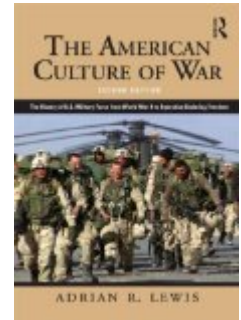


**Adrian R. Lewis.** *The American Culture of War: A History of U.S. Military Force from World War II to Operation Iraqi Freedom.* Second Edition. New York: Routledge, 2012. xx + 566 pp. \$49.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-415-89019-9.



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In his monumental work published in 1973, Russell Weigley formulated the concept the “American Way of War.” Weigley examined how the United States waged its wars from the American Revolution to the Vietnam War by analyzing the activities of key figures in U.S. military history. He concluded that ever since the war between the United States and Mexico, the American way of war has focused on the desire to achieve a decisive military victory over the enemy by a strategy of attrition or destruction.

In military history, the concept of “decisive victory” has been given various interpretations, which in turn has shaped different strategies to obtain total victory in war. Generally speaking, the theoretical discussion about the ways to achieve decisive victory appears in the writings of many military thinkers, but that systematic discussion began mainly in German military thought. One of the first precursors of German military doctrine after the Napoleonic wars, Carl von Clausewitz, examined the application of physical force as a means to achieve the aim of impos-

ing the will of one side upon another. To achieve this aim decisively, the enemy had to be disarmed and deprived of any desire to continue fighting.

Clausewitz outlined two main principles for achieving this goal. The first was the total overpowering of the enemy’s military forces. But this principle, he noted, was not enough to achieve decisive victory, which could only be attained after taking control over the enemy’s material and political sources of power, especially its capital city, Clausewitz’s second principle. An advance against the nonmilitary sources of power would force the enemy to send its army to protect them (especially the capital city), and thus additional military forces would be destroyed. Clausewitz contrasted the theory of total victory through a single dramatic effort with the idea of limited warfare. In this type of warfare, the war objectives were restricted and aimed at achieving the ability for political bargaining. One of the outstanding disciples of Clausewitz, the German military historian Hans Delbrück, developed this distinction into two forms of decisive victory: destruction and attri-

tion in conformity with the double approach to war delineated by Clausewitz. While in destructive warfare the victory was dramatic and rapid, in the second model, attrition warfare, victory was achieved gradually and by cumulative effect.

According to Weigley, American victories in past wars were achieved by the destruction of the enemy's military power and the conquest of its capital. Such acts usually mark the end of a war. An early example of this strategy can be seen in General Winfield Scott's expedition from Vera Cruz toward Mexico City, when the conquest of this city (September 1848) led in effect to the conclusion of the war. The strategy of destruction can be found in the famous expedition of General William Sherman in Southern states during the Civil War. Also, with the appointment of General Henry Halleck as commander in chief of the army and the appointment of General Ulysses S. Grant as the commander over all forces of the Union army (March 1864), the strategy of the Union army underwent a dramatic change. General Grant planned the defeat of the armies of Robert E. Lee and Joseph E. Johnston, and thus made the conquest of the Confederate forces and not the conquest of territory as the Union's strategic military goal. A similar trend can also be seen in General John Pershing's argument that the Entente Powers should march toward Berlin in World War I. But the fact that the United States was the junior military partner in the First World War, as well as the military exhaustion of British and French armies, prevented this course of action. The strategy of destruction was the leading one for America even in the wars that the United States conducted in the twentieth century, such as the strategy employed by General William Westmoreland in Vietnam and General Norman Schwarzkopf in the First Gulf War.

By contrast, in his book *The Savage Wars of Peace: Small Wars and the Rise of American Power* (2002), Max Boot asserts that the United States has more than one American way of war. His

claim is based on extensive U.S. involvement in small wars, which are greater in number than major wars. In a later article, Boot offers a new concept. In his view, dramatic advances in information technology have led U.S. military forces to adopt a method of warfare that tries to avoid the bloody killing fields that were so common in the past.[1] Boot's thesis is only one among a variety of studies written about the characteristics of the American way of war. These studies question whether the United States has a way of war, that is to say, an essential strategy or perhaps a way of battle, a tactical approach. Scholars have also asked how a warfare method finds expression during conflict, and this has been answered by analysis of U.S. involvement in various military engagements.

During the past decade, two new issues have been added to the discussion. The first is the conduct of war in the age of information warfare. The second is the unrelenting warfare that the United States is conducting against irregular forces. The variety of views and rich historiography on the subject of the American way of war testify to its importance not only for historians but also for those dealing today with shaping American strategy.[2]

Integrated within this historiographical framework is the book by Adrian R. Lewis, *The American Culture of War*, which examines the cultural links that have influenced and are influencing the conduct of war by the United States during the decades since the end of the Second World War. Lewis's thesis continues John Keegan's line of argument in *A History of Warfare* (1993) that war is a prolongation of culture by other means. Lewis focuses on two main subjects in this study. First, he examines how American culture with regard to warfare has changed after the Second World War and addresses the causes for these changes. Second, he offers a historical discussion on the various confrontations in which the United

States has been involved and the effects of these conflicts on the methods of conducting war.

The first two chapters constitute the theoretical framework for Lewis's comprehensive and careful historical discussion. These chapters examine the concept of "culture," according to the thesis of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, as well as the traditional American military approach. The rest of the book provides a chronological analysis of American military history from the end of the Second World War until the involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Lewis argues that since the Second World War American cultural thought about warfare and ways in which it was conducted have undergone an essential change. This change, he notes, derives from four factors. The first is the technological revolution that was created in the wake of the development of nuclear weapons.[3] The second factor is the desire to save human lives. These two factors led, among other things, to strengthening the lobby of those who supported strategic air power as an efficient means for winning the war decisively. The third factor is the discussion over the position of the United States in the new world order, leader of the free world, which had been created after the Second World War.[4] The fourth and final factor is the development of theories about limited warfare, as a result of the development of nuclear weapons.

The strategic bombing attacks on Germany and Japan led military leaders and policymakers to determine that it was necessary to strengthen strategic air force power. In 1947, the strategic air force command became an independent service and the Eisenhower administration's policy of massive retaliation strengthened air force power and gave it operational precedence. Lewis's claim can be exemplified by the activation of air power at the beginning of American involvement in Vietnam before the full Americanization of the war during 1965.

The Johnson administration sought ways to stop North Vietnamese aggression against the South. The solution was found through the various air attacks up until Operation Rolling Thunder, in March 1965. The Johnson administration solved a number of problems for itself, although it did not prevent the escalation of the war. Firstly, by activating air power, the technological and military might of the United States was demonstrated. Secondly, President Lyndon B. Johnson managed to neutralize the harsh criticism of Senator Barry Goldwater, a transport pilot during the Second World War and an enthusiastic adherent of air power. Thirdly, the use of air power, representing American military might, was viewed as less likely to cause loss of life.[5]

In Lewis's opinion, the major reliance on air power satisfied the American wish to fight wars through the demonstration of superior technology and material might. He claims that the formula for the conduct of war removed soldiers from the dangers of warfare. From a reading of Lewis's book, it appears that this trend had already begun during the Korean War with the stabilization of the frontline in the summer of 1951 and also after the Vietnam War. In the air campaign during Operation Desert Storm, the coalition air forces under the leadership of the United States crushed the Iraqi battle formations. This bombardment enabled the land maneuver, which was also based on U.S. military superiority, to be short and effective. This approach was the leading American strategy even during the period of the Clinton administration. Shortly after the entry of President Bill Clinton into the White House, eighteen American soldiers were killed in Operation Gothic Serpent. This was the largest number of American casualties that the United States had suffered on one day since the Vietnam War. The results of the campaign led the United States to refrain from military involvement that required the deployment of ground forces (perhaps the exception was the dispatch of peace-keeping forces to Tahiti in 1994). The fear of losses prevented the Clinton ad-

ministration from becoming involved in the racial massacres in Yugoslavia and Rwanda. Only after political pressure did Clinton agree to intervene in the Kosovo crisis, but this involvement was based entirely on the air power of the United States and its North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allies. The journalist Richard Minter claims that this policy prevented the elimination of Osama bin Laden already in 1998.[6]

It is difficult to understand Lewis's criticism concerning U.S. attempts to avoid casualties through exercising its military powers. But his arguments have another aspect. According to Lewis, the military and campaign culture that was created after the Second World War caused a disconnection between war activities and fighters and the American citizen. Moreover, the cancellation of mandatory recruitment after the Vietnam War and the creation of an all volunteer army essentially changed the idea of the equality of sacrifice. In the Civil War and in both world wars, a general draft was imposed, while in the Vietnam War, recruitment was selective. Lewis is prepared to accept that there was a certain amount of truth in the argument presented by protest movements, that it was mainly those of the lower classes who were recruited by the army.[7] This trend distanced the war from most of the American public and created the protest movements that at first were against the war but at its height were against the army and the soldiers who had returned from the jungles of Vietnam.

In effect, Lewis's book is a manifesto that calls for a revolutionary change in thinking, especially to restore the idea of the citizen-soldier as it had been during the Second World War, to increase the manpower range of the army, and to cancel the idea of an all volunteer force. In his opinion, the changes after the Second World War led to the removal of the American people from the conduct of war. This central claim is well based and is carefully presented. At the same time, it is interesting that he does not discuss U.S. military in-

volvement during the 1980s, such as Granada and Panama.

The importance of this book is shown by the fact that Routledge has issued a second edition. In addition, even though the book presents a specific thesis that is merged within the fascinating historiographical debate over the American way of war, it also provides an in-depth discussion of U.S. military history of the past sixty years. This book is well written, and Lewis bases his arguments carefully on primary sources and a wide range of secondary sources. Also, the theoretical models that he uses are relevant for understanding the phenomenon of war as representing culture in general and U.S. culture in particular, although it was internal political struggles that influenced the American culture of conducting warfare after the Second World War. This is mandatory reading for all those engaged in U.S. military history, and above all should be included in the reading list of the American officer ranks, as well as the decision makers and policy shapers among the various political and military echelons.

#### Notes

[1]. Max Boot, "The New American Way of War," *Foreign Affairs* 82, no. 4 (2003): 42.

[2]. See, for example, Antulio J. Echevarria, *Toward an American Way of War* (Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2004); Colin S. Grey, *Irregular Enemies and the Essence of Strategy: Can the American Way of War Adapt?* (Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2006); and Thomas G. Mahnken, *Technology and the American Way of War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

[3]. Mahnken offers a similar position. Mahnken, *Technology and the American Way of War*.

[4]. Today as well, it may be said that the United States regards itself as leading the world in its war against global terror.

[5]. Spencer C. Tucker, *Vietnam* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1999), 107-108.

[6]. Richard Minitzer, *Losing Bin Laden: How Bill Clinton Failures Unleashed Global Terror* (Washington DC: Regnery, 2003), 44.

[7]. One of the claims made by the Movement for the Advancement of Black Rights was that the proportion of blacks fighting in Vietnam as well as the number of casualties among them was higher than the proportion of blacks in American society. James F. Dunnigan and Al Nofi address this incorrect perception in *Dirty Little Secrets of the Vietnam War: Military Information You're Not Supposed to Know* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 6-8.

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