

1997

Uncivil Wars: International Security and the New Internal Conflicts

Dominic J. Caraccilo

Donald M. Snow

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

Recommended Citation

Caraccilo, Dominic J. and Snow, Donald M. (1997) "Uncivil Wars: International Security and the New Internal Conflicts," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 50 : No. 4 , Article 15.

Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol50/iss4/15>

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.

136 Naval War College Review

Weinberger and Schweizer ignore the wider range of threats, operations, and conflicts that are most likely the next wars to involve U.S. troops.

ROBIN K. MYERS
Lieutenant Commander, U.S. Navy

Snow, Donald M. *Uncivil Wars: International Security and the New Internal Conflicts*. Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1996. 177pp. \$18.95

The post-Cold War international environment brought on a series of internal conflicts that were curiously “nonmilitary,” resulting in a myriad of opinions and models for a new world. Donald Snow’s *Uncivil Wars* offers yet another perspective. However, Snow’s view is quite significant.

This book explores “contemporary” internal conflicts, defining them as the “more or less systematic murder and terrorizing of civilian populations.” It is indeed the principal form of current systemic violence, even though the world now, according to Snow, is a more stable place.

Snow convincingly argues that these new internal wars are a sufficiently different phenomenon to warrant worldwide intellectual and policy attention. The prototypes he discusses (Somalia, Ethiopia, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Georgia, Tajikistan, and Sri Lanka) seem less principled in political terms and less focused on the attainment of some political ideal. They do not fit the Clausewitzian mold of an extension of politics—“They seem more vicious and uncontrolled in their conduct.” They are unlike the traditional Maoist or any

other political philosophy that the United States has learned to understand.

Snow offers the military strategist a new and unique understanding of a strange and unfathomable type of conflict. No military action can deal with the real underlying problems. In a stroke of classic strategic thought, the author rightly contends that contemporary internal war can no longer be explained in terms of Clausewitzian analysis, and that to respond to them with perspectives and strategies appropriate to the Cold War is ineffective.

This book offers the strategist a means for discerning how to assess a nation’s national security and its appropriate military strategy. The destruction of colonial boundaries left many newly formed sovereign states “economically unified but [often] not politically.” As a result, ethnic strife has raged out of control.

Snow’s new breed of internal war has no common center of gravity and no kinship with the traditional Maoist mobile-guerrilla strategy. If one accepts this notion, then Snow’s uncivil wars have important implications for international politics and military affairs.

In view of the media’s ability to make internal strife very public, the United States will be tempted in future conflicts to intervene and “staunch the slaughter.” Snow admits, however, that as a nation the United States is unfortunately not well organized to understand and deal with this kind of conflict; its framework for approach is that of the Cold War—traditional wars of national liberation.

Snow labels a definitive three-tier system that determines a nation’s relevance on a scale of economic and

political well-being. It allows him to establish, somewhat analytically, that "the areas that lie principally outside the growing global economy" are the areas where most of the internal violence takes place. It is the emerging global world and the traditional nonplayers that are causing the majority of discontent.

Snow asks how the world's strongest countries (or as Snow labels them, "the First Tier") will deal with these unstable countries at the bottom of his Second Tier. Removing a Soviet-type interest in these countries for the United States to counter leaves the United States "with hardly any interests on which to exert its energies." It leaves the nation facing a dichotomy—it remains confused about how to deal with crises on a strategic level. But "how many simultaneous Chechnyas, Bosnias, and Somalias is the system willing to tolerate?" Whether or not First Tier nations will attempt to moderate or influence the lower tiers' internal violence, a thorough understanding of the dynamics of that violence is required.

Snow appropriately conveys these dynamics with this intriguing and unique book. *Uncivil Wars* is a must for all strategists—political and military. In short, it may be the best book to help one gain a better understanding of how contemporary wars may affect the security of the larger global system, as well as the role of the United States in the post-Cold War era.

DOMINIC J. CARACCILO
Major, U.S. Army

Mensah, Thomas A., ed. *Ocean Governance: Strategies and Approaches for the 21st Century*. Honolulu, HI.: Law of the Sea Institute, 1996. 628pp. (No price given) (Order from BookMasters, Inc., P.O. Box 2139, Mansfield, Ohio, 44905.)

During the week of 11 July 1994 the Law of the Sea Institute sponsored its twenty-eighth annual conference. Its objective was to identify the principal elements of functional oceans governance for the twenty-first century. This daunting task involved in-depth analyses of the fundamental issues, risks, and concerns looming on the horizon, including boundary disputes, allocation of living and nonliving resources, environmental degradation, climatic modification, and transit and jurisdictional rights. The topical discussions were viewed through a geopolitical thematic lens, examining oceans management from global, regional, national, and local perspectives. The conferees were a distinguished gathering of ocean law, policy, and technical experts from government, business, and academia. The diversity of the participants lent singular credibility to the meeting, but most importantly it precipitated a candid and productive dialogue concerning the most appropriate means of managing mankind's last great resource. In addition to their peerless credentials, the participants' variegated geographic and political orientation made the conference a truly world-class assemblage.

This treatise is a compilation of the formal presentations, speeches, and panel and roundtable discussions that took place over the course of the