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## Book Reviews

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## Book Reviews

DEFENSE STUDIES

### A Violent Peace: Race, U.S. Militarism, and Cultures of Democratization in Cold War Asia and the Pacific

By Christine Hong

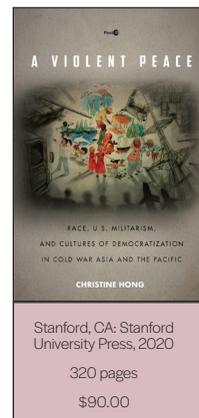
Reviewed by Eric Setzekorn, historian, US Army Center of Military History

Christine Hong, in *A Violent Peace: Race, U.S. Militarism, and Cultures of Democratization in Cold War Asia and the Pacific*, uses critical theory to redefine America's post-1945 Asia-Pacific experience around militarism and domination. While the central role of the US military in the Asia-Pacific since 1945 deserves more study, *A Violent Peace* confuses rather than clarifies the interrelationship of militarism, race, the impact on local communities, and the connections between US foreign policy and domestic programs.

Hong primarily argues US military supremacy in the Asia-Pacific in the aftermath of World War II enabled the construction of new hegemonic racial and political structures shaped by “catastrophic violence and world-altering terror” (3). A key element of this post-1945 environment was the development of new ideas about race and military power. The US military served as a major player, assimilating the peoples of the region and drafting African Americans—who experienced the opportunities and dangers of Cold War militarism—into military service.

An associate professor of literature and critical race and ethnic studies at the University of California, Santa Cruz, Hong often relies on the works of Cold War-era authors James Baldwin, Carlos Bulosan, Ralph Ellison, and Kenzaburō Ōe to illustrate intercultural conceptual linkages across the Pacific. By mining their ideas on race and power, Hong shows “an untold tale of midcentury U.S. fascism” and her analysis “dilates junctures of political solidarity and alliances during the Cold War among [B]lack Americans, Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders and Asians” amid American military power (12). Recent domestic political debates contextualize the work, which has tenuous connections to the Cold War-era Asia-Pacific.

The book's complex, often murky structure poses a significant challenge for readers. Its numerous narrative threads and digressions complicate the core argument. For instance, chapter 7, “Militarized Queerness,” begins



with a discussion of Dan Choi, an advocate against the military “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy in 2009–11. Hong, however, never clarifies the connection between this segment and the book’s themes. The chapter then fails to advance the main argument with a five-page discussion on the US military’s use of dogs in Vietnam. “Militarized Queerness” concludes with a discussion of Korean children living near US military camps in the early 1950s. Readers must labor to connect such subjects to the work’s themes.

The book’s citations also create confusion. Hong alternates her use of in-text references and footnotes and does not supply a bibliography. Readers will find it challenging to refer to sources supporting key themes. For example, chapter six references Noam Chomsky, with in-text citations with his name and a page number in every other paragraph. Without a clear system of footnotes or a bibliography, I could not determine which of Chomsky’s books many was referenced.

Hong also misdates several events, which, while a minor issue, cultivates a rushed feel to the book. I understand the commercial pressures to release a book while a topic is hot, like critical theory, but these errors hinder the work’s impact.

*A Violent Peace* offers some original theoretical perspectives but largely resembles other critical assessments of US foreign policy. Many of Hong’s references come from the 1970s when academics jaded by the US experience in Vietnam castigated Cold War policies as discriminatory and militarized. Hong provides little new historical information or theory to improve the understanding of the Cold War–era Asia-Pacific. Readers seeking a more historical approach to issues of race and the American military’s encounter with the Asia-Pacific should read Marc Gallicchio’s *The African American Encounter with Japan and China* (University of North Carolina Press, 2000) or Michael Cullen Green’s *Black Yanks in the Pacific* (Cornell University Press, 2010). Readers seeking insights into America’s Cold War–era domestic perspective should read Christina Klein’s *Cold War Orientalism* (University of California Press, 2003), which explores cultural viewpoints, or Kori A. Graves’s *A War Born Family* (New York University Press, 2020), which examines the adoption of Korean War orphans by African American families.

Overall, *A Violent Peace* makes bold theoretical assertions about an interesting topic but the book’s uneven source material and tangled organization impede its effectiveness.

## Nuclear Reactions: How Nuclear-Armed States Behave

By Mark S. Bell

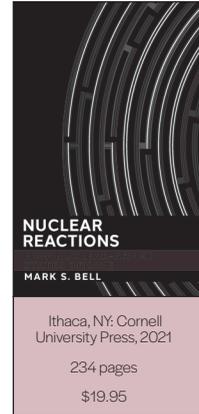
Reviewed by Amy F. Woolf, specialist in nuclear weapons policy,  
Congressional Research Service

Mark S. Bell, in his book, *Nuclear Reactions: How Nuclear-Armed States Behave*, develops the “theory of nuclear opportunism” to explain how states alter their foreign policy after acquiring nuclear weapons (6, 22). While much of the research into nuclear proliferation examines why states seek to acquire these capabilities, Bell focuses on what they might do after acquiring them. The important answer to this latter question would not only help the international community respond to the effects of nuclear proliferation, but it would also afford that community the opportunity to outline the military, political, and economic costs it might face in preventing a state from succeeding in that effort.

Bell notes the difficulty of establishing a single theory to explain how all nuclear-armed states will behave. The theory of nuclear revolution, which posits nuclear-armed states become less aggressive due to the resolution of central security dilemmas, helps account for the lack of a great-power war but says little about broader foreign policy goals nuclear states might pursue. Theories asserting states become more aggressive after acquiring nuclear weapons only explain reasons for aggression and not the full scope of changes in a state’s foreign policy.

With the theory of nuclear opportunism, Bell suggests opportunistic states will use nuclear weapons to improve their position in international politics and achieve political goals. He contends nuclear weapons do not necessitate states change their goals; they reduce neither security worries nor competitiveness. Nuclear weapons facilitate a range of foreign policy behaviors extending beyond the reduction or expansion of aggression, depending on unique policy goals.

Bell begins his explanation of the theory of nuclear opportunism by describing a number of possible behaviors a state might engage in after acquiring nuclear weapons, including: aggression, compromise, goal expansion, the pursuit of independence from an ally, the bolstering of an alliance, and steadfastness in the face of threats. Moreover, the goals a state might pursue, along with the military and political tools it might employ to achieve them, depend on the state’s unique



strategic situation. For example, a state faced with a serious territorial threat or ongoing war might use nuclear weapons to improve its security. If it has a senior ally, then nuclear weapons might allow it to gain independence to pursue its security interests. If a declining power, then it might seek to affect its political trajectory, and if a hopeful rising power, then it might seek to bolster its political image.

Bell tests his theory with detailed reviews of the foreign policy behaviors of South Africa, the United Kingdom, and the United States after each state acquired nuclear weapons. He reviews the historical record to determine why each state acquired nuclear weapons and to describe how its foreign policy changed after it had a deliverable capability. In each case, he finds the model offers insights into how the state pursued its goals and confirms each state exhibited expected behaviors. For example, prior to acquiring nuclear weapons, the United Kingdom had been wary of responding to challenges with military force. After it had a deliverable capability, however, it became more willing to use unilateral force, less attentive to US preferences, and less compromising. Bell concludes nuclear weapons helped the United Kingdom preserve its global position and avoid dependence on the United States.

In Bell's review of other proliferation cases—including those in China, France, India, Israel, and Pakistan—he determines the model, though imperfect, offers insights into how nuclear weapons facilitated the pursuit of these states' foreign policy goals. He notes the seeming exception of China. The theory predicts China would use nuclear weapons to expand its international influence, defend the status quo, and bolster junior allies. China, however, has asserted its nuclear weapons exist only to resist coercion. The study seems to accept this assertion without addressing the recent steps China has taken to expand its influence in international politics and to bolster its regional position. The model may explain China's current behavior as it expands nuclear capabilities but does not predict what China's behavior will be after it has acquired deliverable nuclear weapons.

Bell's research reveals opportunistic states have used nuclear weapons to improve their positions in international politics and to achieve political goals. The theory postulates, and research confirms, nuclear weapons do not change states' political goals but facilitate goal-oriented behaviors. Nuclear weapons affect different states' behaviors in different ways because states have their own aims and means to achieve them. This statement may seem obvious, but it is at odds with current research, which attempts to identify a few overriding goals nations will seek once they have acquired nuclear weapons and to define and design policy responses to block those goals. If nuclear-armed states exhibit different behaviors and pursue different goals reflective of their unique security circumstances, then policymakers will have to deepen their understanding of these states' goals and broaden the range of policy tools to mitigate the risks of nuclear proliferation.

## IRREGULAR WARFARE

## Full Spectrum Dominance: Irregular Warfare and the War on Terror

By Maria Ryan

Reviewed by Dr. José de Arimatéia da Cruz, professor of international relations and comparative politics, Georgia Southern University, and visiting professor, Center for Strategic Leadership, US Army War College

Maria Ryan, a professor of American history at the University of Nottingham, has written an insightful history of the conception of irregular warfare across the US government and on the periphery in the war on terror. *Full Spectrum Dominance: Irregular Warfare and the War on Terror* proposes the pursuit of an irregular warfare capability was part of a broader project with roots predating the application of counterinsurgency in Iraq and transcending the war on terror (4). Ryan argues “9/11 was the initial catalyst for the turn toward irregular warfare because it exposed U.S. security vulnerabilities in spite of unassailable conventional military power” (9).



Irregular warfare developed into a national strategy and doctrine due to several factors: the “globalization” of international security (12); the function of “peripheral theaters of the war on terror” as the “testing grounds for the utilization of irregular tactics” (12); and the development of the Iraqi insurgency (12).

The conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq have widely defined America’s war on terror. Ryan explains secondary fronts in Georgia, the Caspian Sea Basin, the Philippines, and sub-Saharan Africa have become key testing sites for developing what the Department of Defense calls “full spectrum dominance” (4). Ryan defines this concept as “dominance across the entire spectrum of warfare from conventional through to irregular conflict, in order to ensure the continuation of US military preeminence in an era of globalization, in which networked nonstate actors now also challenged US hegemony alongside traditional state-based threats” (4). Since the Army’s potential enemies include regular conventional armed forces and nonstate actors, accomplishing globalized full spectrum dominance requires conventional warfare and asymmetric capabilities. To execute this strategy, the Army aims to combine “an offensive approach to both irregular challenges and conventional military affairs” (17).

Ryan makes another important contribution by asserting full spectrum dominance provides an optimistic outlook on the future of military warfare and a “rejection of the narrative of American decline by the Bush administration” (213). Ryan writes the strategy “is grounded in the belief that the United States should and could dominate international relations not just in the realm of conventional state-based affairs but also at the transnational level” (213). This overextension of confidence regarding America’s military dominance has roots in a decentralized and chaotic post–Cold War international system with wars characterized as networked insurgency–style warfare. Conventional military power has limited value in the face of asymmetric challenges exploitative of US vulnerabilities. To counter such threats requires unconventional activity (31).

Regarding the fourth-generation warfare theater, Ryan writes “nation-states” are “no longer the only actors on the international stage” (7) and “[t]ransnational and subnational groups and networks” are “emerging as powerful forces” (7). Ungoverned areas in which a state cannot furnish basic provisions for its citizens have become fertile ground for terrorist organizations and criminal enterprise networks. As Ryan explains, “[t]he strategy also reiterated the problem of ‘ungoverned states and under-governed territories,’ stressing the need to ‘deny terrorists safe haven in failed states and ungoverned regions’” (44).

The African continent served as a trial location for a whole government approach utilizing full spectrum dominance, which began with the establishment of a regional task force based in the East African country Djibouti (85). Other initiatives in Africa included the Pan Sahel Initiative (PSI), developed in response to the US government’s identification of the Sahel as its number two focus in Africa (the Horn remains number one) in the war on terrorism (89). The State Department established a second interagency program, the East Africa Counterterrorism Initiative, in June 2003 as a “counterpart” to the PSI (93). The important establishment of the African Command (AFRICOM) in 2007 allowed for a “‘holistic’ approach to security that would include good governance, the rule of law, and economic opportunity, as well as more traditional security missions such as train-and-equip programs, with the ‘emphasis on prevention’” (110).

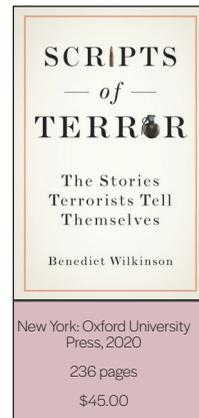
Based on Ryan’s insightful observations, I recommend *Full Spectrum Dominance* to readers interested in security studies, especially US Army War College students.

## Scripts of Terror: The Stories Terrorists Tell Themselves

By Benedict Wilkinson

Reviewed by Dr. Whitney Grespin, lecturer and regional program lead,  
Institute for Governance, Defense Security Cooperation University,  
and non-resident fellow, Joint Special Operations University

**B**enedict Wilkinson, in *Scripts of Terror*, a book adaptation of the author's PhD findings, provides a theoretical framework for readers to apply to motivations of violent Islamist groups and the strategy of terrorism. Well-researched and lucid, *Scripts of Terror* identifies eight narrative "scripts" fundamental to the motivation and evolution of Islamist extremist organizations in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen. The scripts, drawn from three case studies, consist of: "survival, power play, mobilisation, provocation and polarisation, de-legitimisation, attrition, co-operation, and de-mobilisation" (7).



Wilkinson analyzes irregular warfare through valuable vignettes illustrating the potential for different responses from violent extremist organizations (VEOs) faced with similar problem sets. Bringing these episodes' outcomes to attention provides opportunities for informative or insightful thought exercises for strategists conceiving responses to or predicting second- and third-order effects of terrorism.

Wilkinson highlights the phenomenon of VEO subsets formulating scripts independently of leadership. For instance, he writes, "whilst the organisations were acting towards al-Qa'ida's ambitions, they were not acting according to a grand master strategy developed by bin Laden, but to all intents and purposes formulating their scripts autonomously" (67). The decentralization of script creation should remind readers some VEO subsets pursue a "commander's intent" through their own methods; no script is prescriptive.

The work reads primarily as academic. Wilkinson's (admirable) observation of the central problem lacks a "step further" approach. He never articulates policy relevance or draws on his expertise to recommend responses to, interruptions of, or mitigations of scripts. Wilkinson neglects to address the roles of states as incubators for VEOs and misses an opportunity to better characterize the relationship between scripts and their settings (92).

Geopolitical realities and time constraints limit the book's case studies to a Central Command-focus and field research conducted in one country. The work might have benefited from broader consideration of similar groups in different areas of responsibility to determine whether differing trends could emerge elsewhere. The (albeit inevitable) omission of such data weakens the authority of Wilkinson's claims.

The book's biggest contribution lies in its opportunities to interpret each script as a potential course of action with benefits and detriments dependent upon leadership and context (73). With this approach, Wilkinson's scripts could facilitate an intellectual wargaming experience in which readers could analyze incentives and disincentives for each script used by an adversary. Wilkinson acknowledges the importance of observation and anticipation, writing: "Without stories and their cause-effect structures, the outcomes of actions cannot be envisaged and decisions can only be made blindly in the vague hope that something advantageous might arise" (143).

Even with areas in need of improvement, *Scripts of Terror* could serve as a useful primer for VEO case studies. It could prepare practitioners as pre-deployment reading for a better understanding of the foundations and evolutions of potential adversaries. Readers of this publication should be cautioned through this work against the perils of "believing their own press." Wilkinson writes violent Islamists "were deluded by the compelling narratives of scripts as stories [as] [t]hese stories were so alluring . . . that their inherent flaws were glossed over, ignored or dismissed." The *Parameters* community of practice also risks convincing itself of narratives contradicting ground truth.

## The Unknown Enemy: Counterinsurgency and the Illusion of Control

By Christian Tripodi

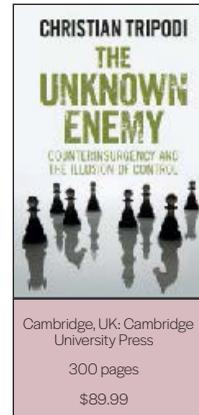
Reviewed by Dr. Kalev Sepp, senior lecturer, Naval Postgraduate School

Was there a misplaced focus on populations and cultures in the prosecution of the military campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan? Dr. Christian Tripodi presents a historical analysis and indictment of a century of attempts by Western commanders to wage counterinsurgency warfare in support of national policies. His review covers five cases of failed and failing British, French, and US interventions, with selected quotations from over 330 books and articles by scholars, journalists, and memoirists and four archival sources.

A senior lecturer in the Defence Studies Department of King's College London, the author's previous book examined British political officers on the North-West Frontier of colonial India, 1877–1947. Tripodi displays a sense of the perennial intricacies of control and conflict in destabilized regions and sees a critical emphasis placed by Western armies deployed in these zones on understanding their operational environment; that is, “the peoples and cultures they operate amongst” (xi). Noting this, he asks, “[W]hat is the relationship between such forms of understanding to the success of these endeavors” (xi)?

Tripodi begins his answer by arguing that then-Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, in his 2002 listing of “knowns” and “unknowns,” left out “unknown knowns”—which the reader eventually comprehends as biases and reflexes deeply embedded in a nation's strategic character (178). These are collectively “The Unknown Enemy” of the book's title (chosen as it happens, by the book's editor), and chiefly explain recurring shortcomings of the Western way of counterinsurgency.

The author critiques American and British efforts in the Afghanistan and Iraq wars to “know the human terrain” as paradoxically replacing “strategy with stereotypes” (4). He assesses that their planning drew on “bad history” and the “questionable” works of T. E. Lawrence, Mao Zedong, and David Galula (11). Counterinsurgency, Tripodi proposes, must be understood by practitioners as “political warfare . . . when warfare is used not simply to create the terms for political victory, but instead as a force of politics *in and of itself*” (22, author's emphasis). Socio-cultural intelligence and “big data,” he contends, do not enable



military officers to deal adequately with “phenomena they rarely comprehend” in this kind of fight (23).

The four themes Tripodi employs to examine each of the counterinsurgencies are: (1) Imperialism, defined as expeditionary democratization; (2) the Nature of War, which he believes is “largely hidden” to military leaders; (3) the Power of Doctrine, epitomized by *US Field Manual 3-24*, which holds a “host of assumptions” and “facile and unworkable principles”; and (4) Policy, Tactics, and the Military Operational Code, a term Tripodi borrows from an unpublished doctoral dissertation, meaning a “set of beliefs about certain rules of action,” which can simply be called organizational culture (28–43, 182).

In each of the five cases Tripodi analyzes with his four themes, he discovers succinct reasons for governmental and military failure. On the British-ruled Indian North-West Frontier, 1919–39, the Indian Political Service was manipulated by the local Pashtuns and burdened by a “directionless and confusing” British policy (88). Similarly, an insupportable French national policy during the Algerian War, 1954–62, drove the Sections Administratives Spécialisé (SAS) to militarize counterinsurgency, winning tactical actions but losing the war. The US Military Advisory Command in Vietnam, 1964–72, did not recognize the “fundamental uselessness of pacification.”

Three decades later, the British Army in Basra and the US forces in Al Anbar, Iraq, 2006–9, were at “the mercy of powerful local actors,” which the Americans “didn’t understand.” The UK-US actions to counter the insurgencies produced consequences contrary to their strategic objectives; pacifying Anbar empowered the Sunni majority, causing “immense frictions” with the Shia-led national government. As for Afghanistan, NATO’s fight in Helmand, 2006–14, could not be won because of Afghan corruption, the Pakistani sanctuary, and Western governments tiring of the war—announcing in 2010 that their military forces would withdraw by 2014. In 2021, they belatedly implemented that decree.

Tripodi agrees with many strategists and analysts who preceded him. His note of debilitating “bureaucratic interests” was well disposed by Ambassador Robert Komer in his 1973 Vietnam retrospective *Bureaucracy Does Its Thing: Institutional Constraints on U.S.-GVN Performance in Vietnam*, where Komer identified the “inherent reluctance of organizations to change operational methods” (118). During the Iraq and Afghanistan interventions, Professor Eliot Cohen, Jan Horvath, and John Nagl, offered offered “Principles, Imperatives, and Paradoxes of Counterinsurgency” (*Military Review*, March-April 2006). Among their paradoxical dictums: “If a tactic works this week, it will not work next week; if it works in this province, it will not work in the next.” They warn, and Tripodi echoes, “Tactical success guarantees nothing.” Tripodi’s bibliography does not include such references and is not a counterinsurgency reading list.

None of Tripodi's assessments is particularly new, although they are usually not presented with such academic condescension. For military commanders, "a true understanding of (the war in Helmand) was even more problematic than a misunderstanding, or even no understanding at all . . ." (195). Senior commanders were " . . . without benefit of a historian's eye for the inherent problems" of the role of military power as an agent of change (66). One might allow that General David Petraeus' doctoral dissertation, subtitled "A Study of Military Influence and the Use of Force in the Post-Vietnam Era" (1987), and Lieutenant General H. R. McMaster's PhD in military history qualify them as historians. Their advisers, like Pashto-speaking analyst Carter Malkasian (mentioned in the preface) were similarly credentialed. Yet, Tripodi gives them little credit.

A viable assessment of the value of socio-cultural intelligence in counterinsurgency requires investigation of winning campaigns as well as losses—but none are studied. The government successes in Malaya versus the Malayan National Liberation Army (MLRA), France versus the Organisation Armée Secrète (OAS), Philippines versus Hukbalahap, El Salvador versus the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN), Peru versus Sendero Luminoso, or Turkey versus Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), among others, could have been researched. And if application of cultural knowledge does not work, then what does? Tripodi offers no solutions besides calling for military professionals "to better understand their role" as "political actors" in such conflicts (208). Military professionals may find his lengthy, if eloquent, sentences and paragraphs often obscure rather than clarify his arguments.

Engaging Russian, Chinese, and Iranian expansion below the level of conventional and nuclear combat—that is, in the realm of political warfare—is now recognized as a strategic imperative. There are foundational tutorials: the 1942 British Political Warfare Executive white paper, George F. Kennan's 1948 State Department memorandum, *The Inauguration of Organized Political Warfare*, and the 1950 National Security Council policy paper NSC-68, *United States Objectives and Programs for National Security*, all consider political warfare in the context of what is now termed great-power competition. Counterinsurgency is just one of its operational components. For military commanders and staffs, wide study of this "like-war-but-not-war," and previous successes and failures in its conduct, may be useful preparation for the demands they may have to meet in the very near future.

## MILITARY HISTORY

## Tower of Skulls: A History of the Asia-Pacific War, July 1937–May 1942

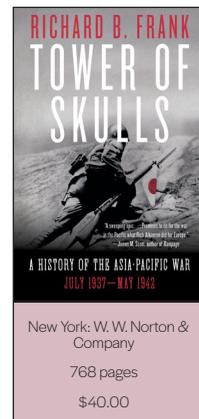
By Richard B. Frank

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

Richard Frank's *Tower of Skulls* shares many similarities with Rick Atkinson's *An Army at Dawn*. Both superb, "bingeable" first volumes of World War II trilogies contextualize the American Army in different theaters of war. Frank's *Tower of Skulls* resembles *An Army at Dawn* in the quality of its research and readability but has a broader scope. Frank focuses on the Asia-Pacific War as a whole rather than one theater and one army. Frank delivers on the sweeping and ambitious nature of *Tower of Skulls*. Given contemporary concerns in the Western Pacific, Frank's efforts are especially relevant to military historians and senior members of the defense community.

As the subtitle suggests, the book spans the period from July 1937, the beginning of the Second Sino-Japanese War (July 7, 1937–September 9, 1945), to May 1942, the day before the Japanese–American carrier battle of the Coral Sea. Frank spends the first five chapters of the book detailing and contextualizing the fight between the Japanese and Chinese and addresses the roles of other nations, especially the United States. His expert discussion interweaves action in China with the series of events leading to the Pearl Harbor attack. He dedicates just over half the book to the period before the merging of the Sino-Japanese War with the Asia-Pacific War, which one could argue began the global conflagration of World War II.

In the second half of *Tower of Skulls*, Frank covers events from December 7, 1941, to May 1942. He examines Pearl Harbor and its aftermath and investigations with an evenhanded discussion of the latter. Pearl Harbor marks the beginning of Japan's grand offensive, and Frank examines each significant Japanese effort following it, with an excellent treatment of Australian, British, Dutch, and American aspects. Part of this treatment includes the forging of the Anglo–American Alliance and the early conferences of the Combined Chiefs of Staff. *Tower of Skulls* features a thoughtful consideration of the Allied failures in Southeast Asia and the Philippines. Frank concludes the book with a discussion



of the Japanese Empire's zenith and the Bataan Death March, setting the stage for the trilogy's second volume, which will begin with the Battle of the Coral Sea.

Frank's exhaustive and impeccable research synthesizes a wide variety of sources. In his acknowledgments, he recognizes a circle of supporting Asia-Pacific War experts and World War II generalists and details many archives where he conducted research using primary sources. Frank devised his own form of endnotes (also seen in his books *Guadalcanal* and *Downfall*) to support his writing, which often includes detailed, expert explanations—a mark of sound scholarship. While formal standardized endnotes would facilitate the retracing of Frank's efforts, his approach improves readability and condenses the book. The inclusion of excellent maps also supports comprehension.

Underpinned by superb research, *Tower of Skulls* balances artful historical coverage with readability—no small feat given its scope. Frank tells a magnificent story of the Asia-Pacific War with seamless shifts from a bird's-eye view to a worm's-eye view. Although he focuses mainly on the strategic environment and battles, Frank incorporates a human element through his descriptions of critical leaders and individual stories.

Frank's work does what no other trilogy or single-volume history of the Pacific War has done: provide balanced coverage of the principal belligerents of the British Commonwealth, the United States, Imperial Japan, and China. While balancing the treatment of the first three major powers is an achievement, Frank contributes to World War II historiography with his unique elevation of the Sino-Japanese War and its significance to the field of strategic studies. Rana Mitter and others' books attest to the tremendous recent literature on the war in China. Still, no other author has seamlessly incorporated China's contribution into the greater context of the Asia-Pacific War in the way Frank has now. If the next two installments follow the trajectory of *Tower of Skulls*, Frank's authoritative trilogy will provide immeasurable contributions to the field.

## REGIONAL STUDIES

## Kim Jong-un's Strategy for Survival: A Method to Madness

By David W. Shin

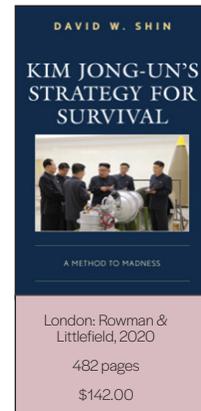
Reviewed by Dr. Patrick M. Cronin, Asia-Pacific security chair, Hudson Institute

Who could have guessed Kim Jong-Un would turn out to be such a clever strategist? He was dispatched to a Swiss boarding school during North Korea's famine years in the 1990s, graduated from Kim Il-Sung Military University in P'yŏngyang shortly after North Korea's first successful nuclear test in 2006, and was hastily groomed for leadership after his father suffered a stroke in 2008. When Kim Jong-Il died in December 2011, his third son, 27 years of age, inherited a troubled regime guided by a clique of octogenarians and locked in enmity with the United States and its democratic allies. Many observers considered the "young general" out of his depth. His likelihood to survive was questionable, his strategic acumen dubious. What a difference a decade makes.

In his latest book, *Kim Jong-un's Strategy for Survival*, retired Colonel David W. Shin explains the secret to Kim Jong-Un's success. As the subtitle suggests, Shin asserts there is indeed a "method" to Kim's so-called "madness." Shin demystifies the Kim regime and shows the young Kim had a clear "strategy for survival" replete with: control of political elites and information flow; circumvention of sanctions; summons of economic efficiency; assembly of a credible nuclear deterrent; and deeper cooperation with China and Russia to fend off Japan, South Korea, and the United States.

Shin spent years at the intersection of arms and Asia as a product of the Army's Foreign Area Officer Program. His experience includes negotiating with North Koreans at P'anmunjŏm as a United Nations Command Military Armistice Commission staff member and as a Joint Staff security representative on the US delegation to the Six Party Talks. Now an associate professor at the National Intelligence University, Shin testifies to the value of cultivating deep regional expertise among military professionals.

Shin's professional background and systematic sourcing provide an authoritative basis for his judgments on Kim's strategy. He captures how Kim orchestrated



a hierarchy of power using the Korean Workers' Party's Organization and Guidance Department to sort out critical political and military leadership posts. Shin notes how Kim also strengthened state security by cracking down on illegal cell phone signals, thus turning an information threat into an advantage. The totalitarian system may have regressed under his father, but, according to Shin, the young Kim understood how to secure the power needed for survival.

Shin illustrates Kim's survival strategy through four case studies. The first is Kim's choreographed nuclear crisis in March 2013, accomplished through dispersing KN-08 mobile missiles. Washington found the threat credible because Kim had paraded a KN-08 ICBM mockup the previous April in a power play that happened to telegraph Kim's strategic intent accurately.

The second case study comes from 2015, in which a tampered landmine wounded two South Korean soldiers patrolling the demilitarized zone. Kim engineered this crisis to demonstrate authority. He was willing to use limited force against conservative South Korean President Park Geun-Hye but seemed content to use less escalatory means when dealing with progressive President Moon Jae-In, suggesting finesse—rather than randomness—to his decision making.

The nuclear showdown in 2017 is the third case study. Days after de-escalating tensions over the 2015 landmine incident, a media leak disclosed a new alliance contingency plan (OPLAN 5015) that would seek a prompt end to the war through a decapitation strike on North Korea's leadership. According to Shin, this revelation hastened Kim's ICBM program. Shin suggests Kim consciously engaged in a war of words with President Donald Trump to justify a nuclear ICBM and to buy time to complete it.

Shin faults Trump for resurrecting Nixon's madman theory, the coercion of an adversary by means of establishing one's own volatility. He adds he wrote the book to refute the idea that Kim is "crazy." At the outset, Shin assails the analysis of the late Jerrold Post for overdiagnosing Kim's apparent malignant narcissism. Shin attests "certainty in psychoanalysis remains elusive." But perhaps Shin would agree it is unclear whether foreign affairs specialists using other (non-psychoanalytic) tools could identify the underpinnings of Kim's actions, either.

Compulsion to relinquish nuclear weapons may never take effect on Kim, but surely few national security professionals assume the North Korean dictator is *non compos mentis*. For this reason, "madman" seems a straw man. For instance, Shin implies then-National Security Advisor H. R. McMaster believed Kim was insane because McMaster opined classical deterrence theory would not apply to Kim. McMaster, however, was counting on Kim's rationality and hoped

to muster “maximum pressure” to convince Kim to reconsider the risks of nuclear weapons and initiate serious diplomatic talks.

In the final case, Shin highlights statecraft that led to a diplomatic stalemate with the United States. Kim sought to reveal the futility of America’s goal of “Final and Fully Verifiable Denuclearization.” (Not without a touch of hypocrisy: the short-term possibility of accomplishing a goal does not determine the ultimate outcome, as Kim surely believes of reunification.)

Despite the policy implications of these case studies, Shin skirts a consideration of arms control talks based on the concept of “denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula.” The sound reasoning of taking modest step-by-step measures is embedded in the Biden-Harris administration policy. South Korean President Yoon Suk-Yeol also hopes to induce North Korean nuclear concessions with new economic development promises. But this challenge remains: would sanctions relief, in exchange for dismantling the Yŏngbyŏn nuclear complex, help or hinder North Korea’s nuclear and missile programs?

In the end, to know Kim Jong-Un’s strategy is not to be able to forecast his every move, but to avoid underestimating him. A close read of Shin’s book will make it easier to understand Kim and almost impossible to underestimate him.

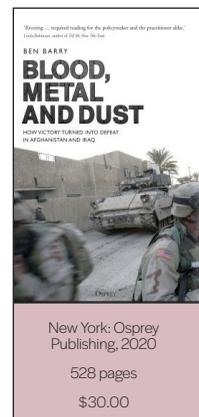
## **Blood, Metal, and Dust: How Victory Turned into Defeat in Afghanistan and Iraq**

By Ben Barry

Reviewed by Dr. John A. Nagl, associate professor of warfighting studies, US Army War College

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**B**lood, Metal, and Dust is a military history of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq focused on the roles of the United States and her closest ally, the United Kingdom. The author, Ben Barry, served as an infantry officer in Bosnia and as Director of the British Army Staff before joining the International Institute of Strategic Studies over a decade ago. Since then, he has studied and written about contemporary history and served as the primary author of a classified study of the British Army’s role in Iraq’s stabilization. That work informed Barry’s new book, in which the ex-infantry officer pulls few punches.



In this stunning compendium of lessons learned, Barry analyzes why the overwhelming early successes of the US-led coalitions in toppling the Taliban

in Afghanistan and Saddam Hussein in Iraq turned to “dust” in the face of persistent insurgencies. Throughout the book, Barry notes how many Western tactical victories resulted in strategic failure.

Barry telegraphs his sentiments through the book’s subtitle, *How Victory Turned into Defeat in Afghanistan and Iraq*. He argues with conviction that “for all the blood and money expended since 9/11, the US and its allies did not win the war in Iraq and have failed in the longer term to achieve almost all of their objectives in Afghanistan” (14). The book, published before the end of the Western military campaign in Afghanistan, contains the prescient prediction “an emboldened Taliban could well overwhelm the current Afghan government and its forces, imposing a victors’ peace that would give it the ability to reverse much of the last two decades of socio-political development” (14).

If the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan proved unpopular in the United States, then they were hated in the United Kingdom—particularly Operation Telic (the British code name for the Iraq War). Barry notes the British military’s trepidation concerning a shift in public opinion. He highlights the tension between spheres: “the army’s key leadership was worried that the effect of fighting two unpopular wars at the same time might so greatly damage the army to the extent that after the wars ended, it might not be able to recover its capability and its reputation” (325). This became a particular concern after British troops in Afghanistan engaged in heavy fighting in the Helmand province in 2006, during part of a larger shift of emphasis from Iraq to Afghanistan mirrored by the United States. The public mind indeed quickly soured towards the largest deployment of British troops since the Persian Gulf War, and both campaigns disaffected the British.

Writing with unsparing prose and conveying inarguable lessons, Barry could republish his outstanding final chapter, “Bloody Lessons,” as a profitable stand-alone article to raise hackles on this side of the Atlantic. Barry notes, with a decidedly un-British willingness to point out mistakes made by its larger ally, “the late 2001 failure to encircle and isolate the Al Qaida fighters in the Tora Bora mountains allowed the movement a better opportunity to reconstitute itself than if the US attack had been better planned and led” (462). In the wake of US troops’ withdrawal from Afghanistan, reflection on the early missed opportunity for success at Tora Bora should caution strategists to take full advantage of opportunities when they present themselves in conflict, if only to prevent future vulnerabilities.

Barry brutally denounces the 2003 American invasion of Iraq as “the worst military decision of the 21st century” and even calls it “military strategic folly on a level equal to that of Napoleon’s 1812 attack on Russia and Hitler’s 1941 attack on the Soviet Union” (464-65). Unlike those two gross strategic errors

in Mackinder's heartland, "Iraq administered no such massive attrition of the military capabilities of the US and its allies. But it had an effect of similar strategic magnitude—the significant loss of [US] legitimacy" (465). Mistakes made in Iraq and Afghanistan have shaken America's global leadership role and will reverberate for generations.

Barry argues the "simplest explanation" for the strategic defeat of the United States and her partners in both wars "is that the US government of President Bush displayed insufficient strategic competence between 2002 and 2007" (484) as "[i]t took several years for President Bush to recognize that the ends, ways and means being employed were inadequate" (485). The problem mirrored itself on the other side of the Atlantic: "British contributions to the first parts of the Iraq and Afghan wars were degraded by a lack of strategic competence in London" (486). Of President Bush's American counterpart, British Prime Minister Tony Blair, Barry writes his "strategic leadership of Britain's role in both wars should be judged a failure" (487).

Barry doles out scathing criticism of American and British leaders, but some belligerents did earn his praise. Unfortunately, those participants fought on the other side. He calls Qassem Soleimani, then-commander of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard's Quds Force, "the most successful strategic leader of the wars" (488). He deems the Afghan Taliban and Iran "much more successful" than the United States and her allies (509) and believes "Iran is the only nation that can be judged to have succeeded in achieving its strategic aims in Iraq" (463).

*Blood, Metal, and Dust* is not a cheery read for Americans who care about the high estimation of their country and hold the armed forces in high regard. Given America's tradition of widespread patriotism and love of its troops, this book deserves a wide audience for a better understanding of—and foresight to curtail—America's weaknesses. Ben Barry has the courage to call out failures of the American national security establishment. The lessons he lays out could save lives and prevent strategic failure when America reencounters the inevitable challenge of irregular warfare.