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Civilians in the Path of War

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Grimsley, Mark, and Clifford J. Rogers, eds. *Civilians in the Path of War.* Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 2002. 280pp. $50

This edited volume of essays provides an important set of historical case studies about noncombatant victims of war. From ancient Greece to the French Revolution, to strategic bombings of urban centers in World War II and the Gulf War, these articles address not the ethical or moral dimensions of war but rather the military calculus in planning violence against enemies that could also endanger or kill civilians. This collection gives historical perspective to the concept of collateral damage.

In their introduction the editors state, "This book is about occasions in which soldiers and governments have deliberately attacked the helpless." The authors provide specific, highly detailed examples, removed from the lens of morality and judgement, of the "whys" of strategic interventions. It is difficult, however, not to document the uncertainty that accompanies military decision making, as author Conrad Crane describes in his article, "Contrary to Our National Ideals." In spite of the important strategic use of American airpower to exact a toll on cities during World War II, he explains how American public opinion shifted against such ruthless bombings. The concept of "surgical strikes" by airpower was a concept conceived in part to assuage public opinion that rejected the indiscriminate use of force to destroy noncombatants.

Nine essays, originally commissioned as part of a 1993 conference on military history, reveal a central ambivalence by the authors about the impact of military imposed violence on civilians. These historical cases try to balance what generals depict as a military necessity for bombings or invasions against the realities of on-the-ground conditions, which reveal large numbers of civilians getting in harm's way. What is frequently developed in the name of military necessity is often immoral in practice. Certainly, this is the conclusion of Holger Herwig in his "The Immorality of Expediency," which takes on German military planning and the exclusion of civilians from such discussions on the eve of World War I. Williamson Murray's "Not Enough Collateral Damage: Moral Ambiguities in the Gulf War," extols the use of American airpower to seek "surgical strikes" to minimize the loss of life on the ground but also points out that such an approach does not always produce decisive military victory. He recalls that even in Vietnam, with General Curtis LeMay's "bomb them back into the Stone Age" approach, such bombing did not persuade the North Vietnamese not to pursue their military course.

While all the essays provide a strong historical overview of how noncombatants have fared in the course of warfare, it is difficult to understand how such a published volume could omit important lessons from the post–Cold War, given the gap of nine years between the commissioning of papers and publications. There is no essay about the genocide in Rwanda, where research shows that a military force positioned in early April 1994 could have averted tremendous loss of life. Moreover, in such intrastate conflicts as Chechnya, where the Russian military has turned on not only rebel guerilla groups but also the civilian population, the nature of these

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new wars has also changed the rules about who is a combatant. Even more recent is the case of Kosovo, where Serbian military commanders deliberately targeted civilians as a means of staving off NATO air strikes. It has been precisely the importance of noncombatants as victims in the post–Cold War era that has been the central feature of internal conflicts and has distinguished these recent intrastate wars. Yet no essay in this volume brings the historical cases up to the present.

This anthology is useful for historians looking backward for examples or precedents. However, the book will not work for everyday classroom teaching without supplementation, because the case studies omit some of the more current examples, as mentioned above. Finally, the editors should have added a final essay about the Geneva Conventions and other public humanitarian law. The rules of modern warfare and the centrality of protecting civilians cannot be divorced from the planning of any intervention. As the United States enters a new era of strategic doctrine and preemption, it is especially important that writing about war include not only the details of decision making but also the implications that such acts have on civilians who might be caught in the middle.

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Friedman, Norman. *The Fifty Year War: Conflict and Strategy in the Cold War.* Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 2000. 597pp. $39.95

Winkler, David F. *Cold War at Sea: High-Seas Confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union.* Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 2000. 263pp. $45

Although the Cold War ended more than a decade ago, its impact continues to haunt the international community to this day. These two excellent works from the Naval Institute Press will greatly enhance our understanding of this uncertain period.

Norman Friedman's *Fifty Year War* is a broad look at the conflict between East and West. Friedman contends that the Cold War actually began in Spain in 1937, "when Stalin tried to hijack the ongoing civil war." This divide between the Soviet Union and the West would not come to an end until 1991. Friedman poses several questions: "Should or did the West understand events in the Soviet Union? Did the West in fact defeat the Soviet Union, or did the Soviet Union defeat itself? Was the Cold War, then, about communism versus capitalism or was it about old-fashioned Russian imperialism, cloaked in a largely irrelevant ideology?"

Friedman contends that the Cold War was in fact a "real war" fought in slow motion. It was also a war lost by the Soviet Union for sociopolitical, economic, and ideological reasons. In the end, Friedman sees Mikhail Gorbachev as responsible for its collapse, because he "never understood that his state was built on terror, not on any kind of popular support."

While making these arguments, Friedman also includes some very scary Cold War near misses, including a 1960 mistake by the new U.S. radar at Thule that interpreted the moon as a Soviet missile attack. Also intriguing is