

Book Reivew: Transformations of Warfare in the Contemporary World by John C. Torpey and David Jacobson

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Torpey, John C., and David Jacobson, eds. *Transformations of Warfare in the Contemporary World*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2016. xii + 211 pages. Paperback, \$28.95.

This book is a timely collection of essays edited by John Torpey, the director of the Ralph Bunche Institute for International Studies and professor of sociology and history at the City University of New York, and David Jacobson, the founding director of the Global Initiative on Civil Society and Conflict as well as professor of sociology at the University of South Florida. Among the contributing authors is C. Anthony Pfaff, a United States Army colonel and foreign area officer. Pfaff serves as an Army advisor on the Department of State Policy Planning Staff and is a former professor of philosophy at the U.S. Military Academy.

Moving into the twenty-first century, the United States and the rest of the Western World found itself immersed in armed conflicts not defined by the characteristics and laws of warfare seen in many of the past wars. In 2001, the U.S. military was in the midst of a ‘Revolution in Military Affairs’ and intended to change the Department of Defense into a smaller military that relied on technological advantages rather than traditional brute force to defeat the enemy. However, after the attacks on September 11, 2001, the United States faced an enemy unlike any it had faced in the past. The Islamic terrorist group al-Qaeda’s philosophy was based on religion rather than a specific political ideology (it is arguable that under Sharia law, the state and religion are one entity). It also had armies that formed around tribal and familial ties rather than an organized armed force, and it used weapons built from scavenged explosives and electronics often adapted from toys or other consumer electronics instead of traditional military weapons. In this book, Torpey and Jacobson have gathered a group of writers to discuss this transformation of warfare from a philosophical, legal, and sociological perspective.

To illustrate this transformation in warfare, Torpey and Jacobson discuss the question of defining the enemy that arose after the 9/11 attacks, as policymakers in the George W. Bush administration grappled with defining the groups it first faced in Afghanistan, and the irregular forces it would later face in Iraq as an insurgency rose after the 2003 invasion. To further illustrate the transformation, the editors use a March 2015 declaration made by the Islamic State for its members and sympathizers to attack U.S. service members. Utilizing World War II as a comparison, the editors cite the transformation in several areas such as the make-up of the military from a conscripted force into a volunteer force, less reliance on strategic weapons like those that nearly destroyed the major cities of Europe and the nuclear weapons used against Japan, and the change in the assumption that everything is a legitimate war target. Torpey and Jacobson offer “the book as a contribution to a discussion of these issues, which force us to try to make sense of the shifting but possibly less dangerous terrain of military conflict in the years to come” (p. ix).

In “A Crisis in Norms: Fighting Irregular Wars Well,” Pfaff discusses the challenges that the U.S. military encountered post 9/11. While irregular warfare often seemed to be overlooked

by decision makers and strategists in the past, Pfaff argues that from 1950 to 1998 “weaker actors in asymmetric conflicts won the majority-fifty five out of ninety conflicts surveyed” (p. 80). It is a challenge convincing a strategist that using an overwhelming force can sometimes be less effective than he or she may assume. To illustrate his point, Pfaff cites then Lieutenant General Stanley McCrystal who, while commander of the U.S. led Coalition in Afghanistan, changed the rules of engagement (ROE) to limit civilian or collateral damage: “It’s better to let a few insurgents escape than alienate the Afghan public by inflicting civilian casualties” (p. 71). In Afghanistan, McCrystal dynamically applied the lessons he had learned from his experience as a commander of special operations forces in Iraq when he realized the effect of applying an overwhelming force in a situation where discerning the line between civilians and fighters fell into the classical paradox of counterinsurgency operations.

Pfaff emphasizes two facts that are often forgotten in irregular warfare, that is, the lines between civilian and combatant are blurred or possibly indistinguishable, and irregular warfare is still war. He draws upon a wide range of literature in making his arguments, including the *U.S. Army and Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual*, written under the guidance of then Lieutenant General David Petraus and largely by Lieutenant Colonel John Nagl, whose doctoral dissertation became required reading for military leaders heading to Iraq and Afghanistan. Additionally, Pfaff includes in his discussion classical strategic thinkers such as Clausewitz and more modern thinkers like Mao Tse Tung, and Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui, who co-authored China’s People’s Liberation Army *Unrestricted Warfare*.

Over the last ten years there has been a plethora of literature written in critique of the United States’ use of the military to counter the asymmetrical threats stemming like a hydra on battlefields in Africa, the Middle East, and the Homeland. While most other pieces of literature on the subject present a point view within a specific discipline of study, Torpey and Jacobson’s holistic look at the issues adds to the literature and provides the reader with a range of ideas and opinions that makes it stand out amongst the books available on the subject. *Transformations of Warfare in the Contemporary World* is both timely and topical, and is recommended for academics in the fields of political science, public policy, sociology, philosophy, and ethics. It is also a must-read for strategists and military policymakers as members of Western nations try to understand the challenges they are facing in these times of transformational warfare.

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