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The Savage Wars of Peace: Small Wars and the Rise of American Power

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The voucher program failed largely because of government corruption, which led to a loss of public support.

This book is insightful but incomplete. Orenstein's arguments are concise and persuasive, but he only examines two cases that neatly support his argument. Hungary would have been an excellent additional test, as would have the fledgling economies of the Balkans, where the process of democratization is affected even more directly by domestic and international constraints.

With possible entry into the European Union just around the corner for most of Central and Eastern Europe, the United States and Europe must look carefully at these practical experiments in democratic and economic liberalization. With democracies emerging in Southeast Asia and perhaps the Middle East, it is important to develop and test models of economic reform to see what works and how best to implement them in democratizing countries.

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Boot, Max. *The Savage Wars of Peace: Small Wars and the Rise of American Power*. New York: Basic Books, 2002. 428pp. \$30

If the story of the military history of the United States could somehow be presented in a single museum, the most grand and widely visited halls would be those dedicated to the American Revolution, the Civil War, and World War II. Less visited, but still of interest, would be much smaller exhibits devoted to World War I, Korea, Vietnam, and DESERT STORM. Conflicts such as

the War of 1812 and the war with Mexico might rate a single dusty showcase in some obscure corner. Tucked out of sight, rarely seen, and all but forgotten would be cabinets, crates, and cartons packed with the jumbled stories of bush wars, expeditions, occupations, pacifications, and reprisals—the often sanguinary and surprising “small wars” of the U.S. military experience.

Reporter and *Wall Street Journal* editor Max Boot provides us with a long-overdue survey of the all too often slighted and neglected realm of these lesser conflicts. His work is of necessity an overview, but it is eminently readable and entertaining. Along the way, Boot reminds us that the conduct of these small conflicts is as much an “American way of war” as that which mobilizes and employs mass citizen-armies in protracted combat. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Boot suggests that many of the lessons learned from these small wars may be applied to the security dilemmas of today.

This work deserves praise on several levels. To begin with, Boot has rescued the history of these conflicts from a regrettable level of obscurity (as far as the general reading public is concerned). As the merits and limitations of the United States taking on the role of an imperial police force are increasingly debated, it is useful to recall that this is not the first time America has attempted to do so. The author has the courage to suggest that under certain conditions, imperial police forces may provide a much higher quality of life for indigenous people than would otherwise be possible. Boot notes that Haiti's greatest period of prosperity arguably occurred during its long occupation by the U.S. Marine Corps. He also points out that

the Dominican Republic actually benefited when forcibly placed on a fiscal diet by the United States. Although the U.S. Marines were ensuring that nearly half the Dominican Republic's revenues went to repay foreign creditors, their honesty in disbursing the remainder was so notable that the country received more funds than it had under its own rulers. Boot also points out that Veracruz reached a record standard of cleanliness and hygiene, with an attendant improvement in public health, than it had known previously. Boot reminds us that far from resulting in quagmires of despair and failure, many of these conflicts have to be seen as U.S. successes.

There are, however, several criticisms that might potentially be leveled at this work. Some may say that like so many correspondents before him, Boot excessively admires the U.S. Marines, extolling their triumphs at the expense of the other services. However, while there is no denying that Boot has high regard for leathernecks, he does provide ample examples of Navy and Army actions. It is also important to remember that the Marines were the service of choice for the great majority of these conflicts. A significant portion of the Marines' senior leadership in the 1930s felt that the future of the Corps should be bound up in mastering the challenges of these conflicts. This resulted in the Marines' *Small Wars Manual*, published in 1941. It was later shelved; Boot believes that it would have benefited the United States in Vietnam had those in charge read the dusty tome.

Another criticism that might be made by some is that Boot glosses over the darker aspects of small wars, focusing on the successes and personalities. For

example, the first charging of a serving flag officer with a war crime, the use of torture to extract information, and mutinies of such U.S. trained units as the Nicaraguan National Guard were part of the small-war experience. However, Boot discusses these events in clear and unequivocal terms, leaving the reader to come to grips with how these aspects of war played in U.S. successes.

What make this book so timely and one that should be read by almost anyone with an interest in political-military issues, are the tie-ins that Boot identifies as existing between the wars of the past and the realities of the present. Issues such as exit strategies, expected casualties, the difficulties of working with local allies, and the complexities of state building are not things the United States is facing for the first time. Indeed, as Boot demonstrates, the nation has been dealing with these dilemmas since the beginning of its existence. Well written, timely, and provocative, *Savage Wars of Peace* is well worth attention.

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Vidal, Gore. *Perpetual War for Perpetual Peace: How We Got to Be So Hated*. New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2002. 160pp. \$10

It would be difficult to find a book on world affairs more contrary to the opinions of most readers of the *Naval War College Review* or other members of the American national security community than Gore Vidal's *Perpetual War for Perpetual Peace*.

As a military officer myself, I disagree with many of Vidal's assumptions and