

## BOOK REVIEWS

*An Open World: How America Can Win the Contest for Twenty-First Century Order*

By Rebecca Lissner and Mira Rapp-Hooper. Yale University Press, 2020, 202 pp.

In *An Open World*, professor Rebecca Lissner of the US Naval War College and Mira Rapp-Hooper of the Council on Foreign Relations respond to a yawning gap in the debate on American grand strategy.

After the 2020 presidential election and inauguration of Joe Biden, Rapp-Hooper advised the US State Department's policy planning staff, raising the chances that ideas in *Open World* will survive long enough outside the Ivory Tower to influence US policy in the 2020s. Whether those subsequent decisions serve the national interest and improve the US position in the world may depend critically on a national resource that nevertheless receives scant attention in *Open World*. That resource is America's reputation for strategic competence, especially after more than a decade of dueling US administrations tearing one another to pieces.

Competence will be at a premium because our authors advocate a pragmatic recipe that leaves much to the professional judgment of those in charge. To achieve an open world, policy makers must carefully select the best ingredients from two different strategic outlooks. The retrenchment camp, coming out of international realism, sees the United States after the post-9/11 Global War on Terror overcommitted in the Middle East and somnolent regarding developments in Europe: specifically, several US allies have increased capacity to provide for their own defense.

Also, the United States is burdened by debt too heavy to match China's rising influence in the Indo-Pacific, ship-for-ship or missile-for-missile. Several prominent realists counsel a strategy akin to Britain's nineteenth-century off-shore balancing, limiting US expense to prudent, calibrated interventions, themselves designed to prevent those concentrations of power abroad that would threaten US survival as a vibrant democracy in the Western Hemisphere.

In contrast to retrenchment, engagement demands a wider scope for economic investment and military risk to expand liberal international order. The future of this order depends on the free exchange of goods and capital. As the global economy becomes more efficient and more productive, the pressure increases for the free move-

ment of other factors such as labor and lower transaction costs as might be achieved with a common currency or compatible fiscal policies.

At some point, liberal grand strategy challenges the tradition of state sovereignty, appending obligations to universal human rights so that diverse states worldwide become enmeshed in international organizations, orchestrated if not sponsored by the United States. Principled engagement thus leads toward costly economic and military involvement, despite American anti-imperialist heritage and rhetoric, in the internal affairs of geographically remote states stubbornly operating far from the liberal-democratic ideal.

Lissner and Rapp-Hooper fairly warn that public debate between retrenchment and engagement has gone sterile. The drawbacks of both positions have emerged so clearly since the end of the Cold War that neither strategy is likely any longer to earn enduring support from the American people or their congressional representatives. To avoid what Johns Hopkins University dean Eliot Cohen called *strategic nihilism*, that is, no strategy at all, our authors offer their pragmatic compromise. An “open-world” strategy, like the collective security of the 1930s, draws a clear distinction at the sovereign boundary.

Unlike its isolationism between the world wars, the United States must protect global lines of transport and communication. It must dedicate a significant share of its resources, shoring up international agreements to regulate the external behavior of other states so they remain responsible stakeholders in global exchange. The Lissner/Rapp-Hooper compromise strategy fails if rival powers manage to close off spheres of influence, snatching them out of the reach of US leadership. Still, it may be sustainable if vast, resource-rich areas of the world remain open for liberal capitalism and cultural convergence at the level of global civil society, that is, without necessitating endless military intervention to rearrange the domestic affairs of troubled states.

The compromise, then, grasps at the best aspects of retrenchment and engagement. When it succeeds, it avoids the worst pitfalls—either a world shut off from American commerce and liberal human security values or the American people saddled with enormous losses of blood and treasure in endless twilight wars. Yet, the prescription of *Open World* may not have much potency, for there are at least two well-known limitations to this blend of realism and international liberalism that made similar trials in the past difficult to navigate.

Especially for the United States, without an orthodox empire or a colonial service, the character of internal regimes influences the perceptions of external behavior from economic and security partners. Secondly, the strategies to expand openness are not neutral to target states so engaged. The great power or hegemon that writes the rules wields institutional power and indirectly controls the distribution of benefits in an open system.

On the first issue, it is hard to name a significant case of the hard sovereign boundary from last century’s rise to globalism—spanning the expansion of US influence in Latin America, postwar engagement with Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, and the management of unipolarity after the Cold War. This is because when the United States

pried open a part of the world, it routinely became involved, economically, politically, socially, and in many cases militarily, shaping domestic regimes.

Our authors highlight that rebuilding the domestic politics of Afghanistan and Iraq as thriving democracies has not succeeded, but there may be no easy way forward. It may not be possible to draw China, Russia, and Iran into open global cooperation—even with club benefits at international institutions such as the United Nations Security Council or the World Trade Organization—without reforms that would soften up their domestic regimes for American interference. In fact, all three authoritarian regional rivals express acute sensitivity to this very possibility. Though occupying lower-power positions globally, all three have punctuated their annoyance by attempting to turn the tables on the United States, manipulate foreign public opinion, and destabilize American democracy.

*Open World* also underestimates the difficulty of liberalizing international exchange for goods, services, and ideals without entangling the United States in exhausting contests over the distribution of benefits. During the 1980s, policy debates questioned whether American-sponsored institutions could support economic cooperation and free trade in the West after Vietnam and the decline of US influence. UCLA's Arthur Stein and others argued persuasively that openness was not a neutral feature of efficient system governance but an intentional bug, a thinly veiled instrument of hegemonic power.

A leading economic and military power like Great Britain in the nineteenth century or the United States in the twentieth set the rules under which open exchange occurred according to its preferences. Free trade, for example, when no other country could compete with British industry, expanded the market for dominant British manufacturing and finance; relative economic gains from an open world favored Britain.

Alternatively, after World War II, the United States could fortify Japan as a bulwark against communism in East Asia by bringing its economy into the Western capitalist world while facilitating technology transfer and allowing Japan to protect its infant industries. Relative economic gains of openness, in this instance, favored Japan. But concerning the closed Soviet sphere and bipolar competition in Asia, the political consequences of the open-world strategy compensated the United States and reinforced American hegemony.

Should the United States further reduce foreign military commitments after its withdrawal from Afghanistan and pursue grand strategic principles laid out in *Open World*, potential partners and competitors alike will not help but note the distributional consequences from openness. Nor will they ignore how American resources grant the US government certain influence over who, down to particular political parties, benefits most from an open world.

American diplomats entice cooperation from other countries, even emerging rivals, by demonstrating how a rising tide lifts all boats. Still, an open-world strategy can hardly function without the United States burnishing its reputation for competence and social responsibility before the international community. In theory, a bril-

liant grand strategy still must fit national culture and outlook to mobilize the energy of a free people and work as advertised.

Unfortunately, Americans are turning their back on scientific discipline and public-spirited professions, including engineering, medicine, law, and diplomacy. Instead of supporting visionary national strategy in these times, public opinion regularly vilifies its experts, especially those in a position to shape policy, as fools and knaves. The pursuit of an open world might someday untie the knot and cure America's strategic paralysis between retrenchment and engagement. Before Open World has a chance of succeeding, though, American democracy will need to restore trust in institutions and faith in its scientific enterprise.

Damon Coletta, PhD

*Justifying Revolution: The American Clergy's Argument for Political Resistance, 1750–1766*

By Gary L. Steward. Oxford University Press, 2021, 221 pp.

It is safe to assume that the American Revolution was an unassailable good event for today's average American. In seeking to strip the American colonies of their rights and liberties, the British Crown justly reaped what it sowed.

But as historians have grappled with the American Revolution, particularly the American clergy's role, not all consider the American Revolution as airtight ethically or theologically as some might assume. For instance, in the last couple of decades, notable Christian historians such as Mark Noll, George Marsden, and John Fea argued that American clergy in the colonies were swayed by secular notions of freedom and political resistance that are out of keeping with the Bible and Protestant tradition teachings.

Gary Steward, a Colorado Christian University assistant professor of history, steps into the fray with his new book, *Justifying Revolution*. He has a doctorate in church history and historical theology from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and served as a Baptist pastor in Canada. So Steward is well prepared to make the case that many patriot clergies in the American Revolution era have been deeply misunderstood.

Steward's thesis is straightforward: "the patriot clergy justified political resistance in continuity with the long-standing tradition of Protestant resistance activities and arguments asserted by their theological predecessors on both sides of the Atlantic" (2).

Starting in 1750 and working his way to 1776, Steward shows how numerous American clergy reaffirmed a long-standing Protestant conviction of political resistance in facing unjust rulers. Like the Protestant tradition from which they emerged, these ministers believed that Biblical passages such as Romans 13 were not to be understood as demanding absolute submission to every ruler. Instead, as Steward notes, "If a civil authority abandons his duty to seek the public good and his role as a minister of God, he is no longer to be treated as such; instead, he is to be resisted" (14).

As the book unfurls and time advances toward the Revolution, Steward shows how these long-held Protestant convictions in political resistance were articulated afresh

by clergy on both sides of the Atlantic. As new crises arose, such as the Stamp Act of 1765, the threat of American Episcopal bishops or growing political absolutism and hostility from England in the 1770s, clergy from the theological spectrum affirmed the fundamental rightness of self-defense and political resistance for the preservation of civil and religious liberties. Moreover, Steward repeatedly demonstrates how these clergy drew inspiration and guidance from their Protestant forefathers, who also engaged in political resistance as far back as the time of the Reformation.

In summary, Steward firmly advocates for there being “no compelling evidence for interpreting the resistance thought of the American clergy during the American revolution as marking any sharp deviation in theological, philosophical, or ethical thought” (129). Many of the American clergy and even some British clergy, steeped in Protestant tradition and teachings, were simply applying old principles to new problems.

Steward’s thesis and argumentation are clear and repeatedly reinforced by his thorough use of primary sources. Early in the book, Steward states his aim was to “recreate the theological and intellectual context” of the American patriot clergy and allow the reader to “understand the clergy on their own terms” (2). Steward largely accomplishes this by quoting from a wide array of American and British clergy, some well known, like John Witherspoon, and others most would not know today.

To his credit, Steward also deftly weaves in counterpoints to his arguments by quoting from clergy such as Thomas Bradbury Chandler and John Wesley, who were not in favor of political resistance to England. Steward also provides a treasure trove of footnotes and bibliographic resources for those who want a deeper dive.

Steward’s book is not without some weaknesses, though. For instance, the author repeatedly references important events or figures in English history such as the Glorious Revolution of 1689 or the Stuart monarchs. But for the uninitiated, there is not enough explanation to fully grasp the dynamics of these critical turning points.

*Justifying Revolution* would benefit from a brief appendix giving the reader a crash course in pertinent British history. Also, while Steward quotes many American and British clergy on the topic of political resistance, some readers may wish for more insight into how the colonial clergy exegeted the Biblical text to arrive at their conclusions. Yes, the political resistance they advocated for was in keeping with their Protestant tradition, but how specifically did they build a case for that from Scripture to shepherd their local churches?

Overall, *Justifying Revolution* is a well researched, tightly argued, and fascinating exploration of the doctrine of political resistance advanced by Revolutionary-era clergy. Readers interested in a deeper understanding of the religious motivations behind the American Revolution would do well to pick up this book.

**Joshua Ortiz**

*The Afghanistan File*

By Prince Turki al-Faisal al-Saud. Arabian Publishing, 2021, 272 pp.

Reviewing a book about the history of Afghanistan in early 2022 is an effort steeped in memory, tragedy, and regret. Winter grips the country, leaving millions at risk of starvation. The Taliban continue to reimpose its brutal, misogynistic ideology and conflict between the Taliban and radical organizations like the Islamic State-Khorason Province. The few remaining moderate anti-Taliban groups threaten to plunge Afghanistan back into a cycle of warlordism and internal bloodletting.

Six months after the United States' withdrawal, the haunting feeling is not one of conclusion but of history repeating itself. Just 33 years ago, another failed war in Afghanistan ended and left a shattered country, impoverished and depopulated, along with the ticking bomb of transnational Islamist extremism that grimly exploded on September 11, 2001, and triggered 20 years of failed American military adventurism.

This war, the Afghan-Soviet War of 1979–89, is the subject of Prince Turki al-Faisal al-Saud's *The Afghanistan File*. Turki, a senior member of the Saudi royal family, was the head of the General Intelligence Department (GID), Saudi Arabia's foreign intelligence service, throughout the Afghan-Soviet War and its immediate aftermath and played a significant role in his country's first covert and then, later, more open support of the Afghan mujahideen fighting to expel the Soviets. *The Afghanistan File* details these efforts and Saudi Arabia's attempt to shape events in a post-war Afghanistan still rife with internecine conflict between its "victorious" mujahideen factions. Ultimately, however, in the words of King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz al-Saud (1924–2015) who encouraged Prince Turki to write the book, *The Afghanistan File* is a defense of the Kingdom's actions during and after the Afghan-Soviet War. The book is an opportunity for "Saudi Arabia [to] give its version of events" after other works and histories from the war's participants "had blamed Saudi Arabia for much of what went wrong" (15).

*The Afghanistan File*'s 15 chapters can be divided into four primary sections. The first introductory section, comprised of chapters 1–2 ("Invasion—and Response" and "A Troubled Independence"), details the history of Afghanistan as a nation before the Soviet invasion. It also introduces Turki and describes the Soviet invasion of 1979 and the immediate activities taken by Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, the United States, and others in response to the invasion.

The second section, which comprises the bulk of the book, is about the Afghan-Soviet War itself: (1) the "birth" of the various Afghan mujahideen groups (chapter 3); (2) the development of the funding and arms "pipeline" to anti-Soviet Afghan forces by Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and the United States (chapter 4); (3) the role of charitable contributions and Arab volunteers in the conflict (chapter 6); (4) the influence of Abdullah Azzam, the Palestinian Islamic scholar who would found a key guest-house for Arab volunteers coming to Afghanistan (and who was a mentor of Osama bin Laden) (chapter 7); and (5) the basic historical progression of the war.

The latter led ultimately—due in no small part to the international support provided by the Saudis, Americans, and others—to the Soviet withdrawal (chapters 5 and 8). The book's third section, made up of chapters 9–12 ("The Loya Jirga at Rawal-

pindi,” “Interlude—The Kuwait Crisis,” “The Fall of Dr. Najibullah,” and “Bringing Home the Volunteers”), details the immediate aftermath of the war. This includes attempts by Saudi Arabia and Pakistan to broker a power-sharing agreement between the “victorious” mujahideen factions, the failure of these attempts, the descent of Afghanistan into civil war, and the Saudi government’s efforts to repatriate Saudi citizens who went to Afghanistan to fight against the Soviets or participate in the civil war.

The fourth and final section includes chapters 13, 14, and 15 (“The Rise of the Taliban,” “The Taliban and Bin Laden,” and “Aftermath”). This section draws Turki’s time as head of the GID and his narrative to a close with an account of the Taliban’s abrupt rise from a small group of Islamist students to the ruling power over the majority of Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia’s failed attempts to persuade the Taliban to extradite Osama bin Laden, and Turki’s thoughts on the post-9/11 efforts to battle terrorism and extremism.

Throughout these sections, the tale told by Turki is largely a familiar one, at least to those with even a moderate knowledge of the history of modern Afghanistan. The reader will encounter the full cast of players in this tragic period of Afghan history: “heroes” (to the extent the history of the Afghan-Soviet War and its aftermath allows the use of such a moniker) like militant commander Ahmad Shah Massoud (the “Lion of Panjshir”), Burhanuddin Rabbani, Presidents Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan, key American supporters of the Afghan mujahideen like Texas Congressman Charlie Wilson, and (the reader cannot help but infer) Turki himself as the Saudis’ primary agent in bankrolling the mujahideen.

The villains are no less familiar: the Soviet political leadership that authorized the invasion of Afghanistan; increasingly ruthless Soviet occupation forces, who brutalized the country’s population and contributed to both the breakdown of its traditional institutions and the Hobbesian rise of its soon-to-be “ruling class” of militant commanders; the perfidious Gulbuddin Hekmetyar (leader of the Hezb-i Islami militant group and a chief rival of Massoud and Rabbani); Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence Agency (ISI); the Taliban; and, of course, Osama bin Laden, the renegade son of one of Saudi Arabia’s wealthiest construction magnates who would, ultimately, upend the post-Cold War international order with his acts of Islamist terrorism. The overarching storyline of the book—the Soviet invasion, mujahideen response, and Soviet withdrawal, followed by the descent of Afghanistan into civil war and brigandage and the rise of the Taliban and al-Qaeda—is also well known.

Still, with King Abdullah’s stated goal in mind, Turki weaves his narrative from the Saudi perspective, attempting to put the best spin, so to speak, on certain unpleasant undercurrents of the war. He describes the “religious zealots” from the Arab world seeking to get involved in the conflict as “a nuisance” (74) and claims that “official” Saudi financing largely excluded the most radical of the militant groups. Turki postulates private individuals in Saudi Arabia may have provided personal contributions to more radical extremists. Saudis, it seems, are “less institutionally minded than people in the Western world” and “like to get involved in . . . all sorts of areas of life on a direct person-to-person basis” (67)

Similarly, no doubt with the post-Afghan-Soviet War rise in militant Islamism in mind, Turki seeks to absolve Saudi Arabia from the blame for the radicalization trend of certain areas of the Islamic world. “[T]he Saudi State in the last hundred years,” he insists, “has not tried as a matter of formal policy to spread Unitarian beliefs [Turki’s description of Saudi Arabia’s Wahhabi form of Islam] to other Muslim countries,” and “[m]ost Saudi support for building mosques around the world has been in response to requests from Muslim governments or Muslim communities in non-Muslim countries” (71). Turki euphemistically notes that “Unitarian beliefs are spread in these communities” as a result of Saudi aid—an brief aside that is left without examination of its larger implications (71).

For its partisan undertones and reexaminations of familiar ground, however, *The Afghanistan File* is not without moments of fascination. These primarily come when Turki describes his personal experiences interacting with other players in the Afghan drama or is actively involved in attempting to shape events. This reviewer found Turki’s descriptions of his two meetings with the mysterious, mercurial Taliban leader Mullah Muhammad Omar the highlight of his narrative, but his work with Pakistani intelligence (chapters 4, 5, and 9), his efforts at peacemaking at the postwar Loya Jirga (chapter 9), and his personal interactions with Osama bin Laden (chapters 7 and 10) were also extremely interesting.

There is little doubt that Turki’s narrative aims to explain Saudi Arabia’s perspective on the Afghan-related events from the late 1970s through the early 2000s. His narrative also attempts, to some degree, to absolve the Kingdom of the blame for some of the more tragic aspects of these events (the arming and funding of more radical Afghan mujahideen groups, the post-Soviet Afghan civil war, the rise of the Taliban, and, ultimately, the September 11 terrorist attacks and rise of transnational Islamic terrorism).

That said, the book remains a valuable addition to the historical literature of the Afghan-Soviet War and its aftermath. King Abdullah’s words to Prince Turki are no less true because they are partisan. As a key player in the drama that unfolded in Afghanistan during and after the 1980s, Saudi Arabia deserves to tell its version of those events. With his first-hand experience as director of the GID, Turki is just the person to do so on behalf of his country.

Major Jeremy J. Grunert, USAF

***Mobilizing Force: Linking Security Threats, Militarization, and Civilian Control***

Edited by David Kuehn and Yagil Levy. Lynne Rienner, 2021, 287 pp.

*Mobilizing Force: Linking Security Threats, Militarization, and Civilian Control* is an anthology of works edited by David Kuehn and Yagil Levy focused on the comparative studies of civil-military relations in Western democracies.

As the subtitle suggests, the book focuses its works on qualitatively linking perceived security threats, the level of militarization for that specific country, and the



ability or inability of the democratic, civilian government to control the military's ability to mitigate those threats. With 10 case studies, *Mobilizing Force* has two major sections.

The first section includes the four nations with a predominantly external threat perception. The second section covers the six nations with a predominantly internal threat perception. All 10 (Israel, Japan, South Korea, the United States, Colombia, El Salvador, Senegal, France, South Africa, and Spain) are defined as democracies. But Kuehn and Levy intentionally picked democracies of varied ages and development to help create a more diverse set of data.

The 10 case studies each address militarization in their subject country. In the introduction, Kuehn and Levy define militarization as "the process that legitimizes the use of military force, actually or potentially." This provides a sound start for further analysis as each nation's history, government organization, cultural inclinations, and threat perception confound any linear analysis between case studies. Militarization and its antithesis, demilitarization, are not uniform when faced with similar influences.

In some cases, higher perceived external threats directly correlate to militarization. Simultaneously, higher militarization generates greater civilian control, whereas less existential but persistent threats may drive less civilian control as militarization levels effectively normalize. Regardless of overlapping trends, what stands out is that extraordinary amounts of variables influence each case study. As a result, trends cannot be easily quantified or even correlated without further substantive research in each case.

Militarization is provided as a qualitative definition from the outset, and the book does a great job linking perception of threats with militarization and subsequent control of military actions. It generates a rough framework for determining how perceived threats will or will not result in greater or lesser civilian control as a function of militarization, mobilization, and the historical legacies of both. While this is a great first step, and the authors allow that it is a preliminary model, it does not intrinsically link historical actors with mobilization and deployment, nor does it categorize militarization as it relates to perceived internal or external threats. This, again, is noted by the authors.

While not absolutely required, a basic understanding of civil-military relations theories helps augment the works in this book as not every country adheres to the traditional US military preference for Huntington's theory of objective control. This is at its core a comparative study, understanding that not every country actively tries to pursue the same organization as the United States and its relationship between civilian and military leadership.

*Mobilizing Force* is a book that will expand understanding of how, why, and to what end states will respond to threats. It is a great book to help augment any student's understanding of civil-military relations. The authors are varied and insightful. Their case studies offer insights into other democracies' struggles with civilian control in persistent and often dynamic threat environments.

**Major James D. Corless, USAF**

***To Boldly Go: Leadership, Strategy, and Conflict in the 21st Century and Beyond***

By Jonathan Klug and Steven Leonard. Casemate, 2021, 286 pp.

What can we learn about leadership from the science fiction classics *Ender's Game* or *Starship Troopers*? Can *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* provide insights into naval warfare? How about whether we should fear artificial intelligence as seen in *Battlestar Galactica*, or will artificial intelligence simply find humans tedious as in the *Murder-bot* series?

For those who have pondered such questions over cigars while deployed in the desert, with friends and a glass of scotch, or even in their deepest musings while commuting through traffic, there is finally a book with the answers you seek! Jonathan Klug and Steven Leonard's *To Boldly Go* tackles serious issues through a medium loved by many: science fiction. The collection of essays broaches surprisingly complex contemporary issues and mines the farthest reaches of our imaginations for answers that are not only entertaining, but also legitimately thought-provoking.

On the surface, *To Boldly Go* suggests a nerdy exposé of obscure sci-fi concepts with little appeal to the common military reader. The book clearly seeks to capitalize on the significant overlap between strategy nerds and sci-fi nerds. Those that fall into the former but not the latter category would still do well to explore some of the essays, as most are accessible even to those unfamiliar with the source material. In fact, the essays that pull from unknown sources are often the most interesting to read.

The book consists of 35 essays crafted by some of today's best-known science fiction authors and military strategists. It is broken into six sections focusing on leadership and command; strategy; ethics and diversity; competition and conflict; humanity and technology; and finally, the dark side of toxic leadership. The essays are quick reads and easily digestible over lunch, a commute, or during your kid's soccer practice. But that does not mean they are light reading!

The book excels at exploring complex issues of interest to modern military leaders and thinkers. The use of science fiction allows the authors and the readers to break free from known conventions and explore the ideas from new angles. The book is well timed to coincide with the growing acceptance of science fiction in popular culture through massive hits such as *Star Wars* and *Dune*.

My early critique of the book was that I only connected with the essays that pulled from franchises I was familiar with or held prior interest in. But by the second section, I widened my aperture as the quality of the essay's analysis increased. I could connect with stories I did not know and seriously ponder the lessons and questions posed by the authors. By the third section, I was hooked, and I could appreciate familiar content with the happy heart of a fan boy while also adding several series to my read and watch lists. I went into the book expecting beer-drinking-level discussions and left it with the mentally tired but happy feeling that comes from a productive college class from a favorite subject.

I would recommend this book to anyone who enjoys military strategy, leadership, or the role of future technology in our lives who also appreciates science fiction. I would tell them to come for the comfort of topics and franchises they love and stay for

the new worlds and thoughts it will help them discover. If nothing else, it will breathe new life into many water cooler discussions.

Lieutenant Colonel Ian Bertram, USAF

*Two Centuries of US Military Operations in Liberia: Challenges of Resistance and Compliance*

By Niels Hahn. Air University Press, 2020, 381 pp.

Niels Hahn's *Two Centuries of US Military Operations in Liberia: Challenges of Resistance and Compliance* makes an ambitious promise to reframe the history of US-Liberia relations.

For Hahn, Liberia's history has been dominated by the US military, and its recent past exemplifies modern US policy making across Africa. He leverages substantial documentary evidence and interviews with Liberian policy makers and former fighters to proceed chronologically through the history of Liberia. Hahn's book, for all its imperfections, highlights the importance of examining Liberian history through the lens of US policy.

The opening chapters trace Liberia's history up to 1980. Hahn argues that the American Colonization Society, which spearheaded the effort to establish settlements in Liberia, was not truly a philanthropic organization and sought to remove freed slaves from the United States to mitigate the risk of uprisings like the Haitian Revolution. Hahn pays particular attention to the US Navy's role in Liberia's early history from violently coercing local leaders to give up their land to using Liberia as the base from which to patrol the West African coast.

The beginning of the twentieth century was characterized by American industrial efforts to establish the world's largest rubber plantation. The Firestone company, aided by the US government, engaged in deeply exploitive practices to gain labor for rubber production and influence Liberian elites to give the company favorable terms. Meanwhile, World War II drove the US government to establish bases in Liberia to project power further into Africa and, as the Cold War developed, to use Liberia as a bulwark against Pan-Africanism. With US support, the Liberian government created international organizations to counter Pan-African leaders such as Kwame Nkrumah, while the US government used Liberia as a springboard for operations across Africa.

Subsequent chapters follow the presidencies of William Tolbert and Samuel Doe. Tolbert broke from previous Liberian leaders by aligning himself with the Eastern Bloc and left-leaning African nations. He also implemented protectionist measures to develop Liberian industry and secure fairer terms from international corporations. Hahn argues that US opposition to Tolbert's foreign policy and domestic agenda led to unrest and the eventual removal of Tolbert in a coup led by Samuel Doe. Unlike Tolbert, Doe leaned heavily on US support in the initial stages of his government to secure his regime.

Hahn argues that after 1986 US-Liberian relations deteriorated as the United States pressured Doe for financial reform, Doe looked to the Soviet Union for relief. As rebel groups fought Doe with growing success, the US Department of Defense (DOD) and Department of State were at loggerheads over how to proceed as many policy makers wanted Doe to leave power peacefully to forestall further violence, and others were mistrustful of prominent rebel leader Charles Taylor. Hahn asserts that the US government established and supported the West African-led ECOMOG mission to Liberia as a proxy force and that the eventual killing of Doe was tacitly sanctioned by ECOMOG and the US government.

The concluding chapters cover the period from Doe's death in 1990 to the present. Foreign powers including much of West Africa, the United States, France, and Libya supported different actors, leading to a series of unsuccessful negotiations and prolonged conflict. Hahn astutely points out that the 1997 election that brought Charles Taylor to power against the wishes of the United States and others was unfairly portrayed by the international community as the result of Liberian irrationality.

Hahn argues more-or-less convincingly that the state of academic and policy discourses in the late 1990s and early 2000s justified intervention in countries like Liberia without considering the role of the international community in fomenting instability in the first place. Hahn asserts that the international community hobbled Taylor's Liberia by leveraging his support for the RUF in Sierra Leone and involvement in the diamond trade to levy sanctions. The final chapters are also where Hahn explores the role of China in Liberia in the most detail. Liberia, like many African nations, found China's nonintervention principles attractive and Chinese construction, aid, and influence have grown considerably.

Hahn concludes the book by calling for more international relations research to include outside actors in studies of conflict. Hahn successfully argues that philanthropic narratives were mobilized throughout Liberia's history to justify outside intervention. Lastly, Hahn argues that foreign-imposed neoliberal policies, particularly during the post-Taylor reconstruction, alienate Liberian officials.

Unfortunately, the author missed several opportunities. Hahn fails to deliver what was promised in terms of demonstrating the role of the US military in Liberia. While the US military is mentioned frequently, the description of the US military's operations in Liberia is shallow. A closer look at US operations in Liberia, such as the DOD assistance to Liberia's military, would have helped readers understand the scope and impact of the military's role in Liberia. Few former or current US officials are interviewed.

As a result, some claims about US activities are only sourced to interviews with Liberian sources. For instance, Hahn's claim that UK and US firms hired thousands of Liberians as mercenaries to fight in Iraq and Afghanistan is sourced solely to the Liberian Minister of Labor. Given that Hahn decries the use of "secondary sources or partial informants" by other works about Liberia, it is confusing why he accepts some claims without triangulating (239).

The book would have benefited from more of Liberia's recent history. The narrative abruptly cuts off around 2010, which stunts the discussion of current US-Liberia rela-

tions. Addressing discourses on China in Africa up to 2018–19 would have been an opportunity to relate US policy in Liberia to its broader behavior toward China in Africa.

Overall, *Two Centuries of US Military Operations in Liberia* covers an understudied topic and provides a readable account of US-Liberia relations for a general audience, but its shortcomings make it difficult to recommend to readers interested in rigorously exploring US operations in Liberia and the case's wider applicability to the continent.

Marcel Plichta

*Deterrence by Denial: Theory and Practice*

*Edited by Alex S. Wilner and Andreas Wegner. Cambridge University Press, 2021, 282 pp.*

The rise of nuclear-armed superpower adversaries during the Cold War prompted theorists to produce a rich body of literature on the concept of deterrence. But they favored the study of deterrence through punishment by nuclear weapons to the point that other forms of deterrence, notably deterrence by denial, went under-theorized.

Amid a geostrategic environment in which deterrence has taken on new salience, Alex S. Wilner and Andreas Wegner have produced a volume of essays that is a timely addition to the theory of deterrence by denial. To advance the study of the concept beyond its infancy, they assembled an international group of scholars of political science, international relations, and strategy.

At the start of the volume, the editors and distinguished theorist Patrick Morgan explain what ostensibly is a straightforward concept. Whereas deterrence by punishment attempts to influence a challenger's decision calculus by imposing costs for that action beyond what the challenger is willing to pay, deterrence by denial affects the other side of the balance; it denies the proposed action's benefits. The concept is seemingly useful in our era of great power competition where security threats thrive but do not rise to the threshold of nuclear exchange.

Nevertheless, without the overwhelming clarity of mutual assured destruction, theorists have been ambiguous about its application and effects. The case studies in the volume illustrate the challenge of identifying a cause-and-effect relationship between a defender's denial efforts and a challenger's decision refrain from action, casting doubt on the utility of the concept as it is formulated by the volume's contributors.

Dima Adamsky's article on Israeli concepts of deterrence exhibits the difficulty of parsing out the concept's working from the tangle of actions and counteractions taken by opponents in real-world conflicts. The thrust of Adamsky's chapter is that in their conflict with the Arabs, the Israelis shifted from punitive deterrence to static defense once it became clear to Israeli strategists that punitive operations were losing their deterrent effect.

He claims that deterrence by denial became more prominent after the Israelis made the shift. Yet, his descriptions of Israeli missile defense and civil defense advances are not connected by argument to enemy decisions to abandon intended attacks. He does

not analyze the enemy's decision calculus or its interpretation of Israeli actions. Lost in his discussion is a cause-and-effect analysis that shows the intentionality of Israeli deterrence by denial, how the deterrent message was understood by enemies, and how that understanding shaped their actions. Jonathan Trexel's article on Japanese ballistic missile defense vis-à-vis North Korea suffers from a similar lack of evidence-based argumentation.

While Adamsky and Trexel are unconvincing in showing the action of the concept in their case studies, James J. Wirtz hampers the editors' goal of gaining "a better understanding of the conceptual distinction and relationship between defense, deterrence by denial, and deterrence by punishment" (212). In a chapter on the strategy of deterrence by denial, Wirtz blurs the theoretical distinction between defense and deterrence. He posits an idiosyncratic typology that makes deterrence a subset of defense. Writing of "defense by deterrence," he makes deterrence instrumental to something from which the editors hope to distinguish it (124, 140).

He may have in mind a grander conception of defense, such as that implied by the title of the Department of Defense, but he refrains from defining it. Regarding deterrence by denial, he recommends to US policy makers a sort of second-order strategy of denying challengers' attempts to circumvent American deterrence efforts. In essence, Wirtz recommends defending US deterrence activities from attacks by adversaries. The suggestion, again, conflates defense and deterrence. Overall, Wirtz's chapter gets lost in its layers of abstraction, obscuring rather than clarifying the concept.

The best chapters in the volume evaluate deterrence by denial critically. John Sawyer, who analyzes its applicability to counterterrorism, and Martin Libicki, who evaluates its relevance in cyberwar, each provide insights into the broad concept that extend beyond the circumscribed subjects of their chapters.

Sawyer analyzes the logic by which deterrence by denial functions and finds it should be reclassified as "dissuasion by denial." Sawyer begins by defining three approaches to preventing or mitigating terrorist attacks: offense, defense, and influence. Deterrence falls under the influence approach, which is, in turn, subdivided into "bundling" and "dissuasion" logics. On the one hand, bundling consists of if-then relationships between adversaries, for example, "if you do x, I will respond with y," "if you stop doing x, I will not do y," and so on.

On the other hand, dissuasion seeks to alter the attacker's perception of status quo as it pertains to the costs and benefits of a prospective attack. Sawyer argues that deterrence by punishment is an example of bundling; but, in contrast, deterrence by denial fits under the logic of dissuasion. It is better classified as dissuasion by denial: "manipulating perceptions of the ability to access and attack a given target using a given tactic" (109).

By removing deterrence by denial from the if-then logic within which it does not fit, Sawyer makes it a more useful concept. Dissuasion by denial becomes more than the other side of the cost-benefit equation. Instead, it operates on the present environment, not in the future, and it operates independently of the defender's threats. By grouping dissuasion by denial with other forms of dissuasion, Sawyer opens the way

for the fruitful application of denial to a larger dissuasion effort. Furthermore, he clarifies the logic of the concept, which up to this point, he correctly notes, has been “an untenable and confusing mishmash of the bundling, dissuasion, and offense logics” (108–9).

In his chapter, Martin Libicki makes points about information and understanding that transcend his subject of deterrence by denial in cyberspace. He argues that militating against it is the difficulty of opponents to know each other’s capabilities when contemplating attack or defense. Opponents struggle to discern the deterrent effect of a defense and attackers can only know if a target is impenetrable by attempting to penetrate it (196). They often do not know the scope of a defender’s defenses or if an attack succeeded and, if so, what the consequences are.

A study of military history would demonstrate such uncertainty on the part of an attacker to be the case of any conflict. Moreover, Libicki shows that in cyberwar, a challenger front-loads costs so that its chances for success against a defense will be good when it is time to strike. Therefore, it is the challenger’s perception of his own preparations, not the quality of the defender’s defenses, that determine if the challenger will strike. The result, Libicki concludes, is that the prospects for deterrence by denial are dim in cyberspace. Overall, Libicki’s work indicates fruitful paths for research on deterrence in other domains.

The editors of the volume intend it for “policy makers, practitioners, analysts, and academics,” but it is likely of marginal value for officials seeking to translate theory into plans (281). The volume as a whole elaborates and expands the concept of deterrence by denial without giving it greater power to guide decision-making. The contributors lack a common lexicon and typology to discuss it.

Their various analyses are often unclear about who is being deterred, what action is being deterred, or when deterrence starts or ends. They do not offer evidence that would assure those seeking to practically apply the concept. To make progress, analysts should generate longer and richer narratives that illustrate the concept’s impact on events and why it was deterrence by denial and not some other contingency that shaped the course of a given conflict.

All the same, the book is a contribution to the growing literature on this concept. In elaborating the theory and in its short case studies, it serves as a guidepost for the work that needs to be done in developing this concept, which is of salience amidst today’s great power competition.

**Richard Marsh, PhD**

***The Light of Earth: Reflections on a Life in Space***

By Al Worden with Francis French. University of Nebraska Press, 2021, 150 pp.

Astronaut memoirs tend to fall into two categories. The first is a straightforward career narrative, as a super-motivated super-achiever does increasingly bigger and better things that culminate in being selected as an astronaut, followed by one or more amazing voyages into outer space.

The second, typified by Chris Hadfield's *An Astronaut's Guide to Life on Earth* and Nicole Stott's *Back to Earth: What Life in Space Taught Me about Our Home Planet—And Our Mission to Protect It*, use an astronaut's experiences to teach a broader lesson. Al Worden, the command module pilot of Apollo 15, wrote the first kind of memoir in his 2011 book *Falling to Earth: An Apollo 15 Astronaut's Journey to the Moon* with the assistance of Francis French. With the authors being intelligent, well-educated, and articulate people who have accomplished fascinating things, both kinds of astronaut books are worth reading.

Worden's second book, also written with Francis French, is a different kind of book. Essentially it is a collection of essays, with each chapter standing alone. In *The Light of Earth*, the topics include his views on his Apollo astronaut colleagues, the claim that the moon landings were hoaxes, the space shuttle, risk and death, his poetry about space travel, and his thoughts about the greater purpose of the space exploration.

Worden's descriptions of some of the other Apollo astronauts are detailed and personal. This was an extraordinary group of men who happened to be at the right time and place to do historic and extraordinary deeds. Most of his descriptions are laudatory. He had differences with some of his fellow astronauts, but Worden does attempt to be fair. In general, those who are well-read in the literature of Apollo will not be surprised by the vignettes. At the time, the Apollo astronauts appeared to be cut from the same mold, but, in fact, they were distinct individuals.

"I Never Liked the Space Shuttle" is the title of Worden's chapter about that vehicle, and that sums up his perspective. He admits that it was "unimaginably impressive" and "an absolutely great machine" but regards it as conceptually flawed: inherently complex, dangerous, and expensive. With the benefit of retrospective, it is hard to argue. Note that the new generation of spacecraft for human spaceflight have a family resemblance to their predecessors in the 1960s and not the winged space shuttle.

Worden's musings on risk and death will be no surprise to many readers of this review, whose chosen professions of military service and aviation expose them to a higher degree of risk than the typical American. To Worden, risk is something that can be accepted to the degree that the reward is commensurate with the risk. He is open about how his approach to risk contributed to the collapse of his first marriage.

In Worden's view, the ultimate purpose of space exploration is the survival of the human species. A species that is limited to a single planet is less likely to survive than one that is spread across the universe. Worden believes that the Chinese will land humans on Mars before the Americans do because of America's calcified bureaucracy.

*The Light of Earth: Reflections on a Life in Space* is thoughtful book by an author with an interesting perspective. Æ

Kenneth P. Katz

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