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# When America Fights: The Uses of U.S. Military Force

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## BOOK REVIEWS

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### TIMING IS EVERYTHING

Snow, Donald M., *When America Fights: The Uses of U.S. Military Forces*. Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press, 2000. 221pp. \$ 24.95

“Timing is everything,” so the saying goes. Timing was certainly a factor in developing a fair and reasoned review for this book; it arrived in this reviewer’s mailbox on 12 September 2001. Since the major thesis of Donald Snow’s concise and cogent work is that peacekeeping will be the most likely type of early twenty-first century military operation for the United States, the book initially appeared quaint and somewhat nostalgic: how nice and simple it would be to deal with questions of how to bring and sustain peace to *other* lands.

However, when the inevitable strong feelings associated with the horrific attacks of 11 September dissipate somewhat, one finds this book to be a valuable, if flawed, addition to the professional national security studies student’s library. There is no other single work available comparable in scope to this book in its thorough investigation of the driving forces, necessities, and demands of peace operations.

Snow, recognizing the ad hoc nature of much, if not most, national security literature, has attempted to develop an integrated approach, connecting theory to practice, and yielding findings and

conclusions that should awaken and disturb those in the national security strategy establishment. He begins with a broad diagnosis of a national security policy “adrift” in the first decade following the end of the Cold War, explaining well why realist and neorealist paradigms of international relations and the use of force no longer can explain or predict real-world behaviors. Similarly, he introduces the concept of a two-tiered world, with developed free market democracies in the first tier, and all others in the second. It is with this second, heterogeneous group of nations that Snow finds that the realist paradigm cannot explain or describe behaviors and relationships, which in that group are sometimes chaotic.

Snow uses this observation to develop in the second chapter a theoretical construct by which the United States can adapt its strategic “lens” to focus better on security problems with second-tier nations, combining the still-relevant aspects of the realist legacy with idealist paradigmatic tensions (between internationalism and isolationism). Carefully constructing his case, Snow then describes the spectrum of conflict that he

believes the United States might experience. He finds that the most likely form of conflict will be Kosovo-like peace operations, and he explains why operations addressing these conflicts are so difficult. This section provides some of the most dramatic and compelling information and analysis in the book, particularly concerning his operational distinctions between conflict suppression and state building (the latter being the most problematic for this country). *When America Fights* concludes with a recommendation of realistic internationalist national strategy based on five major influences of modern grand strategy, and it offers the reader fifteen guidelines on how to increase the probability of success in peace operations.

The book provides a consistent thread of argument and analysis on the use of American armed force. However, notwithstanding the author's preface, *When America Fights* is a highly opinionated work. It does not comprehensively analyze the implications of other possible points on the spectrum of conflict, nor does it pursue alternative or possible conflictual guidelines that might be generated by applying the theoretical framework to those other types of conflict. Further, the two-tier world concept simply is neither the only way nor the most widely accepted one of attempting to organize the chaos of the post-Cold War international environment. Finally, the conclusion that there are two types of armed force employments—of necessity (forced on the nation) or of choice (at the nation's discretion)—is most intriguing (I have already adopted the lexicon in my courses) but it is not the only typology that one might consider.

There are two admittedly minor but irritating faults in the book. First, being a

very old-fashioned academic, this reviewer appreciates the value and information provided by footnotes; they are totally lacking in this work. True, there is a bibliography following each chapter, but that is an empty vessel for serious research. Second, Ralph Peters, a most insightful strategist of the current age who is quoted in the last chapter, is a retired Army, not Air Force, officer.

*When America Fights* is an excellent book on the use of armed force as applied to peace operations. It is a book with a point of view and a strong theoretical base. Regardless of whether one agrees with the author on the flow and form of his argument, the reader will find the material engrossing and invaluable—even though this nation is now engaged in what Snow has viewed as the less likely scenario for force employment, that of necessity.

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Carter, Ashton B., and John P. White, eds. *Keeping the Edge: Managing Defense for the Future*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2001. 326pp. \$50

This book “addresses a need widely recognized but long neglected: to adapt and modernize the system by which the United States manages the largest and most successful security establishment in history.” Do not be misled into thinking that the word “managing” in the title suggests a dry treatment of managerial practices requiring extensive change. *Keeping the Edge* deals with that, but it primarily examines many key organizational strategy issues; these studies will have comprehensive value to anyone within academia or the national security