

Naval War College Review

Volume 39
Number 4 *Autumn*

Article 20

1986

Why Nations Go To War

Donald M. Snow

John G. Stoessinger

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

Recommended Citation

Snow, Donald M. and Stoessinger, John G. (1986) "Why Nations Go To War," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 39 : No. 4 , Article 20.
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol39/iss4/20>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu.

Schlesinger in his bibliography but omits *The Imperial Presidency*). The argument can be put in a different way. With Wilson begins serious American involvement in world politics, and the Constitution has not been found flexible enough to allow the "Executive" to handle the complications of world power without accruing to itself more and more power that has been taken from the Congress and from the State Department. This power has usually been grabbed under the excuse of outside dangers or emergencies that could not wait for diplomatic or congressional action. Mr. Rubin perspicaciously quotes John Quincy Adams: "There is an inevitable tendency to direct interference in foreign wars, even wars for freedom, to change the very foundations of our government from liberty to power." Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger were prepared, indeed seemed to welcome, that risk; the Congress did not. That is where we stand today, and emotional appeals against a Vietnam "syndrome" can only be used to paint over what is a constitutional problem. Mr. Rubin suggests there are administrative, procedural, and personnel solutions to his problem. These are important, but they are not the question. A powerful Presidential staff pursuing an ideological foreign policy in the Third World will not allow the State Department to bring practicality and proportion to the decisionmaking process. Only the Congress can do this, and can do it only through an adversarial relationship which is messy and confusing

both to Americans and foreigners. Mr. Rubin's book describes a striking similarity in how this problem has bedeviled two Administrations as different as the Carter and Reagan ones.

J.K. HOLLOWAY, JR.
Naval War College

Stoessinger, John G. *Why Nations Go To War*. 4th ed. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985. 220pp. \$25

Now in its fourth edition, John G. Stoessinger's *Why Nations Go To War* has become something of a chestnut among American textbooks dealing with violence and war. This edition does little more than update the third edition published in 1982. As a result, it retains all the good features that have made this thin volume an enduring work. Unfortunately, some of the warts which mar the text remain as well.

The chief advantages of the book are its clear, highly readable prose style and its brevity. Stoessinger is a masterful writer and storyteller, characteristics not altogether common in American political scientists, and he tells the stories of seven 20th century wars with color, literacy and grace. Moreover, he tells the tales in a manner that compacts information into a minimum of space and verbiage. For both reasons, *Why Nations Go To War* is always a favorite assigned text, especially with undergraduates.

This brevity becomes a curse for the serious student. The book surveys seven important and complex mili-

tary events: the outbreak of World War I; the German decision to launch Operation Barbarossa against the Soviet Union in 1941; the Korean War up to the Chinese intervention; Vietnam from 1950 to the decision to implement Vietnamization; the three confessional wars between India and Pakistan between 1948 and 1971; the Arab-Israeli crisis from 1947 to the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982; and the crisis in the Persian Gulf from 1979 to the present. Each of these subjects can and has been treated in numerous books of greater breadth and depth than *Why Nations Go To War*. In condensing them into a single slim volume, something had to get left out.

Several examples of omissions stand out. His discussion of Korea stops at the point the United States and its allies were stopped and forced to retreat by the Chinese intervention. Some of the most interesting and instructive aspects of Korea are found when the Chinese were stopped and routed, sending the U.N. forces to the 38th Parallel a second time and having to decide whether to cross the line again. In a more minor vein, his brief section on Israel's invasion of Lebanon and the subsequent involvement of the U.S. Marines fails to mention either that there were two Gemayel brothers (Bashir and Amin) who were presidents of that country or that the United States deployed and withdrew from Lebanon twice during the crisis.

The least satisfying chapter, as has been the case in all editions, is the chapter on Vietnam, which is very

critical of American involvement. There is nothing wrong in criticizing our intervention; what is troubling is that the critical points all reflect the same arguments he made in the first edition. On the basis of the material presented, it is not at all clear that the author is even aware of some of the more subtle arguments and interpretations that have been made in the last 5 to 10 years.

Why Nations Go To War has obviously been a durable book, or it would not be in its fourth edition. As an introduction to the study of why wars occur or as a textbook in a relatively low-level college course, it maintains its value. It does have warts, however, and those blemishes reduce its value to the serious student.

DONALD M. SNOW
Naval War College

Suchlicki, Jaime. *Cuba: From Columbus to Castro*. 2nd ed. rev. New York: Pergamon Press, 1985. 260pp. \$19.95 paper \$12.95

Pergamon-Brassey, the publishers of defense related material with offices in eight nations, have done us a service with this softbound, second edition short history of Cuba by Jaime Suchlicki. Recently this reviewer heard a serving four-star officer declare he had had little experience in the Caribbean area. This volume is designed to fill precisely such a basic information gap. In this case, it deals with a major player in