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# Winning at War: Seven Keys to Military Victory throughout History

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than attend to its own core security interests on the continent. More optimistically, he recognizes that the United States must remain open to debate on AFRICOM's proper role. Thus he recapitulates the sensible tone of this fine edited collection—hard-nosed but not hopeless.

JONATHAN STEVENSON  
*Naval War College*



Koblentz, Gregory D. *Living Weapons: Biological Warfare and International Security*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 2009. 272pp. \$35

Gregory D. Koblentz, the deputy director of the Biodefense Graduate Program and assistant professor of government and politics at George Mason University, has written an outstanding analysis of one of the most significant national security challenges of the modern era. The author devotes five crisp chapters, written in easily understandable terms, to the complexities of the potential use of biologicals in modern warfare.

He describes the national security implications of the potential use of biological weapons by state actors as well as those with no state affiliation. One of the areas Koblentz addresses, in necessary detail, is the existence of many barriers to preventing proliferation of biological weapons by states, nonstate actors, and terrorists.

Koblentz uses case studies to review the biological warfare programs of Iraq, Russia, and South Africa, speculating on the strategic assessment of the risks and benefits each country may have considered in determining whether to proceed with the development of these

offensive weapons. With each example the reader is able to understand better the nature of the biological threat and how truly difficult it is to control such a weapon once in an aggressor's hands.

The United States has the most powerful military force of modern times but is having a most challenging time defeating an asymmetric adversary in Afghanistan. When one considers the potential of a lesser state actor or a terrorist group to develop and use biological weapons against a militarily superior force, one is forced to ask *when* the use of this weapon will occur, not *if*. As Koblentz astutely points out, "Biological weapons were the first weapon prohibited by an international treaty, yet the proliferation of these weapons increased after they were banned."

This book is a must-read not only for the professional military officer, diplomat, and politician but for the average citizen as well. It is for anyone who wishes to gain a better understanding of the current biological weapon threat and is interested in or responsible for protecting the nation's vital interests.

ALBERT J. SHIMKUS, JR.  
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Potholm, Christian P. *Winning at War: Seven Keys to Military Victory throughout History*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010. 304pp. \$39.95

*Winning at War* is the product of over forty years of academic inquiry into the nature of war by Christian Potholm, a professor of government at Bowdoin College. He proposes that throughout history there have been seven keys to

military victory: “superior weapons and technology entrepreneurship, superior discipline, sustained but controlled ruthlessness, receptivity to military and integrative innovation, the ability and willingness to protect capital from people and rulers, the centrality of superior will, and the belief that there will always be another war.” Drawing on an array of historical examples from the Peloponnesian wars to the present, Potholm builds a case that there is a predictive formula for success. Application of this formula depends on strict objectivity, which explains why he applies a template of Mars through which to analyze the decision for war, its execution, and final results. Viewing human conflict through the cold, dispassionate lens of the god of war, for whom winning is all that matters, advances the process of distilling war to its essence.

The premise of this book is provocative for a couple of reasons. First, it may seem to the student of military history problematic that a scholar without prior military experience would presume to write authoritatively on war. After all, many classics of military theory and history were written by scholars who cut their teeth on the battlefield, such as Carl von Clausewitz, Mao Zedong, and Sir Basil Liddell Hart, who are among those with extensive military experience whose works are eminent today in the classrooms of our nation’s service academies and war colleges. Second, the book provokes the curious to see whether the author really is on to something, having produced a work of unique value for policy makers and military strategists.

In fact, the quality of analysis in *Winning at War* debunks the myth that

military experience is necessary to write authoritatively on war. Like Sir Julian Corbett, who never served in the Royal Navy yet became Britain’s foremost theorist on joint strategy, Potholm’s work deserves our attention because of his distinguished credentials. That being the case, what value does this book have to offer that cannot be derived from Thucydides, Sun Tzu, Clausewitz, or contemporary works like Colin Gray’s *Fighting Talk: Forty Maxims on War, Peace, and Strategy* (2007)? Unlike these classic authors, Potholm draws his conclusions from a comprehensive survey of military history of over 2,500 years, being candid about his inclusion of non-Western examples in the analysis. Thus, the seven keys were derived from a vetting process that sought to eliminate the constraining factors of time and space. Yes, there is familiarity in each of the seven keys, but when considered collectively they provide a unique, succinct guide for when to avoid, initiate, conduct, or end a war.

Potholm addresses the book’s relevance by applying the template of Mars to the current war against “radical jihadist Salafists.” Holistic application of the template leaves one hopeful about American potential for defeating this type of “postmodern” insurgency. Ultimately, however, the author understands that Mars is rarely pleased by the way humans conduct war and that war is a contest of wills that are subject as much to emotion as to rationality. The objection to this book, if any, will be put forward by those who do not believe that war is a fundamental part of the human condition.

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