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Great Powers and Little Wars: The Limits of Power

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Weapons Don't Make War is more a series of critical essays than a systematic attempt to develop a singular thesis. That weapons by themselves do not make war is clear, but they certainly do embody military capabilities and raise questions about intentions, and they can generate quests for countervailing capabilities and produce at least perceptions of arms races. Gray insists that politics and policy are (or ought to be) supreme, but he admits they are part of an intricate system in which military technology, weapons, policy, and strategy interact. Although he asserts that his fundamental lessons and arguments are not time-bound and should therefore guide U.S. national security policy regardless of changes in the international system, he constructs little to replace what he sought to demolish with his sharp pen. Indeed, in many ways this is a negative book: weapons don't make war, arms races do not exist, and arms control does not work.

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Ion, A. Hamish and Errington, E.J., eds. *Great Powers and Little Wars: The Limits of Power.* New York: Praeger, 1993. 246pp. $49.95

Levite, Ariel E.; Jentleson, Bruce W.; and Berman, Larry. *Foreign Military Intervention: The Dynamics of Protracted Conflict.* New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1992. 334pp. $32.50

These two books provide odd counterweights to each other. Both seek to examine questions surrounding the intervention of one state into another's affairs, and both are edited works, with each chapter written by a different author. Yet there the similarity ends, for one book provides a sterling example of a well edited book, and the other provides a blueprint of what not to do.

Great Powers and Little Wars is a compilation of papers from the March 1991 Military History Symposium at the Royal Military College of Canada. To begin with, I do not recommend reading first (if at all) chapters one through four. The introduction reads like an *ad hominem* attack on the legitimacy of military force as a tool—for anything. Many other aspects of the editors' discussion distressed me as well, such as the claim that "the Falkland Islands (Malvinas) War, the invasions of Grenada and Panama, and the Gulf War could not have taken place without the threat of nuclear retaliation, which prevented other Great Powers from actively supporting the underdog." Which "other Great Power" did the United States deter from intervening with nuclear weapons during the Gulf War? Certainly not the Soviet Union or China, either of which could have vetoed any of the U.N. resolutions against Iraq. A.P. Thornton's essay, "Limits of Power," is sprinkled with such gems as that during war, "politicians, hoping to become statesmen once more, can do nothing except wait for the military, their own military, to *finish*." Thornton either has not heard of or rejects the Clausewitzian conception that "war is the continuation of politics by other means."

Edward Ingram's discussion of the First Afghan War provides a post-modernist approach to military history, and, as with much of post-modernist thought, it can confuse as much as enlighten. I am still not sure that I understand the author's contention that "victories are not victories, nor defeats, defeats, because wars are not fought where they are fought.... Colin Powell and General Norman Schwarzkopf recently won a great victory in Arabia, but at the end of an imaginary war. The enemy they were pretending to fight was not present. It was somebody else, to be found elsewhere. Military and diplomatic history, both the events themselves and the historian's account of them, takes place in secret, imaginary worlds (doubtless soon to be called texts), though no more secret and imaginary than all the other worlds around." Elsewhere, Ingram argues that intelligence history is a silly fad. My respect for Ingram's scholarship does not extend to this essay.

J.I. Bakker's essay follows, with an anthropological approach to the Aceh War, in which the Netherlands conquered the northwestern part of Sumatra. Bakker's work shows how anthropologists and historians view history differently. For example, he provides an example of "a contemporary Islamic reformer" to illuminate the events of 1873–1913; the reformer, however, was active in the 1940s and 1950s, not during the Aceh War.

I found one feature of *Great Powers and Little Wars* especially frustrating. The authors come at their subjects from a wide range of historical disciplines and philosophies (post-modernism, anthropology, economic history, narrative, and others). Thus, the book has virtually no continuity. In this vein, Gordon Martel's "Aftermath" impressed me—he created a logic-stream tying together six of the seven case studies. But even Martel could not bring all of them together—he does not mention the chapter on the Russo-Japanese War (which is totally out of place here in any event, though well written and interesting). The authors' varied methodologies might have been more successfully employed in approaching the same conflict; readers would then have found the differing perspectives illuminating rather than aggravating.

I should not exaggerate my diatribe against this work. There are parts worth reading—too bad that it takes half the book to reach them. Particularly worth attention are Anthony Clayton's discussion of the French campaigns in Madagascar and Brian Sullivan's treatment of the Italian-Ethiopian War. Both bring light to conflicts little acknowledged in English-language scholarship.

Notwithstanding, *Great Powers and Little Wars* has no real theme, uses no common questions of any sort, and has no common structure unifying the case studies. Virtually any reader will find the mix of essays and their quality disappointing at best.

However, my frustrations disappeared when I turned to *Foreign Military Intervention*. The book's genesis was lunchtime discussions among the

editors about the commonalities between the experiences of the Soviets in Afghanistan, the Israelis in Lebanon, and the U.S. in Vietnam. While each conflict certainly differs, it was their commonalities that intrigued Berman, Jentleson, and Levite enough to spur a major research project on "protracted foreign military intervention." As their discussions progressed, the editors added three more cases for study (Syria in Lebanon, India in Sri Lanka, and Cuba and South Africa in Angola), set up an analytical framework, and commissioned experts to each case.

Each study focuses particularly on how the military intervention began, how it progressed, and how (with the exception of Syria in Lebanon) the intervening power disengaged. While none of the chapters is definitive, all are well written by scholars who could (with more pages) have come close to making that definitive statement. Reading the six historical studies will provide readers a basic understanding of the interventions and their courses of events. The inclusion of abbreviation lists and chronologies at the end of each chapter is a good service and indicates the sort of attention the editors gave the work. My only grievance is that I think there should have been a bibliography.

Far from haphazardly throwing together papers from a conference, the editors took five years and two workshop conferences, from the initial lunchtime talks to the book's publication—a long haul, but worthwhile from this reader's perspective.

The result is six case studies with a common structure that truly provides a basis for the three analytical chapters examining in turn the questions on which the case studies focused. These analytical chapters draw conclusions that seem to confirm long-held conceptions, such as that it is easier to get into an intervention than out of one. On the other hand, some conclusions might surprise readers; for example, according to Charles Kupchan, interventions are driven not by an intervening power's change in objectives but by changes in the "target state." Yet much of the value of the book lies not in these conclusions but in the structured path it provides toward examination of military intervention. In this regard, the editors' introductory and concluding chapters clearly articulate the reasoning for the six selected case studies, highlight some of the more important conclusions from the work, and raise many other related and important issues that await further study.

We can hope that decision makers are taking the time to give *Foreign Military Intervention* the attention it deserves. This book is well worth reading for those in the "foreign policy loop" at the White House, State Department, and Pentagon (or in other governments). Anyone interested in the dilemmas surrounding military intervention should consider this a must-read book. As a historian, then, I am disappointed to have to report: skip the historians (*Great Powers and Little Wars*) and read the political scientists (*Foreign Military Intervention*). For once, they

have provided much more insight from the past for the present.

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O'Hanlon, Michael E. *The Art of War in the Age of Peace: U.S. Military Posture for the Post–Cold War World.* New York: Praeger, 1992. 159pp. $42.95

Michael O'Hanlon's *The Art of War in the Age of Peace* is a fairly brief analysis of the military posture of the United States at the beginning of the 1990s. O'Hanlon attempts to cover a breathtaking landscape in 107 pages (exclusive of appendix and bibliography), from defining missions for U.S. military forces, redesigning the conventional force posture, and proposing alternative force postures, to examining alternative force postures and conventional arms control. He also deals with nuclear weapons and budgetary issues. This is a familiar set of themes for works of this genre, if of a range rarely attempted in a book of this length.

The author's suggestion is a familiar one too. O'Hanlon says that U.S. interests can be protected at minimal risk with a military reduced by roughly 40–50 percent in most types of major combatant forces and by a greater amount in nuclear-capable forces. Although he disclaims similarity between this book and the recent work of William Kaufmann and John Steinbruner, *Decisions for Defense: Prospects for a New Order*—calling their book "better characterized as the reflections of seasoned and thoughtful experts than as detailed analytical studies"—he arrives at his conclusions in much the same manner as do Kaufmann and Steinbruner, citing them often in his work.

While acknowledging that his proposed cuts in many areas would be twice as deep as those proposed by former Secretary of Defense Richard Cheney, he does recommend maintaining and even expanding our capabilities in logistics, intelligence and communications, special forces, and research and development. The appendix contains many mathematical formulae for calculating such things as required amounts of resupply shipping, tonnage lifted by air, and attack-at-sea exchange ratios. His mathematical conclusions all appear to be precise and correct.

As a weapons and arms control analyst with the National Security Division of the Congressional Budget Office, O'Hanlon brings excellent credentials to such a study. This work is extensively footnoted and should serve as an excellent research reference for students.

Broad in scope and clearly written, *The Art of War* is filled with authoritative information, much of it in easy-to-understand tables. A reader looking for a brief review of the strategic landscape will find it particularly appealing. On the other hand, because this is a very short book, the author rarely presents his arguments in great depth, a particular problem in that he proposes radical changes to force structures that have withstood the crucible of interservice negotiation, executive department scrutiny, and finally, congressional voting. His analysis would have been