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War and the Engineers: The Primacy of Politics over Technology

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If there is a drawback to *Strategic Challenges*, it is that for all its high-caliber writing, the challenges it evokes seem oddly comfortable and familiar. This is not to imply they are not valid but rather there is widespread agreement that these are issues that will task future U.S. presidents. It would have been illuminating if the authors had taken a deeper look at more unusual challenges, such as the growth of feral cities, the ability of the international community to respond to pandemics, the security implications of global warming, and the impact of clearly established demographic trends. Some of these issues are mentioned, and others are actually examined to some degree, but a deeper look at each would have been welcome.

Strategic Challenges would seem destined to become required reading for students in the security studies field. It is suited for both the undergraduate and graduate level as well as lay readers looking to gain an overview of security threats in a minimum amount of time.

RICHARD NORTON
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Lieber, Keir. *War and the Engineers: The Primacy of Politics over Technology*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 2008. 226pp. \$21

Keir Lieber, a recent graduate of the Political Science Department at the University of Chicago, is presently an assistant professor and faculty fellow at the University of Notre Dame. This is Lieber's first book.

One of the first books to examine and criticize directly the current political science analysis on "offense-defense theory," this work is an analysis of the

debate as well as a well crafted refutation of the theory as a whole. The title, however, could have been a better fit with the content—this is not a book about war itself, or about engineers.

In the introduction Lieber outlines the foundations of current theory. Offense-defense theory, broadly, states that war and peace are dependent on technology and perceived power. If a country has offensive capabilities, it will attack and expand, overthrowing the status quo. When defense predominates (ideologically, technologically, or otherwise), cooperation and peace are more likely. Lieber questions this theory. To refute it, in later chapters he considers both *military outcomes* and *political outcomes* (italics original) in specific case studies. By analyzing offense-defense theory using its own vocabulary and definitions, he is able to deconstruct it persuasively. Using two case studies on "offensive" mobility (trains in the wars of German unification and tanks in World War I), and two on the evolution of "defensive" firepower (small arms in World War I and the "nuclear revolution"), Lieber turns the theory against itself. He effectively argues that neither offensive nor defensive capabilities pushed or prevented war during the periods in question.

In his conclusion Lieber offers an alternative argument, "technological opportunism," with just enough information to lead readers to look forward to his next project.

Lieber's use of sources, both primary and secondary, is extensive, and his bibliography provides a wealth of information. His book is well written, well argued, and concise. However, it is sure to cause controversy, outlining as it does both the offense-defense theory as

well as Lieber's refutation of it. This work is the latest in the debate within political science circles on the causes of war. I highly recommend this book to historians, political scientists, military officers, and analysts, who should all be familiar with offense-defense theory and objections to it.

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Scheuer, Michael. *Marching toward Hell: America and Islam after Iraq*. New York: Free Press, 2008. 364pp. \$27

Former CIA analyst Michael Scheuer offers an assessment of the war on terror, providing in varying proportions the history, an estimate of the global situation, recommended tactics, and a polemic against what he believes has both provoked al-Qa'ida and impaired Washington's ability to fight it successfully. Scheuer was chief and then special adviser to the chief of the CIA's Bin Laden unit from 1996 to 2004.

Scheuer's core argument is twofold. First, he argues that al-Qa'ida's attacks America because of U.S. foreign policies in the Islamic world, and not because of any objection to the nature of American society. In Scheuer's estimate, while jihadists do have contempt for American values, it is only Washington's interference in Muslim lands that motivates them to target Americans and their allies. Second, he argues that this misunderstanding has led Washington to underestimate them and thus remain superficial in its responses.

Scheuer is fairly convincing in his first argument, primarily using statements by al-Qa'ida leaders to illustrate how

they focus attention on U.S. policies and how they use sophisticated strategies to attack (or spare from attack) other Western nationals in proportion to their support for those policies.

However, he also shows how ineffective the U.S. response has been toward these attacks, arguing that the central premise of American strategy in the Muslim world is flawed. That is, whether or not America is a prosperous, free, tolerant, and generous country is beside the point; many Muslims may agree and yet still believe that America deserves punishment for its policies. He then delivers stinging critiques of other U.S. policies since 9/11—for example, deploying too few troops to Afghanistan and deposing a natural ally against al-Qa'ida, Saddam Hussein.

Some of his critiques are less convincing than others. It is frustrating that the author does not critically evaluate the veracity of al-Qa'ida's accusations against the United States or logically explain how U.S. policy failures flow directly from its failure to comprehend al-Qa'ida's true motives. The book is also riddled with run-on sentences and strings of four-or-more-words-connected-by-hyphens, which better editing could have reduced.

The value of the book for the national security community is its identification of eight future hot spots in the global war on terrorism. Scheuer identifies one of these regions, the northern Caucasus, as particularly dangerous and well positioned to provide al-Qa'ida with nuclear weapons.

Because the book's virtues, insights, and provocative ideas are mixed with logical gaps and woeful underdevelopment, this reviewer cannot give it his