

1987

## America Overcommitted: United States National Interests in the 1980's

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### Recommended Citation

Bottoms, Albert M. and Nuechterlein, Donald E. (1987) "America Overcommitted: United States National Interests in the 1980's," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 40 : No. 2 , Article 25.  
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol40/iss2/25>

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in general, it is difficult not to be impressed by the case he makes that there never really was any question to those in the North that the U.S.-backed South would never prevail. Indeed, the author rather convincingly suggests that there may even have been elements in the United States, particularly in the Central Intelligence Agency, which recognized this as well.

While the book is generally a credible piece of scholarship, the author too frequently permits his views to wear through. For example, he has fallen for the old standby reason for U.S. involvement in Vietnam in the first place: rubber. Very authoritatively but, alas, without reference, he tells us that "Raw materials, though less publicly cited than earlier, were still prominent in the decision makers' vision" as late as 1961.

Despite the coloring this is an important book. The portion in which the author deals with the political economy of the war and its effect on Western financial relationships, is the best such approach—perhaps the only—in the literature on Vietnam. In addition, Mr. Kolko is surprisingly critical of the Tet Offensive, resulting as it did in the "NLF . . . [loss of] most of its already fragile urban infrastructure"; he summarizes the issue as one which was costly but nevertheless crucial as a consciousness-raising evolution for both the U.S. planners and the "educated urban elements" in the South.

One can choose to accept or not Mr. Kolko's fundamental Marxist

assumptions and his subsequent glorification of the Communist Party of Vietnam; nevertheless, one cannot reject the nature of the beast as he describes it. Most importantly, though, Gabriel Kolko has given us a primer on how not to wage war against an enemy with whom we are essentially ill-equipped to engage. In so doing, he has, unquestionably, without meaning to, validated the underlying principle of what has become known as "the Reagan doctrine." The nature of warfare has changed and our commitment to support noncommunist insurgencies with unconventional means testifies to our recognition of this most urgent "lesson of Vietnam." Kolko suggests, though, that "the modern historical experience" will prove us unequal to the task.

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Nuechterlein, Donald E. *America Overcommitted: United States National Interests in the 1980's*. Lexington, Kentucky: The University of Kentucky Press, 1985. 238pp. \$23

Sometimes a title does a disservice to a book. Such is the case with Donald Nuechterlein's latest study of the underlying structural bases of American foreign policy, *America Overcommitted*. One might expect handwringing from a *quid nunc* pundit. Those who have followed Nuechterlein's thoughtful development of a logical structure for identification of the nature and degree of national

interest know better. This book captures the essence of his earlier works and applies the same logical framework to an analysis of U.S. interests and policies on a global scale.

Nuechterlein baits the hook for the reader in the first chapter by introducing the controversy among scholars as to the utility of the concept of national interest in foreign policy formulation and analysis. Because the author provides explicit paths and explanations of the data, historical background, and assumptions that he used in identifying the U.S. national interests—country by country—around the world, the reader can make his own judgement as to utility.

The author's national interest matrix arrays four attributes: defense of homeland, economic well-being, favorable world order, and promotion of values (example: human rights) against four measures of intensity of interest: survival, vital, major, and peripheral. The author develops the criteria for distinguishing between vital and major interests—the others are self-evident.

Students of conflict and persuasion will relish the eleven political/economic and nine military instruments of foreign and national security policy that range from establishing or breaking diplomatic relations to the "limited" use of nuclear weapons—quite a gamut! Nuechterlein's discussion of these instruments is not particularly deep and might not satisfy specialists, but it is adequate to fix one's ideas as to how to apply the national interest matrix.

The author looks at national interest primarily through a political/power lens. He views smaller countries or distant ones like Japan, Korea, Brazil, and South Africa as being in the vital-major range of interest. He does not see them as essential to U.S. national survival. He does not explicitly make linkage or identify results of changes in regional alignments vis-à-vis the United States or its allies that potentially are catastrophic to the United States.

The reader is invited to do what the reviewer did—use the national interest matrix not from the political/power viewpoint of the United States but from the economic (war-fighting) interdependence of the United States, its allies, and most of the neutral and nonaligned nations. Many of the countries of lesser interest in the power/political view become vital, approaching survival, interests as the integrity of the war industrial base is threatened through destruction or denial of strategic materials on critical electronic sub-assemblies. Any decline or cut in the ability of the United States to sustain conventional forces leaves nuclear options of uncertain utility as the only "trump card."

The arsenal of the free world in the final few years of the twentieth century has a vastly different character than it had during World War II. Vital, "high-tech" components and labor-intensive as well as capital-intensive manufacturing processes have moved offshore. It is as if the arsenals of the Confederacy during the American Civil War were located

in Moline, Ill., Gettysburg, Pa., and Bermuda rather than Birmingham, Atlanta, and Richmond. Using Nuechterlein's methodology, what then becomes of survival interest for the Confederacy?

This book provides not a practical, but a conceptual viewpoint. The typical examples from the 1980-84 time period (the Iranian Hostage Crisis, Marines in Beirut, etc.) do not detract from the lasting value of the methodology. Those of us who are involved intellectually in the debate about future force composition and structure can benefit from Nuechterlein's work and from his ability to involve us in his argument.

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Hart, Gary and Lind, William S.  
*America Can Win: The Case for Military Reform*. Bethesda, Md.: Adler & Adler, 1986. 301pp. \$16.95

In this assessment, Senator Gary Hart (D-Colo.) and his aide, William S. Lind, examine the very core of the U.S. military structure. The diversity of issues ranges from warfare types, Joint Chiefs of Staff organization, and military procurement to subjects as mundane as the weight of the individual rifleman's combat load.

*America Can Win* is a manifesto of the military reform movement. Reflecting the express aims of this reform movement, the book's two most ambitious and broad goals are: moving the focus of the defense

debate from the budget to combat effectiveness, and the adoption of maneuver warfare.

The authors propose that the issue of military budgeting and spending *not* be focused upon how much money is spent but upon whether the money being spent provides America with an effective military with war-winning capabilities. They argue that the measuring stick of the Armed Forces ought to be combat effectiveness, not McNamaraesque cost efficiency. As the authors perceptively point out, "Most congressmen justify their focus on the defense budget by saying that they are trying to prevent waste. What they miss is that, if the armed forces are not effective in combat, *all* defense spending is waste."

The second broad goal is the adoption of maneuver warfare by all branches as expressed doctrine. *America Can Win* is not a treatise on maneuver warfare nor is it intended to be. Nevertheless, since the acceptance of maneuver warfare is a cornerstone to the proposed reform, the authors should have sent out their reasons for its superiority. Instead the book presents only straw anecdotes, and the reader is expected to accept on faith that the doctrine of maneuver warfare is superior. This flaw would have been ameliorated somewhat had a bibliography been included. As is, the average reader's understanding will be limited to the level of cocktail party discussions only.

In their analysis of the current military structure and its ills, the authors are bitingly direct and merci-