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## Secret Wars: Covert Conflict in International Politics

Abram N. Shulsky

Austin Carson

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example includes a grassroots logistics effort that supported a national army by coordinating donations of money and supplies from across the globe. It proved so effective that Ukrainian military commanders sent in supply orders; in true e-commerce fashion, civilians fulfilled the requests and even delivered items—including uniforms and flak jackets—to units in the field. Contrast this effort to the U.S. Liberty Bond and war bond drives of the two world wars as an indirect mechanism for noncombatant support. The Ukrainian Facebook-driven campaign, although conducted outside sanctioned government control, had more impact on the individual donor, because the donors could see the direct effects of their efforts. The nature of much civilian support for a belligerent on one side of a conflict has not changed—consider care packages and letters in the mail in wars past. Yet the characteristics have transformed through individual empowerment, displaying a magnitude and immediacy unseen in military history. It exemplifies a transfer of real impact on combat effectiveness from traditional institutions and hierarchies to networks of individuals.

For centuries the United States enjoyed a geopolitical position that protected our shores from direct interventions. Arguably, cyberspace, with its instant accessibility from afar, could counterbalance that advantage. As we begin to understand cyberborne capabilities enabling conflicts, works such as *War in 140 Characters* should shape the way we think about our vulnerabilities. The book constitutes an author's plea to understand better twenty-first-century war, and it leaves the reader compelled to ponder the strategic implications of the way ahead. Do information revolutions

of the past, such as the advents of the printing press, radio, and television, illuminate a path forward for society to follow? It is clear from Patrikarakos's work that increasingly effective individuals promulgating disparate realities on social media will mandate entirely new approaches from traditional Western institutions if they are going to survive.

MARC D. BEAUDREAU



*Secret Wars: Covert Conflict in International Politics*, by Austin Carson. Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2018. 344 pages. \$35.

Professor Carson takes up two intriguing and related questions: Why do nations often choose to intervene covertly rather than overtly in military conflicts, and why do their adversaries, after detecting the intervention, often choose to stay silent about it (or, as he calls it, “collude”)? Using four case studies (the Spanish Civil War, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and the Soviet war in Afghanistan), he develops his own theory of why nations act these ways.

His theory applies to “limited wars”—conflicts in which some of the adversaries (the outside great-power intervenors) are not employing the full range of their capabilities. Carson argues that maintaining a war's limited character provides the motivation for this collusion of covertness. Demonstrating how this works is the core of his argument, and the case studies provide persuasive examples.

First, by intervening covertly—or by not publicizing an adversary's covert intervention—a party avoids stirring up hawkish public opinion, both domestically and on the part of the adversary. By avoiding public demands

to “win the war” by whatever means necessary and risk a face-losing, disadvantageous settlement, both leaderships preserve maneuver room.

Second, by thus reducing the political consequences, both parties can signal their desire to keep the conflict limited. In essence, both sides bargain—while pursuing their respective interests—and cooperate in escalation avoidance. Since this point is the book’s key contribution to the literature on this subject, let us see how it works.

An intervenor proceeding covertly instead of overtly pays a price: he may be constrained in the size of the force he sends and the weaponry employed, his logistics may be more complicated and less efficient, and he forgoes whatever reputational advantage he might gain by being seen as having supported his allies and stood up for his principles. By paying this price, the intervenor signals to his adversary that his desire to win is constrained by his interest in keeping the conflict limited; he shows respect for the adversary’s reputation by not confronting him openly.

When the adversary detects the intervention yet does not use his knowledge to diplomatic or propaganda advantage, he likewise signals his interest in avoiding escalation. He shows that he is avoiding a self-imposed requirement to confront the intervenor openly and defeat his intervention.

While Carson argues for the importance of this dynamic, he fully recognizes that many other reasons for covertness and collusion exist beyond the two he discusses: “[I]t bears repeating that my limited-war theory does not claim to be a ‘master cause’ of all secrecy in war. Alternative logics are compatible with my own logic even within the same

conflict” (p. 63). Thus, a government may intervene covertly if it hopes to hide its involvement from dovish domestic opinion, or if it seeks to gain an operational advantage from secrecy. Indeed, it is possible that keeping an (initial) intervention covert is a means of putting one’s adversary off his guard and thus achieving surprise when one subsequently intervenes in a more substantial way.

However, there are additional reasons for covertness/collusion that the book ignores or underemphasizes. If a government wants, for whatever reason, to follow a moderate course in a conflict, it has more than hawkish domestic opinion to worry about; it also must make sure that its adversaries or third parties do not interpret its moderation as weakness. Hence, it may employ covertness as a way of reducing the reputational stakes involved.

The same logic operates for the detector. While Carson notes that the detector might gain diplomatic advantages from going public, he underemphasizes the other side of the coin: complaining about an adversary’s intervention in a conflict and underreacting merely may advertise one’s weakness. A government also may collude if it fears that public knowledge of the adversary’s military action will fan fears of a wider conflict, scaring its own (dovish) public or third parties, and thereby increasing opposition to its own involvement in the conflict.

Additionally, a government may keep its intervention covert—or at least unacknowledged—for propaganda reasons; open intervention might contradict its own self-portrayal in its propaganda as pacific and anti-interventionist.

The book is at its strongest in showing how covertness and collusion can serve

the purpose of avoiding escalation. But ultimately, no government intervenes for the sake of keeping a conflict limited; regardless of that goal, its actions will be determined most by the political objective it seeks to achieve. The author's theory sheds light on one aspect of the actors' motives in cases in which the desire to avoid escalation is relatively strong. But, as in the case of any such theory, understanding such situations requires a full assessment of the goals and circumstances of each of the actors.

ABRAM N. SHULSKY



*China's Maritime Gray Zone Operations*, ed. Andrew S. Erickson and Ryan D. Martinson. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2019. 352 pages. \$50.

In its long history, China has deployed substantial naval power, but only episodically. It never faced sustained naval threats, so the country's maritime frontier was not a perennial strategic concern. But in more modern times, seaborne pressures from the Western powers and Japan became unrelenting. Foreign navies even sailed deep into the country's interior, establishing "treaty ports" hundreds of miles from the coast. This ended with the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949. Still, even though Western naval power was pushed offshore, seaborne forces nearby could attack China with impunity.

This rankled, but what to do? In 1965, Marshal Lin Biao (perhaps Chairman Mao's closest comrade in arms) looked to the earlier defeat of Japan by the once-tiny People's Liberation Army (PLA) to ask, "How was it possible for a weak country finally to defeat a strong country?" His answer was found in

Mao Zedong's idea of "People's War." Although land based, the concept held promise for menacing forward naval positions of the United States, perceived as the foremost opponent. Having backed an insurgency in the Philippines, a coup attempt in Indonesia, and guerilla wars in Malaya and Vietnam, Beijing could imagine pushing the United States out of great anchorages such as Subic, Cam Rahn, and Singapore. As for Yokosuka, Japan—the U.S. Navy's most important base in the western Pacific—a successful political campaign might chase the United States four thousand miles east, back to Honolulu.

This was naval warfare de facto, but it did not succeed. In the end, China learned that American sea power could not be neutralized on the cheap. However, China began to rise economically through its seaborne connections, and in the 1980s Admiral Liu Huaqing—sometimes called "China's Mahan"—made a case for a strong navy. This vision was realized more fully in 2012 when Communist Party leader Hu Jintao announced a new national goal: "to enhance our capacity for exploiting marine resources, develop the marine economy, protect the marine maritime rights and interests, and build China into a strong maritime power."

During this same period of an economically rising China, the Naval War College's China Maritime Studies Institute became a leading center for analyzing China's naval power. Two of the Institute's mainstays, Andrew Erickson and Ryan Martinson, again have contributed to our understanding by assembling and editing twenty papers prepared for a 2017 conference on what could turn out to be the most significant component of China's *modus operandi* at sea: exploitation of the so-called gray zone.