

Cimbala, Stephen J. *The Politics of Warfare: The Great Powers in the Twentieth Century*. University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 1997.

Stephen Cimbala argues that the continuing "politicization" of war necessitates the modification of time-honored attitudes concerning international conflict. Cimbala begins by addressing the Prussian theorist Carl von Clausewitz's assertion that the military art is to be subordinate to policy guidance provided by state authorities acting within their proper sphere of influence. Clausewitz maintained that war is but an extension of politics and that the military must, in order to avoid the potential for absolute war, remain bound by reasonable policy. Concomitantly, the political leadership must not abuse its ascendancy over the armed forces by engaging in unjust or fundamentally purposeless war.

Cimbala contends that in modern warfare the political leadership has become immoderately involved in the preparation of military strategy. The characteristics of these "politicized wars" include: the tendency for political leaders to interfere with operations; to leave obscure or ambiguous the political aims; and an increased public awareness of war and its costs (thus increasing the potential domestic political costs of the leadership). The greater the level of politicization in conflict, the less effectively strategy can be planned. Consequently, a state's ability to wage war effectively diminishes.

Cimbala uses case studies of the two World Wars, the Gulf War, the Cold War and Vietnam to present evidence of politicization and its deleterious impact on military efficacy. He also uses these cases to show the difficulties encountered by the great powers in their attempts to balance force with diplomacy and to develop and maintain major coalitions for battle. Cimbala then turns his attention to the unconventional means by which most post-Cold War conflicts will likely be waged, including terrorism, insurgency and rebellion. In addition, he adroitly addresses the past and future roles of special military operations, intelligence and the peacekeeping efforts of IOs and major powers as well as their prospects for overall effectiveness and potential problems of accountability. Last, Cimbala examines the issue of nuclear proliferation in a post-bipolar world, showing the erosion of state power, investigating possible future policies concerning proliferation, and exploring the means by which recalcitrant or aspiring nuclear powers may be combated or deterred.

These studies provide evidence that the history of twentieth-century conflict points to a significant weakening of the Clausewitzian conception of the relationship between policy and force. Wars have been initiated for "politically feckless" purposes, including attempts to attain impossible political objectives and, in other instances, because the power of the military has rendered impotent the directives of policy. Cimbala concludes that large interstate and small intrastate wars seem to be most prone to "politico-military" distortion of aims and hierarchy, while wars of intermediate scope and intensity are more likely to avoid politicization. But, lamentably, it is small-scale conflict, focusing on ethnographic, religious and sub-state issues, that has become increasingly prevalent since the end of the Cold War. The mutation of the nature of conflict during this century indeed requires reformulation of the association between policy and conflict. To this end, Cimbala also

examines whether the CIA can (or should) engage effectively in covert action after the dissolution of the Soviet bloc and the sustainability of military operations other than war (MOOTWA).

Cimbala's combination of acute historical analysis and consideration of future contingencies is excellent and renders inconsequential deficiencies such as limited treatment of politicization of battle tactics and excessive focus on strictly American experiences. There is only one apparent weakness: the classificatory power of Cimbala's typology of the size of war. The labeling of small or unconventional wars as intrastate or civil conflict, large as major regional or coalition battles, and intermediate as those involving major powers but of limited intensity, means and aims is intuitive and reasonable but possibly outdated. Although Cimbala endeavors to show the ways in which the international order and conflict have changed and are changing, he does not address how he would categorize wars waged under these new conditions. For example, Cimbala has difficulty in categorizing the Gulf War, (p. 213) a modern regional and coalition conflict in which actors were subject to strict limitations of intensity and means, and potential intrastate issues were evident (i.e., the Kurds).

The example of the Gulf War shows that components of modern wars may qualify for more than one category. It is apparent that in much of modern warfare, operations in wars of all sizes are often subject to limitations on available means by international norms and the threat of intervention. It may be beneficial to recognize not so much that wars of limited scope and stake that are becoming rare, but rather that those wars are rare that can be readily defined (in historical terms) as large, intermediate or small.

Despite this problem of classification, the primary objective of the work is successfully met: challenging the notion that the modern relationship between policy and the military has been defined and appropriate. The work is an important contribution to the study of post-Cold War conflict and a fine addition to a body of work clamoring to initiate a thorough rethinking of the neoteric relationship between policy and war.

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