2016

Waging War, Planning Peace: U.S. Noncombat Operations and Major Wars

Aaron Rapport
Edward Erwin

Follow this and additional works at: https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review

Recommended Citation
Available at: https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol69/iss2/14

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu.
Part 4 is a valuable addendum giving academic, primarily historical, reviews of military ethics in the Islamic (John Kelsay), Chinese (Ping-cheung Lo), and Indian (Torkel Brekke) traditions. The editors provide summary introductions to all four parts, and they asked the authors to begin each chapter with an abstract and to close with a conclusion section preceding a list of references. All three features are helpful.

Aptly titled a “research companion,” this is a cutting-edge effort by many leading students of military ethics. I learned major things from every author; and while I especially admire certain chapters, other experts are likely to applaud different contributions most, depending on their own backgrounds. However, all the chapters are aimed at advanced scholars or the highest level of decision makers.

Finally, two critical remarks underscore scholarly responsibilities. The word guerrilla is spelled with a single r more than a score of times—even quoted materials repeatedly are mangled—in an otherwise laudable chapter by the volume’s expert on unconventional warfare. Second, an author asserts that the Gulf of Tonkin incident was merely a matter of erroneous U.S. Navy reporting. While the Navy now judges that the night “battle” of 4 August 1964 never took place, no one doubts that the 2 August day engagement of USS Maddox (DD 731) and three North Vietnamese P-4 torpedo boats happened. (There were eyewitnesses and photographs; a Vietnamese 12.7 mm machine-gun round lodged in Maddox’s superstructure; and in 1984 General Vo Nguyen Giap told former Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara the attack was deliberate.) The lesson for all of us is that, in professional ethics, theories are interesting but facts matter, usually decisively.

THOMAS GRASSEY

Innovative, provocative, and compelling, Aaron Rapport’s Waging War, Planning Peace offers a distinct perspective on U.S. failures in postwar stability and reconstruction operations since 1941. The disconnect between waging war and planning peace is the subject of this intriguing study that applies theories of national security policy to four historical case studies. A lecturer at the Department of Politics and International Studies at the University of Cambridge, Rapport examines how the ambitious state-building aims of U.S. presidents and senior advisers were consistently undermined by meager planning.

Rapport invokes “construal level theory” to explain postconflict reconstruction failures following World War II and Operation IRAQI FREEDOM, arguing that the Roosevelt and Bush administrations projected confidence and visionary objectives for peace after the war without providing the necessary organizational support. In turn, failures following the Korean and Vietnam Wars are attributed to administrations that did not articulate end-state agendas and instead concentrated on immediate operational and military gains. The flaw common to the actors in all four historical studies is that kinetic aspects of the war were prioritized at the expense of postwar planning.
The construal level theory consists of several key components. The more distant our goals, the greater we construe the long time horizon abstractly. The more immediate our goals, the greater we construe the short-term horizon in detail. Consequently, the desirability of distant goals can overshadow their feasibility. National leaders who formulate lofty goals for the distant future support transformative objectives, while those who focus on the particulars of combat operations tend to be preoccupied with a maintenance outlook that is far more cautious about future estimations. Proponents of desirability and transformative strategies for peace display deductive reasoning based on preexisting concepts, whereas advocates of feasibility and maintenance approaches demonstrate inductive thinking sensitive to context-specific information. Undergirding these processes in strategic assessments, the construal level theory presupposes the dynamic of communication fluency. In other words, civilian and military leaders’ predispositions toward either desirability or feasibility will determine the flow of information and whether the incoming data are accepted or rejected.

Rapport suggests that the semantics of “postwar” be reformulated. The semantics of “post” makes reconstruction endeavors more of an afterthought, and the “post” verbiage buys into a sequential scheme of arranging operations instead of a fluid model of cooperative interaction. From this descriptive analysis, he offers a prescriptive remedy to the problem: instead of sequencing or paralleling phases of the total operation, he suggests overlapping the coordination of waging war and planning peace so as to harmonize stabilization considerations with kinetic aims. To that end, greater joint agency collaboration between military and civilian leaders—both desirability visionaries and feasibility organizers—must take place for abstract ends and concrete means to synergize in the range of military operations. By bringing the why of desirability and the how of feasibility together through interagency cooperation, U.S. presidents and their senior advisers will be better equipped to win the peace, and not simply the war, through a continuum of joint operational planning.

Overall, Rapport’s use of construal level theory for understanding the gap between jus in bello and jus post bellum is persuasive. Readers must decide whether this particular theory assumes too great a role in explaining the lack of correlation between war fighting and state building and, in the process, minimizes the cultural, political, and economic factors that frame the context and motivate the power brokers of a given historical period. For scholars and students, policy makers, and warfighters, Rapport’s interdisciplinary work in history, international policy, and psychology is a fascinating study worth the time and money to read and heed.

EDWARD ERWIN


Bruce Stanley, a retired Army officer and professor at the United States Army’s School of Advanced Military Studies, has written a detailed and well-documented