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Winning without Fighting: Irregular Warfare and Strategic Competition in the 21st Century

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not to unrest. China's aging population also poses additional problems. China's heavy-handed moves in the region have harmed its reputation and increase the chance of strategic encirclement. By the 2030s, the authors predict, improvements in U.S. and Taiwanese military capabilities will pose much greater obstacles to the Chinese use of force.

At the same time, Brands and Beckley's analysis reveals Beijing's chances of success, if an attack is mounted quickly, are increased by conditions facing the United States and its current and potential allies. U.S. military forces are spread across the globe. The Russian invasion of Ukraine and the need to bolster NATO to deter Russian aggression are a major distraction for Washington. Recent increased military action against Houthi rebels and Iranian-backed militias will increase U.S. difficulties and make more attractive a quick, violent, and successful strike at Taiwan.

Danger Zone claims the current state of U.S. forces increases the chance of Chinese military action. In the words of the authors, "Many of the Pentagon's workhorse ships and combat aircraft are literally falling apart or bursting into flames" (p. 133). Required platform retirements will reduce the number of missiles available for use—a calculation Chinese military leaders can and will easily make. If, as expected, these issues will be dealt with by the 2030s, the pressure on the Chinese to do something in the short term will dramatically increase.

The authors spent some time analyzing President Xi. He has pledged the reunification of Taiwan as a major political and personal goal. His key advisers are described as "hawks and yes-men who tell him that the [People's Liberation Army] could successfully carry it out" (p. 134).

Danger Zone uses historical examples to illuminate both potential Chinese decision-making and how the United States could craft a course of action to survive the near term. While analogies are always fraught with risk, those provided here seem reasonable.

U.S. leaders are urged to adopt an immediate shift in policy in dealing with China. Foundational elements of this policy include a clear prioritization of interests, accepting that the United States must concentrate on the most dangerous issues, those with the most potentially long-lasting consequences. For example, Taiwan must be armed heavily to defend successfully against an invasion or make an invasion prohibitively costly. The United States must also become more aggressive toward China, accepting a higher level of risk to "provoke China into strategic blunders and selectively roll back its power" (p. 162).

If there is a major weakness to *Danger Zone*, it is that while the authors recognize the difficulties involved with many of their recommendations (which all involve hard choices), they do not explain how those difficulties can be overcome. For example, hyperpartisan politics and a war-weary public will provide serious obstacles to the recommended course of action. Understandably, there are no suggested solutions—and perhaps there are none. If that is the case, all one can hope is that the authors are wrong.

RICHARD NORTON

Winning without Fighting: Irregular Warfare and Strategic Competition in the 21st Century, by Rebecca Patterson et al. Cambria, 2024. 332 pages. $49.99.

Winning without Fighting: Irregular Warfare and Strategic Competition in

the 21st Century makes a timely contribution to the ongoing and controversial national-security debate on how the United States should organize for current and future conflicts. By examining the topics of irregular warfare (IW) and strategic competition, which emerge as the rightful but disputed cornerstones of U.S. national-security efforts, the author team identifies the weak points within U.S. strategic culture, contrasts this culture with those of its more fluid Russian and Chinese adversaries, and then derives recommended U.S. approaches to IW and strategic competition through an adapted elements-of-national-power framework encompassing military, economic, and informational statecraft tools complemented by resilience.

This volume is a significant work for national-security policy makers, practitioners, and scholars to read and reflect on, taking particular note of chapters 2, 3, and 4. First, chapter 2 provides a valuable and sobering examination of American strategic culture—the country's preferred method of waging war and handling conflict—where a worship of U.S. exceptionalism leads to a "bias to action at the cost of well-considered analysis and reflection" (p. 30). This approach results in a binary view of conflict exacerbated by an "obsession with metrics and quantification" (p. 31) that ultimately is not relevant to the competition environment. This section serves as an urgent wake-up call for U.S. self-examination, especially given the poor outcomes of recent wars (p. 37).

Chapter 3 follows with excellent insights into the contrasting adversary cultural climates of Russia and China, evaluated against the book's statecraft framework. Unsurprisingly, this chapter echoes the message found in H. R. McMaster's book *Battlegrounds: The Fight to Defend the Free World* that U.S. political-military elites must develop greater understanding of and strategic empathy for the enemy to succeed in any conflict—irregular or otherwise. Perversely, the chapter also demonstrates that while the United States struggles to implement IW in its strategic culture, Russia and China both fear real and perceived American IW efforts (p. 62). Chapter 4 then advocates for a close study of the U.S. experience in the Cold War, not to duplicate the template, but to take its principles of political warfare and apply them to the present environment characterized by a multipolar world in which IW and strategic competition are the preferred conflict methodologies.

The remaining chapters outline the broad parameters of the aforementioned tools of statecraft and aim to provide pragmatic recommendations for more-effective U.S. actions in the strategic-competition and irregular-warfare arenas. While the tools are not new, the book contains some nuggets worth contemplating. For example, under the military statecraft rubric, the simple practice of key leader engagement emerges as an underutilized instrument, since durable relationships—and not short-sighted transactions—matter in strategic competition. Equally, the authors note the necessity for a major redirection of security cooperation, since "the preponderance of military aid has flowed to the Middle East as opposed to the supposedly priority Indo-Pacific region" (p. 107).

Under economic statecraft, the impotency of sanctions stands out, while the authors reinforce the excellent idea for

a civilian Joint Chiefs of Staff, including the Departments of Commerce, State, and the Treasury, to serve as a counterweight to an overly military approach to competition. More emphasis could have been placed on the counter–threat finance and financial tools as counterbalances to the array of economic measures mentioned. The information statecraft section is arguably the weakest chapter, since this form of national power seems to be the hardest to address for the United States in irregular warfare. The authors' recommendations are constrained by this larger context. A novel aspect of the book was the inclusion of resilience as a tool of statecraft and the recommendation to make it a central element of national security. A simple comparison of the costs of the COVID-19 pandemic with those of natural disasters and the 9/11 attacks—COVID-19 was more costly by an order of magnitude—makes this argument compelling (p. 185).

Overall, the entire book is highly credible, since the four authors possess impeccable pedigrees as soldier-scholars that make their analyses and recommendations all the more noteworthy. All are retired colonels with doctorates, and they offer a blend of economist, strategist, and special operator profiles, which are highly relevant to the discourse on strategic competition. With an excellent glossary up front, a comprehensive bibliography, and a clear style, this book is highly recommended reading for national-security policy makers, practitioners, and scholars wrestling with the U.S. approach to IW and strategic competition. It would serve well as a core textbook at both the staff- and war-college levels.

KEVIN D. STRINGER

Sea Power and the American Interest: From the Civil War to the Great War, by John Fass Morton. Naval Institute Press, 2024. 392 pages. $39.95.

John Fass Morton's *Sea Power and the American Interest* covers a period that numerous historians of the U.S. Navy have explored: the development of the so-called New Navy in the latter decades of the nineteenth century. Morton, however, brings a new and refreshing framework, albeit one clearly inspired by scholars studying the development of the fiscal-military state. Previous studies have focused on the institutional development of the force as well as its cultural evolution. Morton instead focuses on the overlapping web of financial, industrial, and political interests that increasingly saw the U.S. Navy as both an outlet for industrial output and a means by which the security of those interests could be guaranteed.

Morton, a journalist and author, perhaps best known for his book *Mustin: A Naval Family of the Twentieth Century* (2003), spends much of the monograph detailing how the United States grew into an industrial power because of the Civil War. The development of this incredible economic engine, initially funded in large part by British investments, both drew the nation into the British-dominated "Atlantic System" and also allowed the emergent American financial and industrial titans to seek more economic opportunities in the Western Hemisphere and East Asia. The advent of the Progressive movement and its emphasis on societal and scientific progress did little to stop this evolution, as these goals often overlapped with those of the moneyed interests, and the emphasis on rational institutional development