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Anatomy of Failure: Why America Loses Every War It Starts

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approaches that can survive not only different administrations and electoral cycles but interagency differences and bureaucratic turf wars.

One of this reviewer's only regrets is that—barring a few segments in the introduction and conclusion—the author chooses not to apply his findings to the study of more-contemporary COIN campaigns. Dr. Ladwig has acquired a reputation in the field of South Asia studies for his careful, methodical approach to the region's security challenges, and it would have been useful for the reader to get a better sense of his take on the past, present, and future of U.S. policy on Afghanistan. It also might have been interesting to explore the challenges that come with more-multidirectional proxy wars, such as that currently unfolding in Syria, which involves multiple potential clients and competing "candidate patron" states, ranging from Turkey to Russia and Iran. These are all minor quibbles, however, and ones that Ladwig no doubt can address in a follow-on study, should he wish to do so.

All in all, this is an excellent and well-timed contribution. Moreover, despite being an academic work, it also is an example of the virtues of the more interdisciplinary, even subtle, approach to security studies embraced by European institutions such as King's College. Drawing not only on well-researched history but on other social sciences such as economic theory, *The Forgotten Front* is refreshingly jargon-free and clearly written, thus making it an ideal study companion for readers of the *Naval War College Review*.

ISKANDER REHMAN

Anatomy of Failure: Why America Loses Every War It Starts, by Harlan Ullman. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2017. 272 pages. $29.95.

When former Secretaries of State General Colin Powell and John Kerry and former Supreme Allied Commander Europe Marine general Jim Jones (for whom I worked when I commanded the International Security Assistance Force [ISAF] in Afghanistan when it expanded across the whole country) call Harlan Ullman's *Anatomy of Failure* a must-read, people should pay attention. And for those who worry about policy books being boring, *House of Cards* creator Michael, Lord Dobbs deems *Anatomy,* in another blurb, a combination of the works of best-selling thriller novelist Tom Clancy and Carl von Clausewitz. All are correct.

In the interests of full disclosure, the writer and I have been friends and colleagues since my time at ISAF. As Britain's Chief of the General Staff and then Chief of the Defence Staff, I worked with Ullman on many issues. Irrespective of this, *Anatomy* is essential reading for practitioners and students of foreign, defense, and national security policy.

The book's center of gravity is the asking and answering of the vital question of why, since World War II, America arguably has lost all the wars it started and has failed in military interventions in which it did not have just cause to participate. This question alone directly challenges the accepted view in Washington that America has the best and most formidable military in the world. If that is the case, despite some stunning tactical successes, why, at the strategic level, has its record in

using that military been so apparently dismal over the past seventy years?

Of course, Ullman records, we won the big wars: World War II and the Cold War. And, as he notes, George H. W. Bush was entirely successful in winning the First Gulf War in 1991. But in Korea and especially Vietnam, Iraq the second time, Afghanistan, and numerous lesser operations—ranging from Grenada and Beirut in 1983 to Libya in 2011 and the ongoing campaign in Syria—he argues persuasively that the results range from simply bad to catastrophic.

In the first two-thirds of the book, Ullman examines—in depth and with personal insights, in what he calls vignettes—why America's resort to using military force has been so poor. He produces three overarching reasons that apply not only to the United States but to many other countries—including, most certainly, my own. First, America elected too many presidents who were inexperienced, unprepared, and unready to handle what may be the most difficult job on earth. Through the lens of the use of military force, the book analyzes the strengths and weaknesses of every president since World War II, noting along the way John F. Kennedy's rueful observation that "there is no school for presidents."

Second, administrations that failed applied poor, or simply wrong, strategic judgment in determining whether to go to war or to use force. The Kennedy-Johnson decision makers truly believed that monolithic Communism had to be stopped on the Mekong River so it would not spread to the Mississippi. Bill Clinton believed a few bombs would force Serbia's Slobodan Milosevic to stop killing Kosovars. George W. Bush had the flawed vision that the geostrategic landscape of the Middle East could be changed forever by democratizing Iraq, although he justified the decision to go to war on nonexistent weapons of mass destruction. Barack Obama drew "redlines" and demanded that Syrian president Bashar al-Assad stand down—to no effect—and he "led from behind" in bombing Libya, bringing about Mu'ammar Gadhafi's downfall—thereby provoking a brutal civil war. Who knows what Donald Trump could do?

Third, the book shows how the lack of sufficient knowledge or understanding of the regions and conditions where force might be used guaranteed failure, from Vietnam to the current misnamed "war on terror." What gives this book an added and authoritative dimension is the author's personal insights that complement the book's theme. As a Swift boat skipper in Vietnam, his stories of that war underscore the folly of America's intervention. At times during the Cold War, whether in discussions with former Defense Secretary Robert McNamara or the Pentagon leadership under Ronald Reagan, or in later years with those dealing with terrorism, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, he reveals the damage that lack of knowledge and understanding will inflict on any policy and strategy.

The vignette that struck me in particular was a sensitive mission that Ullman undertook in Vietnam as part of Operation PHOENIX, an assassination program that the Central Intelligence Agency and the South Vietnamese mounted to terminate with prejudice (i.e., kill) suspected Vietcong and North Vietnamese agents. It was a metaphor for why the war was lost.

In the remaining third of the book, Ullman itemizes a series of recommendations to overcome or reduce the likelihood of failures in using military

force that arise from electing unready presidents and using poor or flawed strategic judgment, and to ensure that sufficient knowledge and understanding of the reasons for using or rejecting military force are in place. He calls for a "brains based approach" to strategic thinking—a term that I, as army and defense chief, borrowed shamelessly. He proposes a "Bletchley Park–like capacity" for using open-source material available on social media and unclassified avenues such as Google Earth to enhance knowledge and understanding.

Some of Ullman's recommendations are unique to the United States, but in the main any and all leaders and students of national security will benefit greatly from this book. Indeed, to reinforce the recommendation of Messrs. Powell, Kerry, and Jones, read this book! And, as Lord Dobbs adds, this is a very good and intriguing read as well.

LORD RICHARDS OF HERSTMONCEUX

Fragile Rise: Grand Strategy and the Fate of Imperial Germany, 1871–1914, by Xu Qiyu, trans. Joshua Hill. Foreword by Graham Allison. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2017. 368 pages. $32.

Once in a great while, a book allows the familiar to be viewed through new eyes. *Fragile Rise* is such a volume. On its surface, it is an account of imperial Germany's catastrophic grand strategy between the nation's founding in 1871 and the onset of the First World War. While this is well-tilled ground, *Fragile Rise* provides a clear and convincing account of how Otto von Bismarck mitigated the tensions created by Germany's newfound power within the European system, and how his successors failed at the same task. But what makes *Fragile Rise* unique is less what it says than who is saying it. The author, Xu Qiyu, is an active-duty colonel in the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) who serves as deputy director of the Institute for Strategic Studies at the National Defense University in Beijing—the counterpart to the U.S. National Defense University.

USN readers who harbor cartoonish images of our PLA counterparts may be surprised at the depth of research and insight offered in this volume. Xu has been a visiting fellow and guest of a number of prestigious Western institutions, including the Naval War College, where he is respected as a subtle and engaging thinker. His research and writing reflect that experience, informed by international scholarship and primary-source material from across Europe.

Throughout the book, Xu draws no explicit parallels between the German and Chinese experiences, although the book's translator points out that the cover of the Chinese edition features the words "When it is difficult to see clearly into the future, looking back into history, even the history of other peoples, might be the right choice." In China there is a long tradition of using historical examples to offer implicit criticism of what may not be criticized officially, and how Fragile Rise can be viewed in this light is apparent upon reading.

Xu characterizes the newly unified Germany as following a "hide and bide" strategy, recalling Deng Xiaoping's guidance that an emerging China should hide its capabilities and bide its time, avoiding international leadership and the complications that come from displays of power. By 1878, however, Germany found itself a factor and a source of concern in the international