

BOOK REVIEWS

Brogan, Patrick. *The Fighting Never Stopped: A Comprehensive Guide to Conflict Since 1945*. New York: Vintage, 1990.

Thompson, Loren B. *Low-Intensity Conflict: The Pattern of Warfare in the Modern World*. Lexington, MA, and Toronto: Lexington, 1989.

War since 1945 has become an increasingly tricky business. Many if not most of the nations involved in conflict — whether with other nations or within their own borders — have had to fight according to rules far different from those supposedly learned in the two world wars of this century. Those wars, for the most part, taught how to (and how not to) fight conventional wars against more or less conventional enemies. The irony is that those rules, once learned, have but rarely been applicable.

Although the politics of the Cold War inadvertently lessened the likelihood of general war, the proliferation of new nations in the wake of the collapse of the European empires seemed to increase the possibilities of local wars. In retrospect, we realize, as supporters of empire did then and scholars have since, what substantial forces for stability the empires were — a stability “imposed at the point of a bayonet” writes Patrick Brogan. (p. viii) But the imperial idea by 1945 had lost its drive and attractiveness. In the brave new world of decolonization and independence suspicious nations glared at reciprocally suspicious neighbors. And within these new and sometimes immature nations tribal, ethnic, racial and other communities oppressed, or were oppressed, by other tribal, ethnic, or racial groups. The United States, Russia, China and other developed or powerful nations also interjected into the Third World their own needs and policies, feeding the unrest and discontent already there (and in a generally negative way).

Therefore, it seems only natural that those groups and individuals who were oppressed, or felt oppressed, or who just wanted to be in control, might look for means to topple their, or their neighbor's government. Because someone else controlled the government and thus the country's soldiers and weapons, these groups found it impossible to fight by and with conventional means. Thus the stage was set for the emergence of the unconventional as the warfare of choice in the Third World. Many readily grasped the truth inherent in using unorthodox means to gain political ends. Namely, that a few determined individuals, full of “passionate intensity,” driven by theories of national liberation wars, insurgency wars, revolutionary wars, and adept at assassination, sabotage, terrorism, torture, political propaganda, organizing demonstrations, etc. could destabilize and overthrow governments not deeply rooted in the fabric of the new nations.

All of the above theories and methods became coins of unconventional warfare and as such have been freely spent since 1945. Those using this approach have generally but not always been more adept and successful than

those — mainly western nations — attempting to counter it. In failing, the western nations have lost themselves in a new fog of war. Unconventional warfare has become a hallmark of our age, dealing with it one of the age's central and most intractable problems. Both books under review, albeit in different ways, reflect these sad facts.

Patrick Brogan's work amply confirms that from 1945 on *The Fighting Never Stopped*. Subtitled *A Comprehensive Guide to World Conflict Since 1945*, this reference book is arranged by region (Africa, Asia, the Middle East, etc.); and within the region by individual nations, or in a few cases by subregions and topics (eg. the drug wars). In each entry a country is briefly profiled vis-a-vis vital statistics, then a short narrative of war in that country's history since 1945 follows, and is itself followed by a select bibliography. Thus one can get a quick fix on the country, its wars, and if needed, direction to more information. Brogan includes useful if macabre appendices on wars, coups and revolutions, and assassinations since the end of World War II.

What emerges is dismal and Brogan knows it. In the introduction he notes that:

The world has never been at peace since the victory celebrations of 1945. The great wars that have shaken Asia and Africa and the lesser conflict that have afflicted the rest of the world have sometimes subsided and have sometimes flared up into monstrous conflagration. They have never ceased. (p. vii)

In those years 15 to 30 million people have died as a result of war, and another 30 million plus have been made homeless.

Describing the entries as superficial is not necessarily to criticize but merely to register the nature of the enterprise. Individual entries are, as one might expect, uneven in quality. Especially disappointing is that most entries deal more with a nation's recent conflict(s) than conflict(s) that nation has experienced since 1945. The worst entry in this respect is the one on Vietnam. Surely the pivotal events in the history of this country's conflict since 1945 have been the wars against the French, the Americans, and between the Vietnamese themselves. Together these wars make up what might be called a thirty years' war (1945-75). They are covered quickly and perfunctorily, and the real object of the author's interest, Vietnam since 1975, comes into focus. Perhaps this preoccupation with the very recent past is intended so that the guide will be useful to those wanting or needing a quick run-up to the present. For someone wanting a guide reliable for the entire period it is less useful.

The space allowed for various countries makes one curious about the criteria used to determine length. For example, Vietnam, Korea, Fiji and New Caledonia all received seven pages. What does this mean? That world shaking war in the Falklands received nine, the Philippines thirteen, Cambodia fifteen, Northern Ireland and Lebanon eighteen each, South Africa twenty-two, and Israel twenty-three. Israel's entry is the longest for a single nation and this, when put in the larger context of the length given to some of the entries just mentioned, surely allows one to feel that something is amiss. Quite probably

the nature of the entries reflect Brogan's personal interest and a certain British insularity.

The entries themselves are written in an astringent style that is both idiosyncratic and attractive. Brogan's efforts have brought forth a reference book not half so useful as it could have been had it contained better judgements as to which conflicts are more important than others in recent world history.

The second book, *Low-Intensity Conflict: the Pattern of Warfare in the Modern World* promises more than it delivers. Its editor, Loren B. Thompson of Georgetown University, asked his contributors — "recognized experts" — "to analyze the most critical aspects of the challenge posed by low-intensity conflict and make recommendations concerning how the United States can better meet the challenge." (p. xix) They were to do this for military and civilian practitioners of low-intensity conflict, educators, and the intelligent lay public. Thompson leads off with an overview of the subject with special reference to the United States in the 1980s. Then eight special studies follow. Although all to a greater or lesser extent pay lip service to the notion that low-intensity conflict is at heart a political conflict, the substance of their work generally belies this. Their hearts (and dare I say minds) are with the military side of the solution to the problems presented by low-intensity conflict, the side that deals with special operations, counterterrorism, and intelligence.

John Schlight perceptively suggests an explanation for this phenomenon, and why and how it gets in the way of our getting a better fix on the problem *and* working towards a solution.

The warrior ethic, America's annihilative proclivities in times of war, and our penchant for rapid and dramatic results have at times coalesced to skew the concept of low intensity conflict (LIC) further in the direction of combat than the term implies. The warrior ethic, which accords to military combat a central position in foreign struggles, tends to confuse 'conflict' with 'combat.' As a result, among the ever-increasing number of writings on low intensity conflict, disproportionate attention is sometimes paid to small military wars, such as the Libyan strike or the recent invasion of Panama, which have little — or nothing — to do with low intensity conflict. The 'conflict' in LIC is not combat, and low intensity conflicts are not necessarily small wars. The resort to combat can, in fact, signal the denouement of low intensity conflict.¹

Looking at the contributors' backgrounds their emphasis on the military side of things is none too surprising. Five are or have been directly or indirectly involved with the American Defense Department or defense establishment, three are academics (one of whom heads a national security studies program), and one is an expert on terrorism and special operations. "Recognized experts" write about what they know best.

The articles, with the above caveat in mind, are generally interesting and capable efforts. One (Noel Koch's "Objecting to Reality: The Struggle

to Restore U.S. Special Operations Forces”), believe it or not, contains humorous moments and insightful comments regarding the Pentagon’s bureaucratic interaction with a very political Congress. Another, Harry Summer’s “A War Is a War Is a War Is a War,” while attempting to untangle the conceptual knots of low-intensity conflict, demonstrates once again his misunderstanding of the nature of the Vietnam War.² The most original contribution is William V. O’Brien’s “Counterterror, Law, and Morality.” O’Brien discusses the nature of terror and counterterror as political tools in late twentieth century conflict, then moves on to an examination of the war decision law and just cause doctrine, and finally applies his analysis to the American raid on Libya in 1986. He concludes that the action was a just, effective, and moral means to defend America’s legitimate interests against illegitimate attacks. O’Brien’s more general accomplishment is that he has provided a moral foundation on which a state can establish and implement an effective counterterror policy. And as a policy influencing document his is probably the most important chapter in the book. Even so, his words speak more to special operations than to the larger subject of low-intensity conflict.

Taken together the books tell us that we live in melancholy and imperfect times. However, just as Brogan tells the tale of “Man’s inhumanity to man” since 1945, Thompson gives us modest hope for the future.

John M. Carland
U.S. Army Center of Military History.

Endnotes

1. John Schlight, “Low intensity Conflict,” in *Army History*, (Fall 1990), p. 5.
2. The debate over whether it was a conventional or guerrilla war is sterile and wasteful. We should realize once and for all that it was a revolutionary war, a type of war that has been defined and explained over and over by Vietnamese theorists and practitioners such as Vo Nguyen Giap and Truong Chinh. A concise and elegant inquiry into this approach is John Gates’, “People’s War in Vietnam,” *The Journal of Military History*, 54, no. 3 (July 1990), pp. 325-44.

Adkin, Mark. *Urgent Fury: The Battle for Grenada*. Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath, 1989.

Grenada, one of the long string of islands which mark the boundary between the Atlantic and the Caribbean, has an agreeable climate, but a disagreeable history.

Its modern history begins in 1974 when Britain thankfully cast loose the island’s colonial bonds. They were caught by Sir Eric Gairy, a native