s objectives and decisions increasingly influence the geopolitical landscape. The new world order will be complex and challenging for any single country to lead or dominate (239–40). Leaders in the West and the rest of the world must accept China’s new role and influence in global affairs, despite disagreements with CCP leadership. Demonizing China and misreading its intentions will only generate misunderstandings and saber-rattling counterproductive in the new international order. A well-needed addition to all bookshelves, *China Risen* is an asset to scholarship on China and should be required reading for all senior military and civilian leaders involved in crafting US policy.

**Stronger:  
Adapting America’s China Strategy in an Age  
of Competitive Interdependence**

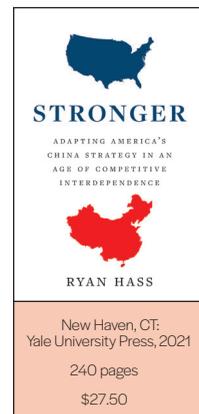
By Ryan Hass

Reviewed by Dr. Andrew Scobell, distinguished fellow for China,  
United States Institute of Peace

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**R**yan Hass—a central figure in early twenty-first century US-China relations—has been engaged in the relationship for two decades, active both in the trenches and at the apex of power. He has written an insightful and illuminating book on the subject, with insights and analysis informed by his firsthand experiences from postings at the US embassy in Beijing and the National Security Council as the China point person.

In an era where the most enduring multidimensional external national security challenge facing the United States is China, almost everyone seems to be an expert. Many of these self-styled experts have penned books purporting to provide key insights or uncover secret schemes. Of all the available tomes, *Stronger* is a volume every national security professional should read. Why? First, the book—written by an expert in the field—is a succinct primer for anyone seeking to understand contemporary China policy. Hass has produced a masterful overview



with authoritative analysis and sensible recommendations. He explains how Washington and Beijing reached the current state of contention and confrontation and reviews—in sufficient but not mind-numbing detail—all the critical issues, including economics, technology, human rights, and military matters. Second, all serious China policy players in the US government will have read it. *Stronger* is likely the one book your boss has read or at least skimmed. Anyone who wants to be effective in their job should be conversant with the analyses and recommendations Hass outlines. Of course, not everyone will agree with what Hass writes.

The fundamental assumption of *Stronger* is “the old policy playbook for managing U.S.-China relations no longer holds answers . . .” (5). According to Hass, bilateral relations have evolved into a condition of “competitive interdependence” whereby “[n]either country is capable of imposing its will on the other at acceptable cost or risk, and yet both countries hold preferences and priorities that place them at sharp odds with each other” (4). What policy prescription does Hass recommend? He contends: “To compete effectively with China, America’s leaders should focus on fostering greater national cohesion, restoring America’s international prestige, and preserving its historically unmatched network of alliance relationships” (9).

My main quibble with *Stronger* is the author’s excessive optimism about America’s ability to negotiate skillfully the challenge of competing with China. Hass asserts Beijing faces “the hardest governance challenge on the planet” and contrasts this problem with the multiple factors that should give the United States the clear advantage (192). Yet, Hass may significantly underestimate the array and magnitude of domestic challenges confronting the United States. In other words, America’s governance challenge may be as difficult as China’s. Quibble aside, Hass rightly identifies the precondition for a successful US strategy toward China—Washington must get it right at home.

Hass provides the best overview and analysis of contemporary US-China relations I have seen in many years. In particular, uniformed and civilian professionals of the US defense establishment should peruse the thoughtful and thorough chapter five titled “Mitigating Risks of Conflict” (126). The Pentagon, Hass suggests, will face difficult choices as it seeks “to align its capabilities with its ambitions in an era of growing fiscal restraints” (153). Penned in unpretentious and jargon-free prose, *Stronger* will appeal to a wide audience including national security practitioners, policy wonks, educators, students, and anyone wrestling with the long-term challenge China presents to the United States.

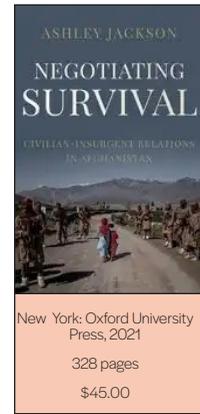
## MIDDLE EAST

## Negotiating Survival: Civilian-Insurgent Relations in Afghanistan

By Ashley Jackson

Reviewed by Dr. Heather S. Gregg, research professor of military strategy and policy, Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College

The sudden collapse of the Afghan government and the Taliban's takeover of the country in August 2021 caught almost everyone off guard. Ashley Jackson, a scholar of armed conflicts with over a decade of experience in Afghanistan, has a provocative explanation for these dramatic events: "An essential part of understanding the Taliban's once-improbable resurrection and ascent lay in their relationships with civilians" (4). Specifically, in *Negotiating Survival: Civilian-Insurgent Relations in Afghanistan*, Jackson documents through 418 interviews with civilians and members of the Taliban across 15 provinces that, beginning around 2017, Afghan communities and members of the Taliban began to actively negotiate and cut deals with one another as a survival strategy. The end result of these negotiation was what Jackson calls a Taliban "parallel bureaucracy replete with governors, courts, tax collectors and even school monitors" (4). These shadow governments helped pave the way for the Taliban's rapid takeover of the country once it successfully negotiated the complete withdrawal of the US military by the end of August 2021.



To more broadly explain this process of civilian-insurgent bargaining, Jackson develops a framework that focuses on three variables: interests, including civilians' desire for survival and insurgents' need for legitimacy and organizational survival; leverage, including the use of coercion and violence, persuasion (the story or narrative), and incentives, such as social services and other goods; and social capital, which she defines as "not relationships and norms alone but the new options and abilities that arise from them" (38). Through the combination of these three broad variables, insurgents and the population navigate a complicated relationship that recognizes each group's needs and mutual dependency. Within this theory, Jackson notes a few important caveats that shape these negotiations. Critically, insurgents have far more power and leverage at the negotiation table than do populations. Furthermore, insurgents who want political legitimacy are more willing to negotiate than those that do not. She also contends that the more senior and cohesive the insurgent group, the more likely it can successfully make

and keep its agreements with the population and, similarly, the more unified a community, the more likely it can bargain and negotiate with insurgents. Finally, in most cases insurgents and the population do not easily have the option to walk away from negotiations, unlike in business deals. It is this complicated mixture of incentives, threats, and the dynamic relationship built between insurgents and populations that produce reciprocal arrangements that are, at least in some ways, mutually beneficial.

Jackson applies this framework specifically to Afghanistan to explain why the U.S. led military strategy failed. Through her interviews and time spent in several key provinces, she identifies where counterinsurgent forces failed to understand the complex ways in which the Taliban worked with the population for their own political survival and struck mutually beneficial agreements. She argues that “the Taliban has been consistently underestimated by their opponents, in part because their opponents focused almost exclusively on the Taliban’s acts of violence and terror,” and discounted the many ways in which they collaborated with the population for their compliance (213). She further notes that western strategists assumed that an Islamic movement would be unyielding in its ideological aims and, therefore, their eradication was the only option. By contrast, she finds that pragmatism trumped ideology in Afghanistan, allowing for deviation from maxims and dogma. Ultimately, she concludes that the Taliban succeeded in attaining the population’s compliance through iterative negotiations over time and that “. . . compliance is not ‘won’ in a decisive victory. Rather it is mediated and maintained through continual negotiation” (215). Jackson notes that bargaining and negotiations worked particularly well for the Taliban in areas where it had a degree of control and where military confrontation was minimal. Under these conditions, the Taliban used negotiations with the population to consolidate its gains. It also had greater responsibility to deliver goods and services to the population, giving the population had some leverage with which to negotiate. In areas that were militarily contested, the relationship between the population and insurgents was less dynamic.

Jackson’s book is essential readings for scholars and practitioners who wish to better understand the central role that populations play in shaping insurgencies and their outcomes. Rather than assume that populations are passive bystanders in an armed conflict, Jackson identifies the agency that they have and seeks to understand the conditions under which populations, including women, can and do negotiate with insurgents to shape their future. Alongside agency Jackson further includes the role that emotions play in armed conflicts and negotiations, which is another critical yet under-investigated topic in war studies.

Jackson’s research demonstrates that discounting or ignoring the role that populations play in counterinsurgencies will most likely result in strategic failure. She summarizes, “The neglect of civilian agency and behavior has fundamentally

impaired our understanding of how wars are fought and won or lost” (212). This observation is particularly important when considering the priorities that the U.S. military and its allies had in Afghanistan, including their focus on building Afghan security forces, elections and the structure of the government for building a viable state. Ultimately, while highly measurable pursuits, these counterinsurgency strategies may not be successful if they do not include actively include the population and recognize their role as active participants in the war and its outcome.

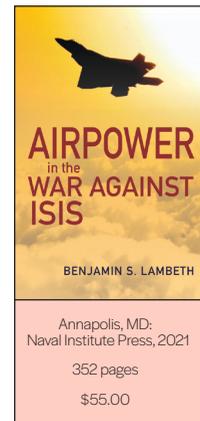
## Airpower in the War against ISIS

By Benjamin S. Lambeth

Reviewed by Dr. Conrad C. Crane, chief of analysis and research,  
US Army Heritage and Education Center

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No one is a more respected or versatile commentator about contemporary airpower than Benjamin Lambeth, a nonresident senior fellow with the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments following a 37-year career at the RAND Corporation. He has written books about American air operations in Operation Enduring Freedom, NATO’s air war for Kosovo, and Israeli air operations against Hezbollah. His latest work, *Airpower in the War against ISIS*, examines Operation Inherent Resolve over a four-year period, 2014–18, as US Central Command (CENTCOM) fought the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). As usual with his work, he provides much to ponder for practitioners of airpower and leaders who want to apply it.



Lambeth pulls no punches. He begins by excoriating the Obama administration for leaving Iraq in 2011 and permitting the conditions that led to the rise of ISIS. After two years of increasing terrorist provocations and expanding incursions resulting in the fall of Mosul, President Barack Obama finally authorized Operation Inherent Resolve. Lambeth characterizes the air strikes in 2014 as “half-hearted” and lacking serious purpose, typified by “unproductive gradualism and misplaced targeting emphasis” (11). This initial “fundamental misjudgment” of the character of the conflict by CENTCOM leadership produced a “needlessly prolonged and costly air war” (218). By contrast, once the Trump administration came into office in 2017, President Donald Trump authorized Secretary of

Defense James Mattis to expand and intensify the air campaign, resulting in the crushing of ISIS in little more than a year.

Lambeth is especially critical of restrictive rules of engagement that seemed more concerned with limiting collateral damage than hurting ISIS. He argues the campaign should not have been envisioned as counterinsurgency, with a focus on winning hearts and minds, but instead ISIS should have been considered a protostate meriting the application of more decisive force. He also argues then CENTCOM Commander General Lloyd J. Austin III—and his chosen US Army commander for the Operation Inherent Resolve Joint Task Force—misdiagnosed their mission as primarily a ground war, and the campaign would have been better served with an airman in charge of at least the initial phase of the operation.

Lambeth's grasp of tactical details is impressive and less controversial. Air operations to liberate Mosul and Al-Raqqah receive considerable attention, as does the mission that killed jihadist leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. He describes the performance of various aircraft and weapons used during the campaign, including the first combat sorties of the F-22 Raptor and new intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance systems.

The section about the Russian intervention in Syria is particularly insightful. He describes the provocations and airspace challenges that ensued, along with a number of combat actions. In one February 2018 incident, Russian mercenaries and allies attacked an American special operations forces outpost. Americans retaliated with punishing air strikes that killed as many as 200 Russian personnel—but also led to the inadvertent bombing of Syrian government troops, revealing human error has still not been eliminated from increasingly complex targeting procedures. For both sides, the incident was “a windfall opportunity for reciprocal learning” (175). The Russians were able to watch American air warfighting up close and compare aircraft. In turn, US observers analyzed their aerial counterparts for changes in air doctrine and employment. Though the Russians employed new precision technologies, their air operations still had more in common with World War II-era frontal aviation support than more dynamic American targeting.

*Airpower in the War against ISIS* is definitely a book of the COVID-19 era. Its extensive documentation relies primarily on media reports and e-mails to work around travel and access restrictions. Its greatest strength is also its greatest weakness. Lambeth presents the airman's view of Operation Inherent Resolve in great detail, based on an impressive number of e-mail messages and manuscript reviews ranging from senior US Air Force noncommissioned officers to American and Australian Air Force generals. Lambeth's analysis of the broader aspects of American policy and the campaign would have benefited greatly from a Joint and interagency approach that better examined other viewpoints for those actions he criticizes. Some Iraqi commentary would also have been useful. While

the book comes across as rather parochial, it is bound to be acknowledged as the seminal work on the contributions of airpower in the war against ISIS, just as the title promises.

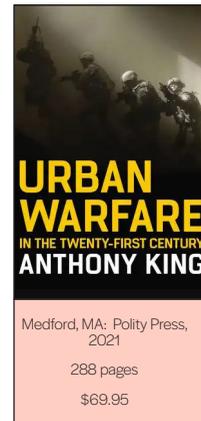
## URBAN WARFARE

## Urban Warfare in the Twenty-First Century

by Anthony King

Reviewed by Dr. Russell W. Glenn, principal, Innovative Defense Research

Anthony King's *Urban Warfare in the Twenty-First Century* is an unusual book and a challenge to review. King seeks to provide a new analytic approach to urban warfare, one providing a "sociology of urban warfare" endeavoring "to transcend [previous] disciplinary limitations by analyzing the interplay between cities, weaponry, and forces in order to unite social and military sciences." The ultimate outcome is less successful in that regard than as a presentation of the challenges and conditions inherent when combat visits urban environments backed by impressive research spanning a broad spectrum of historical contingencies. While King provides fewer revelations for longtime students of urban operations, he presents a potential resource for readers less familiar with city fighting. As such, the book could complement Louis A. DiMarco's *Concrete Hell: Urban Warfare from Stalingrad to Iraq* (2012), Roger J. Spiller's *Sharp Corners: Urban Operations at Century's End* (2000), other resources addressing specific urban battles or other-than-combat urban disasters, and the many studies published over the past 30 years that focus on specific aspects of urban undertakings.



The book lives up to King's promise to take a force size-centric versus environment-centric analytic approach. Its first half sets the stage writ large, reaching deep into the past before reviewing what comprises a city from both academic and pragmatic perspectives. Threats posed by irregular forces, the evolution of the urban guerrilla, and the influence of city size and structure on combat operations establish a foundation for chapters addressing military capabilities in terms of "Air," "Fire[s]," "Swarms," "Partners," and "Rumour" (considers information and information operations in terms of conflicts in cities). A final chapter, "Armageddon," briefly contemplates the future of urban combat.

The strength of King's offering is unquestionably his depth of research and fine pen in presenting fighting during operations in Syria, Marawi on the Philippine island of Mindanao, and Iraq's Baghdad, Fallujah, and Mosul in addition to many more distantly past operations. Belfast, Marawi, and Mosul receive special attention to good effect. Even longtime students of urban operations will find the occasional revelation rarely—if ever—found in previous publications. King

wisely avoids the oversimplification of presenting cities as organisms, an analogy that quickly breaks down in light of the inherent complexity of urban areas. Interestingly, and perhaps deliberately as a way of sidestepping a related technical discussion despite its relevance to social theory, the potentially illuminating characterization of large urban areas as ecosystems is also foregone.

King rejects viewing cities in terms of their flows. Instead he suggests a more appropriate approach is to appreciate them as consisting of groups and interactions between them. Here his effort to convince regarding the applicability of a sociological approach seems strained. Complexity makes such either-or depictions of the urban character a hard sell. Comprehending this complexity requires an inclusive approach when describing: density (also recognized by King as a key descriptor), social groups and relationships, flows, overarching system considerations (both internal to the city and in terms of the city as a component of larger systems). All these terms offer benefits in pursuit of urban area comprehension; one or two will not suffice to address the comprehension conundrum fully. Anyone believing they fully grasp all that comprises an urban area need only wait for a few moments before a city will present a previously unseen nuance, relationship, challenge, or opportunity. Understanding urban environments and operations is an unending pursuit rather than a condition attained.

Use of *Urban Warfare* as an introductory text could ironically benefit from King's sometimes too narrow presentation of existing urban theory and practice. Complementing his book or excerpts with readings offering alternative explanations, different approaches, or contrary descriptions would serve as stimulus for student discussions and written assignments. For example, the King's acceptance of what comprises a city as an entity (based on a threshold of 100,000 population or some combination of density and spread) overlooks the considerable challenge of dealing with dramatically varied definitions of urban area and city employed by academics, nations, and international bodies. Unhelpfully, the United Nations has no single definition of urban area, instead using the country-specific definitions of whatever countries they are operating in at the time.

King's conclusion that "the congested, multidimensional challenges of urban operations do not pertain below a dense population of 3,000" need not be incorrect, but the implication that so fixed a demarcation holds notable significance implies an operational importance that does not exist. The number, any number, is less significant than other factors collectively meriting consideration during the planning and conduct of urban operations. These and other considerations regarding urban environments and combat in cities (for example, King's conclusion that urban warfare is more likely given smaller militaries in much of the world today or his belief that "a successful information campaign requires networks of true believers" rather than simply sufficient numbers of the naïve, ignorant, or

gullible) will surprise readers intimately familiar with urban operations. While there is much good in this book, readers looking to *Urban Warfare* as their initial resource regarding urban warfare should read with a questioning mind and plan to complement its reading with others' thinking on the subject.

