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## How Democracies Lose Small Wars: State, Society, and the Failures of France in Algeria, Israel in Lebanon, and the United States in Vietnam

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so the People's Liberation Army would "likely choose the historical responsibility of keeping Taiwan part of China"; Thacik counters that the Taiwanese "will not permit an accommodation of China's demands that Taiwan become subordinate to Beijing." This standoff is a recipe for disaster, but one that is all too often obscured and glossed over rather than highlighted.

Finally, U.S.-China military relations are addressed by Paul Godwin and Alfred Wilhelm, Jr., while U.S.-China relations in general are outlined by Richard Thornton and David Lai. These authors again present a mixed bag, with Godwin warning of a U.S.-Chinese "escalation dynamic expanding the scope of the war beyond the intent of either adversary"; Wilhelm calling for removing "all remaining military-related sanctions on the PRC" and promoting increased military-to-military talks; Thornton advocating measures to "curb" Chinese ambitions "now before China becomes too strong to control and we find ourselves on the path to war"; and Lai arguing that the China threat has been "overblown." Since the book does not include a much-needed conclusion to sort through this morass, or an index to assist in locating particular topics of interest, the reader is left with the unfortunate impression that the experts could not agree with each other, much less with the editors, on what final message they should present to their audience.

While many essays in this book are quite good, they do not work well as a whole. One is left with the feeling that the editors published whatever they were given, with one essay on the air force numbering almost forty pages, while a scant four pages are devoted to

China's all-important relations with Russia, where the bulk of the PLA's most deadly weapons are purchased. Furthermore, there is no chapter devoted specifically to Sino-Japanese relations, though various authors admit that Japan is China's nearest great power and maritime rival. Equally relevant topics not raised by this book include rising tensions over North Korea; China's space program and the rapid growth of its missile forces; territorial disputes in the South China Sea; and the U.S.-led efforts with Japan, and perhaps even Taiwan, to build theater and national missile defense. For these reasons, this book falls short as an examination of the true nature of U.S.-Chinese relations.

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Merom, Gil. *How Democracies Lose Small Wars: State, Society, and the Failures of France in Algeria, Israel in Lebanon, and the United States in Vietnam*. New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2003, 295pp. \$22.99

In this work, Gil Merom, an assistant professor of political science at Tel Aviv University, sets forth an intriguing proposition based on case studies of conflicts occurring in the second half of the twentieth century. Democracies, he argues, fail to win small wars because, as democracies, they are unable to bear either the casualties, particularly from among the "educated middle class," that such wars produce or the brutality winning such wars requires. If valid, the implications of proving such a hypothesis are significant. For starters, a hard blow would be dealt to the international relations school of realism and its

offshoots. These models tend to view relative national power, especially military power, as the primary determinant of military success—a tenet that Merom's conclusions seem to refute. To the contrary, his findings would seem to offer substantial vindication to analysts and scholars who believe constituencies in a democratic society's domestic political system are the true drivers of such a state's international behavior.

While important to political scientists and international relations scholars, Merom's question could not be more timely for national leaders struggling to advance their interests in the real world, for his work suggests that an entire family of conflict is not likely to be won by democracies. It would therefore follow that democracies should either avoid small wars altogether, strike and win before public opinion can react, or handle these conflicts with nonmilitary instruments. Put more bluntly, it would imply that the United States may be unable to secure victory in either the Middle East or Central Asia, because the American people will not condone the type of action required to win these wars and keep casualties low. Merom includes the intentional targeting of noncombatants, the use of concentration camps, intentional deprivation of food and water to a civilian population, forced exile, torture, and indiscriminate bombing as some of the brutal means traditionally used to win small wars.

It is impossible not to see similarities between Merom's case studies and current U.S. operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. However, a closer reading reveals not only significant questions but weaknesses concerning Merom's work. First, it rapidly becomes apparent that

his case studies involve counter-insurgencies, not the much broader spectrum of conflict to which the term "small wars" refers. Thus the successful invasions of Grenada, Panama, and Haiti are not examined. Neither are such successful limited interventions as the French operations ARTEMIS and TOURQUOISE in Africa, the British in Sierra Leone, or the United States in Liberia. In fact, Merom focuses on guerrilla warfare, a type of small war identified by C. E. Callwell, who wrote the book on small wars in the eighteenth century, as "the most unfavorable shape which a campaign [can] take for the regular troops."

The need for brutal measures to ensure victory is also an assumption that deserves to be challenged. Merom does not make the case that the only way to win against a counterinsurgency is through such methods. While he identifies several historical examples of great powers embracing brutal methods to defeat insurgencies in the past, he does not prove that they made the difference between victory and defeat. Nor does he prove that such measures must be part of a future winning arsenal.

There are also problems with his selection of cases. Merom chose three failed counterinsurgencies to make his point; however, Malaya in the 1950s, Greece in the 1940s, and Central America in the 1980s and 1990s would seem to offer obvious historical counterexamples to Merom's thesis. Interestingly, Merom, on one page and in one footnote, acknowledges the existence of the British involvement in Malaya, but he does not identify this conflict as a successful postwar counterinsurgency. Thus it would seem unwarranted at this point to claim that Merom's conclusions

apply to all small wars, or even to all counterinsurgencies.

A related if less telling criticism is that the three selected conflicts are clearly grouped at the more robust end of the small-wars spectrum. The size of a war may be measured by intensity (number of deaths over a given time), duration (amount of time over which killing occurs), or scale (number of total deaths). Other units of measure could be fiscal cost, percentage of armed forces engaged, or the extent to which a state's vital national interests are at risk. None of the wars Merom looks at were quick, low-cost affairs. Perhaps they should not be included in the "small war" category at all.

That said, this book is not without merit. It certainly suggests several areas for future research. Of these, one of the more intriguing would be the use of locally recruited military forces as a means to achieve victory in counterinsurgencies and other forms of small wars without generating adverse domestic public opinion. Such forces have traditionally had key roles in small wars throughout history. Merom's findings suggest that the need for such units may be bigger than ever.

When it comes to the specific cases of Vietnam, Algeria, and Lebanon, Merom's scholarship and argument are convincing. Public opinion and war fatigue, aversion to casualties, and refusal to endorse certain methods of warfare clearly impacted national decision making in these cases. Merom demonstrates that forces unleashed in the various domestic political systems examined in this study had a profound impact on war prosecution and termination. Any scholar wishing to understand these conflicts in deeper detail should read

the appropriate chapters of this book. Again, it should be noted that it is impossible not to see similarities between these cases and current U.S. operations in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The potential for such domestically driven forces to impact national security policy is clearly something that should be of interest to any modern political-military leader or scholar. For, as this review is being published, U.S. and coalition forces in Iraq and Afghanistan are determinedly attempting to defeat counterinsurgencies while trying to avoid initiating the forces Merom examines. So while Merom's work does not provide the key to the problem of counterinsurgency, it does seem to provide at least a significant piece of the puzzle.

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Ambrose, Stephen E. *To America: Personal Reflections of an Historian*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003. 288pp. \$24

The United States is the richest and most powerful country in the world. Yet over two hundred years ago it began as thirteen colonies at the edge of a continental wilderness. Stephen Ambrose, an eminent historian and skilled writer, has used this short, readable book to explain how the United States made this amazing transformation. He attributes its success as a nation to the American spirit.

The American spirit originated with the founding fathers and was further developed by presidents Andrew Jackson, Ulysses S. Grant, Franklin and Theodore Roosevelt, and Dwight D. Eisenhower.