OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM

A Review Essay

BY JAMES R. BLAKER

The March Up: Taking Baghdad with the 1st Marine Division
by Bing West and Ray L. Smith
New York: Bantam Dell, 2003
320 pp. $24.95
[ISBN: 0–5538–0376–X]

The Iraq War: A Military History
by Williamson Murray and Robert H. Scales, Jr.
Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press, 2003
368 pp. $25.95
[ISBN: 0–6740–1280–1]

The Iraq War: Strategy, Tactics, and Military Lessons
by Anthony H. Cordesman
Washington: The CSIS Press, 2003
592 pp. $25.00
[ISBN: 0–89206–432–3]

U.S. convoy passing Iraqi monument.

U.S. Air Force (D. Myles Cullen)

Short wars such as the United States fought with Iraq in spring 2003 cause us to burrow into the souls of those who fight them as well as those who are casualties. Yet the huge populations who get their information from headlines and sound bites respond with short attention spans when the miniwars end. Thus short wars spawn intense efforts to describe and assess them before the memory fades into oblivion. This is a challenge to historians and analysts. Comprehensive descriptions of short wars are hard to write both quickly and well because statistics, anecdotes, data, and assessments emerge slowly, particularly when the war's purpose, conduct, and results are politically charged by approaching elections. All this applies to the months after major combat operations ended in Iraq.

But three early looks at Iraqi Freedom hit the streets within a few months of the seizure of Baghdad, all first rate. Whatever limits early publication imposed on depth of insight and range of assessment, the three taken together offer a far more comprehensive overview, more insight, and more interesting reads than anything yet to emerge from official histories and lessons learned. And *The March Up: Taking Baghdad with the 1st Marine Division* by Bing West and Ray L. Smith, *The Iraq War: A Military History* by Williamson Murray and Robert H. Scales, Jr., and *The Iraq War: Strategy, Tactics, and Military Lessons* by Anthony H. Cordesman reveal much about the bias screens the authors used.

West and Smith accompanied the Marine Corps 1st Division on its assault up from Kuwait through the middle of Iraq. Their interest was mostly the conduct of Iraqi Freedom on the tactical level. Both served as marines in Vietnam and contrast the way small combat units fought in the two conflicts. They portray, often graphically and with experienced sensitivity to the fears and courage of infantrymen, the differences and continuities, concluding generally that today's grunts are tougher, smarter, better armed, and more technically able. The authors are impressed as much by the leap in power in the hands of—and at the call of—American infantrymen as by the continuity of their courage, skill, and conviction.

Experience, tactical sense, and perspective distinguish the authors from the embedded reporters who also saw things from the tactical level. Their reputations and connections with the marines—Smith is a retired major general who goes by "E.T.," from the entrenching tool he used as a weapon during a battle in I Corps, and West, also a combat veteran, is an accomplished chronicler of Marine Corps exploits—freed them from many of the constraints imposed on embedded reporters, got them their own vehicle, and smoothed access throughout the Corps hierarchy. But experience and sense also help them build more general insights from the tactical details they saw up close and dirty during the three-week campaign.

Murray, a prolific historian, and Scales, a retired Army major general and historian in his own right, focus more on the operational level. Their interest is in how well the larger units—corps, divisions, and brigades—executed plans and adjusted to surprises. They write about the use of land, naval, and airpower to crush or avoid what military force the Iraqis tried to throw against the Americans and British. Further, they compare the conflict on the operational level with Desert Storm a decade earlier. They find that the attributes of transformation have grown. Speed, precision, battlespace knowledge, force interdependence, and sequencing were all in markedly greater abundance. But the authors are careful to caveat the undeniable technical advances and increased effectiveness by iterating that the essential factors in the improvement remain training, preparation, experience, and skill on the part of the warriors and their leaders.

Unlike West and Smith, Murray and Scales do not rest their case on direct observation or participation. But while

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their sources are official reports and interviews, their reputations, appreciation of military affairs, and acquaintances gave them extraordinary access to the opinions and views of field commanders. Both are distinguished military historians and deft writers with a consistent perspective on military technology and combat effectiveness. Their book burnishes their credentials and confirms their perspective with mounting empirical evidence.

Cordesman's book comes closest to a strategic view of the war. It presents an almost encyclopedic collection of data, mostly from official releases, and laces it with generally well-reasoned judgments regarding validity, accuracy, and significance. This is no mean accomplishment given that Iraqi Freedom was the most information-controlled conflict involving U.S. forces since World War II.

But although the book is the best collection of source material available to date, the information tends to smother the narrative flow. Page-plus quotations from official statements provide all the nuances and caveats of good bureaucratese. And the catalogue of issues addressed with data and footnoted sources is truly impressive—from blue force trackers, bandwidth, and the rest of the technical inventory used in the war, to what happened to the weapons of mass destruction, to the doctrine of preemption, to all the topics that affect contemporary elections. His book will arm any wonk, lobbyist, student, and citizen with facts and opinions sufficient to dominate any decision meeting or cocktail party. But the quotations and comprehensiveness of his issue survey add little to the lilt of the explication. Still, Cordesman fills in much of the Washington interplay and debate about the war where the other books only hint at it.

All three works adopt the official chronology of the conflict with its generally accepted high and low points. They all highlight the speed at which American ground forces rolled toward Baghdad, the much more effective ground and air integration, the concerns on the tactical, operational, and strategic levels about the risk of a long supply line through unsecured territory, and the ability of U.S. forces to adapt to political challenges such as the lack of access for 4th Mechanized Division through Turkey and to opportunities on the battlefield such as the "thunder runs" into the heart of Baghdad that broke Iraqi hopes for a goal line stand there.

It is in tone and emphasis—in addition to their focuses on the levels of war—that the books differ. *The March Up* and *The Iraq War* by Murray and Scales are seized by the romance of military campaigns. To West and Smith, the Marines and their battlefield leaders are the heroic heirs of Xenophon's hoplites marching through Iraq centuries before. To Murray and Scales, the heroes are the American scholar-generals, vested with a new level of military skill and technology, yet knowledgeable and empowered by Clausewitz's "eternal truths" regarding the fog and friction of war. Cordesman is more skeptical of both the heroism of the American combatants and their leaders' superior wisdom. While he does not denigrate either, he is more cautious in implying superhuman attributes and more attuned to the foibles of individuals and to the military mismatch between Iraq and the world's only military super-superpower.

The central issue in all three books is the origin and nature of U.S. military superiority. It is the pseudo-debate between those who purportedly believe that American information technology drives the increasing dominance of the military and those who claim it is understanding the great theorists who argued that so much of war must remain unassailable by logic or technology that it will always remain cloaked in the fog of confusion, complexity, and chance. The issue is most clearly joined by Williamson and Scales, who devote their book largely to demonstrating the inanity of those who "claim to lift the fog of war." It is a screed, of course, for those to whom they ascribe such beliefs have only claimed that reducing fog and friction more than an enemy gives one a better chance of victory. But the spurious accusation adds spice to an otherwise esoteric and increasingly boring discussion, which is good because it really is important to get the relationship between good people and good technology right.

The Iraq war will rekindle this important issue and, particularly in its aftermath of reconstruction, retrospection, and alliance rebuilding, will help drive American politics and international relations. All three books offer a good basis for understanding and influencing the future. The good news is that all these authors are likely to have more to say about the post–major combat period. **JFQ**

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INTELLIGENCE AND INFORMATION

A Book Review

BY ROBERT TOMES

Uncovering Ways of War: Intelligence and Foreign Military Innovation, 1918–1941
by Thomas Gilbert Mahnken
Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2002
224 pp. $35.00
[ISBN: 0–8014–3986–8]

The revolution in military affairs (RMA) dominated defense modernization discourse during the 1990s. At the end of the decade, the debate shifted to contending defense transformation strategies and objectives. A mix of technological, organizational, and operational innovation generally precedes and spurs RMAs. Understanding the origins of profound military change thus calls for understanding the emergence and diffusion of innovations. This argument is fundamental to the analysis provided in Thomas G. Mahnken's *Uncovering Ways of War*.

Studies of interwar military innovation sponsored by the Office of Net Assessment influenced RMA discussions in the 1990s and inform current transformation planning. Many of these studies use historical cases of military reform to draw lessons for leading change. Questions about foreign military innovation have evolved largely on the margins of these studies, leaving a crucial gap in the innovation literature used in many institutions of senior military education. Similarly, U.S. defense modernization discussions provide little understanding of foreign military innovation as a strategic concern or a contribution to defense planning. Continuing work in such areas as assessments of foreign research and development, analysis of operational innovation, and such capabilities as jamming the global positioning system to diminish U.S. military strength, tend to be classified or concerned with specific asymmetric threats to friendly forces, denying entry into theaters, and dealing with adaptive enemies. Students of military innovation have few resources for understanding the strategic aspects of why states fail to identify and respond to foreign military innovation.

U.S. testing German rocket, 1949.

Jet Propulsion Laboratory

Uncovering Ways of War addresses the myriad organizational and psychological factors influencing detecting, understanding, and responding to foreign military innovations from 1918 to 1941. Refreshingly succinct case studies document U.S. detection and understanding of nine innovation cases in three states: Japan (carrier aviation, surface and amphibious warfare), Germany (rocketry, tactical aviation, armored warfare), and Great Britain (integrated air defense, tactical aviation, armored warfare, tank experiments). The intelligence organizations assessed are the Office of Naval Intelligence (ONI) and the Army Military Intelligence Division (MID), whose military attachés were the primary source of information on foreign military developments during the interwar period. The cases are characteristic of the problems befalling intelligence analysts attempting to detect, understand, and communicate the essence of foreign military innovation.

Comparative analysis yields three cases of failure to recognize the emergence of new ways of war (Japanese carrier innovation, German rocketry, and British integrated air defense) and two where innovations were partly recognized (Japanese surface warfare, German tactical aviation). The four successful cases included two where foreign practices similar to U.S. developments were recognized (Japanese amphibious warfare, British armored warfare) and two where dissimilar practices were recognized (German armored warfare, British tank experiments). Further analysis centers on why failure, partial success, or success occurred.

Both ONI and MID were inclined to monitor foreign developments in existing areas of warfare, overlooking or discounting unfamiliar territory. Little attention was paid to radar and missiles, for example. Similarly, technology and doctrine untested in combat were detected less frequently than proven capabilities. Also, biases about technological superiority blinded both organizations to foreign innovation.

Some scholars will be underwhelmed by the theoretical chapter relating literature on organizational culture and psychology to the question of why innovations are overlooked or ignored. The limited treatment of theory, however, is likely to appeal to defense policy analysts and military leaders. In the relationship between intelligence and defense planning, Mahnken provides an important counter to arguments that intelligence has never informed U.S. military change. That he delves into the cognitive aspects of his subject distinguishes

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Missing an issue?

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his work from most military innovation studies, which tend to focus on cognitive determinants of doctrinal change and technological adaptation only to explore why states succeed or fail to adapt. Few explore interplays between intelligence and military planning biases and the compounding of intelligence shortcomings by linking intelligence of future threats with plans to meet them.

Mahnken's research objectives do not provide comprehensive cases studies. Readers will get the most from his historical data if they are generally informed of the strategic context and political dynamics driving U.S. military developments. Cases well documented elsewhere are complemented by Mahken's study of the interwar period. His discussion of American perception of Japanese military capabilities, for example, adds important insights into Timothy Moy's chapters on U.S. amphibious assault innovations in *War Machines: Transforming Technologies in the U.S. Military, 1920–1940* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2001). It also comes at an opportune time.

Recent conflicts provide future enemies with abundant data on the U.S. military, informing their attempts to understand our strengths and weaknesses and pursue capabilities to diminish our performance on the battlefield. During the wide and varied RMA discussions of the 1990s, furthermore, only a handful of scholars questioned whether U.S. intelligence agencies were truly postured to recognize and inform defense planners of RMAs in weaker powers—something historical data suggest is likely. More importantly, few addressed factors impeding recognition of both similar and dissimilar foreign military innovations.

A multipart, three-stage framework suggests indicators of military innovation derived from analysis of a rising power (Japan) and rapid shifts in military effectiveness (Germany). The stages are 1) speculation: studies, conceptual work, or analysis of U.S. capabilities; 2) experimentation: gaming, demonstrations, or other indications of testing new ways of war; and 3) implementation: publishing new doctrine, shifts in modernization plans, new military units, additional career paths, or changes in military education. To this might be added an antecedent step following from Mahnken's conclusions about biased assessments of foreign military innovation: understanding the strategic context and operational challenges unique to the specific military—that is, understanding both the sense of necessity impelling change and the opportunities for pursuing it. **JFQ**

THE LONG SHADOW OF VERSAILLES

A Book Review

BY JANEEN M. KLINGER

Paris 1919: Six Months that Changed the World
by Margaret MacMillan
New York: Random House, 2001
570 pp. $35.00
[ISBN: 0–375–50826–0]

The subtitle to Margaret MacMillan's meticulously researched and skillfully narrated book is no literary exaggeration: the Versailles peace treaty indeed changed the world. However, MacMillan demolishes the myth that the significance of the treaty lay in its excessively punitive treatment of Germany, making it a source for World War II. Rather, she shows that the lasting impact relates to self-determination being introduced to international politics and how the concept was applied—especially to the non-European world. Indeed, an undercurrent of the book is unintended consequences, for MacMillan traces policies that appeared sensible at the outset to show how they were subverted. Her work is timely for those seeking to understand the origin of problems in today's trouble spots; and it offers sober warning for policymakers and strategists devising plans for the long term.

Many elements in this narrative are familiar, but it is a reminder of the broader significance of the Treaty of Versailles. The accord not only dealt with Germany but redrew the borders in Central Europe and the Middle East. Many of those territorial arrangements remain intact. Participants saw the larger import of the conference. Harold Nicolson of the British delegation said, "We were journeying to Paris not merely to liquidate the war but to found a new order in Europe. We were preparing not peace only, but eternal peace. There was about us the halo of some divine mission. . . . For we were bent on doing great, permanent, and noble things."

Even though the lasting impact of Versailles may be most pronounced in the non-European world, it cannot be divorced from the settlement of the Great War. Many of the unfortunate compromises made in the non-European world grew out of the need to maintain an Allied unity that was fragile for two reasons. First, Allied advantage over Germany seemed to melt because of how the war ended. Although the German army was decisively defeated (General Erich von Ludendorff told Kaiser Wilhelm II by September 29, 1918, he should accept peace at any price), the Allies chose not to press their advantage and accepted a German armistice. The French wanted to avoid further catastrophic casualties while the British sought a settlement before the Americans became too strong. Only American General John Pershing thought the Allies should press beyond the Rhine. The armistice meant most Germans did not experience defeat firsthand, which conveyed the impression their country was never really beaten. That view seemed to infect their opponents as well.

Second, the Allies had fundamentally incompatible interests at stake concerning the disposition of Germany. Given the devastation visited on France, Georges Clemenceau was the most adamant in seeking revenge, compensation, and security. He did not get the division of Germany he wanted, but he got a demilitarized Rhineland under occupation for 15 years. Similarly, the Allies were at odds over reparation, both in total amount demanded and how it would be allocated.

Against the backdrop of Allied division and acrimony over the German treaty, it is no wonder compromise would come elsewhere, as in the repeated sacrifice of self-determination for the political expediency of Allied unity. To be sure, the concept suffered from ambiguity and the implicit way it was expressed in Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points. Secretary of State Robert Lansing recognized the ambiguity inherent in the formulation: "When the President talks of self-determination, what unit does he have in mind? Does he mean a race, a territorial area, or a community? [It] will raise hopes which can never be realized. It will, I fear, cost thousands of lives."

The problematic way the peacemakers applied self-determination is illustrated throughout the book. For example, in Central Europe and the Balkans, all the parties making claims against disputed territory presented their own population statistics based on nationality. However, in the Balkans a single disputed territory might actually contain Serbs,

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Hungarians, Germans, Russians, and others. Any territorial division according to self-determination required the peacemakers "to impose a rational order on an irrational world." In other cases, territorial arrangements solidified an irrational order because of great power rivalry. Thus in the disposition of Ottoman territory, imperial competition between Britain and France created modern Iraq from three disparate provinces that could hardly be expected to cohere.

Despite the problems of self-determination, the concept then as now provided an attractive beacon for supplicants to the victorious powers. And as Lansing anticipated, it was bound to disappoint. For example, the Germans expected to be treated according to the precepts in the Fourteen Points and retain European territory with German population at a minimum. When the treaty fell short, they felt so betrayed by Wilson that their embassy in Washington was the only one to refuse to fly its flag at half-mast when he died in 1924.

A more important betrayal of the principle, with tragic consequences for the remainder of the century, involved China and Japan. Both nations declared war on Germany and believed they were entitled to participate as victors at the peace conference. For Japan, victory meant it should retain German concessions on the Shantung peninsula in China it had seized during the war. Peking assumed that the principle of national self-determination and territorial integrity obliged the great powers to return Shantung to Chinese control. When Japan threatened not to sign the German treaty, Wilson's compromise was to allow it to retain Shantung. A year after the Paris conference, radicals formed the Chinese Communist Party. Its emergence marked Peking's gradual turning away from the West. Japanese diplomacy proved to be a pyrrhic victory because it poisoned Japanese relations with the West and gave rise to the notion of Japan as a "Yellow Prussia." That image took root in the West and perhaps created a self-fulfilling prophecy that made the Pacific war inevitable. Woodrow Wilson was fully cognizant of the flaws in the peace agreement relating to the compromises. However, he told his wife that the mistakes could be remedied by the League of Nations. That they were not and continue to pose intractable dilemmas for world politics is the tragedy told in *Paris 1919*. **JFQ**

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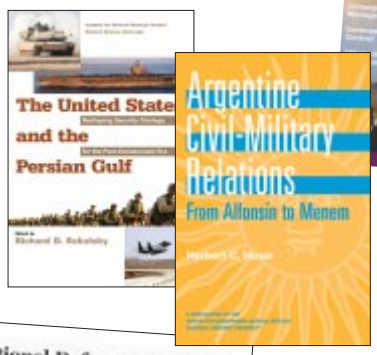

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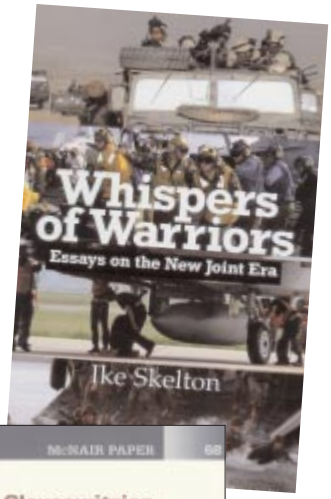

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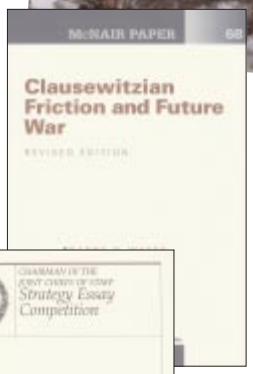

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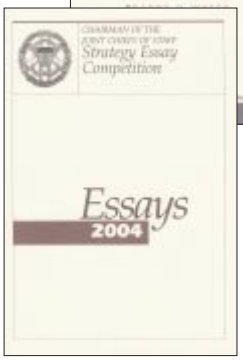

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