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Limited War and American Defense Policy

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BOOKS

Deitchman, Seymour J. *Limited War and American Defense Policy*. Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1964. 273 p.

Despite the facts that this book was written while the author was on the staff of the Institute for Defense Analysis, that it has been commended by some eminent defense personnel, and that it was published by prestigious M.I.T., it is disappointing to report that Mr. Deitchman, in cases, seems not to see the forest for the trees. Fully half of the book is devoted to an overly minute methodical and pedagogic recital of how military doctrine is formulated in general. The parts on 'The Military Background,' 'The Problems of Planning,' and 'The Structure of the Regular Forces' could have been written as a textbook for any of the armed forces in application to general, as well as to limited, war. However, Part I on 'Military Means for Political Ends' and the concluding Part V on 'Unconventional Warfare—Some Special Problems' do bear directly on the subject of limited war; and there is an excellent discussion of the at-times-puzzling characteristics which limited war assumes in this last half of the twentieth century. Deitchman points out that 'depending on what is judged to be military conflict, we can count over thirty military engagements that have taken place since the end of World War II.' He provides a tabulated list of these engagements, together with tables citing the characteristics of limited war as exhibited in such engagements as have actually taken place since World War II. These tables, in fact, are among the most useful contributions of the book.

The author analyzes the traditional three stages of unconventional or guerrilla war, namely; political action or the conflict of political parties for power; then guerrilla activity; and, finally, emergence into regular military activity, e.g., Dien Bien Phu. He concludes with the somber comment:

None of the wars of this kind that have taken place since World War II has ever been won by the Government originally in power after the war entered the third stage. The dynamics of the war make it an extraordinarily difficult proposition, even if it enters the second stage, that of guerrilla and terrorist action.

As is inevitable in a book covering such a scope and in such great detail, errors creep in. For example, the author states, with reference to the landings in Lebanon: 'We may well suppose that the United States Government applied pressure, sub rosa, to assure that the landing would be requested.' This, the present reviewer, who was Ambassador in Beirut at that time, can emphatically refute. On the contrary, it was the Government and President of Lebanon which demanded United States intervention, and not the other way around. In general, however, this is a very comprehensive book, even though much of the material covered is of wider application than the title would suggest. Deitchman gives the Navy its due:

The naval forces have the virtue of being ready and mobile in response to strategic warning. Without the need for the publicity or fanfare that must accompany the movement of divisions or air wings, they can be in place, ready for action, without entering the areas of other nations' sovereignty. They can achieve strategic surprise by appearing at a critical spot with little or no warning.

Finally, at the very end of the book, this scholarly author gives his tribute to the essential factors of policy and diplomacy in limited war:

It will not always be expedient or correct, in the larger scheme of things, for us to be extremely responsive to our allies' expressed demands, nor will they always wish to accept our guidance, though we may believe such acceptance imperative. These potential conflicts open a wholly new area of endeavor, requiring that we look to human problems far greater in scope than those of military organization and hardware. Only if we are successful in the entire effort can the necessary *and* sufficient conditions for winning be established.

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