

2015

## Bleeding Talent: How the U.S. Military Mismanages Great Leaders and Why It's Time for a Revolution, by Tim Kane

Thomas Gibbons

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

---

### Recommended Citation

Gibbons, Thomas (2015) "Bleeding Talent: How the U.S. Military Mismanages Great Leaders and Why It's Time for a Revolution, by Tim Kane," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 68 : No. 1 , Article 15.

Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol68/iss1/15>

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](mailto:repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu).

and intentions and that this weakens deterrence in two ways: the credibility of others' threats is discounted, because their doctrines are thought to be ineffective, and the others' signals are missed by the use of one's own doctrine as a template for indicators. This attention to misperceptions at the level of operational net assessment is new and of direct relevance to planners and analysts.

Much of the book tests the author's theory against three Korean War-era episodes: China's failure to deter U.S. movement north of the thirty-eighth parallel, American failure to deter China from entering the war, and the less well-known maritime story of how the United States prevented a planned Chinese invasion of Taiwan. Twomey also traces how greatly the United States and the People's Liberation Army (PLA) underestimated each other's land warfare capabilities and as a result issued threats that neither considered credible. The PLA Navy, with officers largely educated abroad, understood that U.S. air supremacy rendered landings impossible. The choice of the 1950 Korean cases was wise, as most variables other than PLA army/navy differences are constant. A notable feature of the case studies is archival research, both in the United States and in China; fresh documentation alone will appeal to Korean War specialists.

Doctrinal difference fits the Korean War, but the radical divergence of the revolutionary PLA and atomic American military makes this a relatively easy case, as Twomey acknowledges. How often do doctrinal differences generally lead to deterrence failures? An additional chapter on two Arab-Israeli cases argues that deterrence failure is correlated with doctrinal divergence. The evidence is suggestive, but the book could be

strengthened by a larger universe of cases that may answer such additional questions as these: Are doctrinal differences more common in ground than naval warfare, for example? Do opponents in long-lasting rivalries (compared to the United States / People's Republic of China in 1950) fare better at assessing the others' capability despite differing doctrines?

*The Military Lens* offers a warning that clear, credible threats may not be understood as such by others. Since doctrinal misperceptions take place at the military level, the lessons here are particularly relevant to planners, as they develop assessments and deterrent options for civilian leaders. This work also holds implications for professional military education, stating as it does that officers should be encouraged to overcome doctrinal filters, that scholars should study foreign doctrines, and that educational exchanges might reduce misunderstandings (the author himself is involved in U.S.-Chinese dialogues). Perhaps weapons speak a common tongue, but Twomey reminds us that militaries need to be fluent in multiple languages.

DAVID BURBACH  
*Naval War College*



Kane, Tim. *Bleeding Talent: How the U.S. Military Mismanages Great Leaders and Why It's Time for a Revolution*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. 271pp. \$27

This book provides a critical analysis and highlights a dysfunctional U.S. Army officer personnel management system. The author explains why the best and brightest young officers depart early for civilian careers and what can be

done to encourage them to remain on active duty. Kane also outlines why the military's leadership training is so successful and admired by civilian industry.

Tim Kane's background as an Air Force veteran and successful entrepreneur with a PhD in economics gives him the perspective, skill, and insight to offer a comprehensive evaluation of the current system and a blueprint for the future.

Kane conducted an online survey of West Point graduates from six different classes at different stages of their careers. Overall, it was a balanced sample, with approximately 250 respondents, both military and civilian. Based on the results of a first survey, Kane conducted a follow-up to gain additional insight. The results highlight many reasons why young leaders leave the service, and Kane suggests what can be done to curb the exodus.

Kane proposes an alternative to the current All Volunteer Force (AVF)—what he calls the “Total Volunteer Force” (TVF). He posits that there is a “philosophical difference between the current system, which gives people freedom to choose only at the moment of volunteering [the AVF], and a system in which employees are free every day.” Kane's book is unique in that it offers possible alternatives to many of the Army's current personnel policies that young leaders despise. It is relatively easy to criticize bureaucratic policies without offering solutions, but Kane does offer solutions, which the Army has already begun to implement. For example, Kane proposes allowing officers a break in service to enter civilian industry, after which they can return to the military without prejudice—a policy that the Army recently embraced.

One of Kane's major criticisms of the military is that officer promotions, unlike their civilian counterparts, are based more on year seniority than on merit. “It is fair to say that selection to general is highly competitive, but the reality is that longevity is a bigger factor than merit in determining who makes that rank.” The result is that in an effort to make the officer assignment process as fair as possible the system has become outdated and less than optimal for officers and commanders alike. Kane's TVF proposes promotions based on merit and assignments and using a market mechanism—that is, an internal job market, in which officers apply for any open job.

As a retired Army colonel with almost thirty years of active-duty service, many of them as a personnel officer, I was skeptical when I started reading this book. It is difficult to criticize something when you have been a part of the problem. However, I found that Kane has skillfully proposed a series of recommendations that could make a difference. *Bleeding Talent* is a must-read for all on active duty today. Kane's writing style and method of presenting counterarguments make for thought-provoking proposals that merit consideration in today's Army.

THOMAS GIBBONS  
Naval War College



Northrup, David. *How English Became the Global Language*. New York: Palgrave, 2013. 220pp. \$24

In this slim volume David Northrup, a retired Boston College professor of history, gives a clear and concise account of the development of English into the twenty-first century's one truly global