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Book Reviews

Stephen Biddle, *Military Power: Explaining Victory and Defeat in Modern Battle.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004. 337 pp.

Reviewed by James A. Russell, Naval Postgraduate School

The United States is today presented with a series of disturbing and incongruous images as it attempts to apply force in pursuit of its objectives in various theaters around the world. Why, for example, did the United States and its 1.2 million soldiers, supported by more than $500 billion in defense expenditures (nearly half of all defense spending in the world), have such difficulty controlling the 13-mile road connecting Baghdad's airport to the city center? Why do those rumored to be harboring Osama bin Laden and his lieutenants in the northwest frontier provinces of Pakistan not turn him over to the United States and avail themselves of the $25-million reward? Why was the stunningly successful phase of "conventional" military operations in Iraq in March and early April 2003 not followed by a similarly successful counterinsurgency campaign?

These and other incongruities are the subject of frequent commentary, consuming voluminous quantities of airtime and congressional debate, not to mention more than $100 billion in taxpayers' money in 2006 alone to fund continuing operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. But the truth is that much of the commentary in the mass media is ill-informed and provides viewers with entertainment as opposed to cogent analysis.

Searching for sound content on the national security issues of the day has become an increasingly difficult proposition for educators, policy professionals, and interested scholars. Stephen Biddle's new book, *Military Power: Explaining Victory and Defeat in Modern Battle,* not only provides sound content but does so in addressing a topical issue of paramount importance. Readers seeking content in the form of a theoretical framework, interesting case studies backed by statistical analysis, and well-formulated implications for policy will not be disappointed by Biddle's rigor.

As explained by the subtitle, Biddle, now a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, takes on the issue of why some states succeed and others fail in battle. He places the issue of conventional combat in a theoretical framework that can be supported through modeling and statistical analysis for specialists interested in those techniques. Although Biddle's work provides the operations research modeler with an interesting methodology, his book can also be read and easily appreciated by a wider audience of national security professionals.

Biddle's argument will not necessarily be well-received in the Pentagon, which is

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trumpeting concepts such as "transformation" and "network-centric warfare" that supposedly represent fundamentally new ways of conducting warfare in the twenty-first century. Precision-guided munitions operating at greater standoff ranges all tied together by secure communications offer the promise of enhanced lethality on the battlefield with a greater economy of force, according to transformation advocates. The Defense Department is now awash with "transformation roadmaps" and is implementing something called "capabilities-based" defense planning that aims to consign Robert McNamara's programming, planning, and budgeting system (PPBS) to the dustbin of history. The promise of transformation was on display in Operation Iraqi Freedom, in which an array of sensors and long-range precision-guided munitions supported by an imaginative targeting scheme called "effects-based operations" (or "shock and awe") undermined the will of the Iraqi army to continue its otherwise futile resistance.

Biddle's work pours cold water on the idea that the new technologies underlying the Pentagon's "transformation" represent a true "revolution" in military affairs. Biddle believes that an important and enduring change occurred in the nature of conventional military warfare in the latter stages of World War I, when the stalemated armies finally broke out of the static trench warfare that had led to the slaughter of countless soldiers over the previous three years. Popular wisdom holds that the introduction of the tank broke this stalemate.

Biddle notes, however, that the supposed technological breakthrough represented by the tank actually had comparatively little impact. More important was the way that both armies—the Germans notably in the second battle of the Somme in March–April 1918 and the French and British in the offensives that followed—changed their fighting techniques by making greater use of cover and concealment, fire and maneuver, and combined-arms integration. The integration of combat capabilities at the close of the war saw the emergence of what Biddle describes as the "modern system" of force employment that broke the World War I stalemate. Biddle argues that the emergence of this modern system constitutes the defining revolution in military affairs in the twentieth century. States that can master the modern system and apply it on the battlefield are likely to be far more successful than those that cannot.

Biddle debunks the notion that emerging technologies have fundamentally altered the basic importance of the modern system of force employment. He instead argues that the technologies of the information age have merely reinforced the essential efficacy of the modern system for both offensive and defensive operations. He presents two other interesting case studies in the book: the unsuccessful British attempt in Operation Goodwood to break the stalemate at Normandy in July 1944; and Operation Desert Storm in 1991. The British army's failure to adopt the modern system resulted in defeat against the Germans, whereas the U.S. military's successful execution of the system led to stunning battlefield success against the Iraqis in 1991.

The implications of Biddle's theory, supported by his case studies and statistical analysis, are important for the choices facing the United States in dividing up its $500 billion defense budget. As Biddle cogently notes, his "central themes . . . are that the need for continuity is much stronger than generally recognized; that wholesale change

is not warranted by ongoing changes in technology; and that future warfare is best understood as a continuation of trends and relationships that have been evident for at least one hundred years, rather than a radical departure from historical precedent" (p. 197). Biddle's recommendations call for an emphasis on training and readiness and the retention of direct-fire capabilities that are still relevant in close-combat encounters while taking advantage of the prospects offered by lighter forces with enhanced lethality.

Those looking for analysis of the dismal military situation in Iraq will be disappointed, but Biddle's task was not to take on this issue. This book fills a space that is now sorely lacking for those interested in the issue of defense transformation and the future of warfare—a space often filled more by polemics than by sound scholarship. Hence, Biddle's work stands out. He notes in the closing chapter that he is working on another book that will explain the apparent inability of the United States to apply its military power successfully against the insurgency in Iraq. We can only hope that his next book will apply the same degree of intellectual rigor to this critical problem, thereby giving policymakers and academic specialists a lot more than just hype and sound bites.

Peter Boyle, *The Eden-Eisenhower Correspondence, 1955–1957.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005. 230 pp.

Reviewed by Anne Deighton, Oxford University and Geneva Centre for Security Policy

From April 1955, when Anthony Eden became British prime minister, to January 1957, when he was forced to step down ignominiously, Eden kept up a personal and rather one-sided correspondence with U.S. President Dwight Eisenhower. Eden knew that his illustrious British predecessor, Winston Churchill, had corresponded with two U.S. presidents, Franklin Roosevelt and Dwight Eisenhower, while in office. Eden wished to have the same high-level and personal line of communication to the White House. The letters between Eden and Eisenhower have been brought together in their entirety by Peter Boyle, who has already published the Churchill-Eisenhower correspondence—see Peter. G. Boyle, ed., *The Churchill-Eisenhower Correspondence, 1953–1955* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990). This latest collection of letters tell us a good deal about the two protagonists and about the relationship at the top between the United States and Britain, especially during the worst tensions engendered by the 1956 Suez crisis.

Eden initiated the correspondence and was the author of most of the letters. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the relative influence of their countries, Eden also emerges as the *plaideur.* Financial and foreign intelligence questions constitute the bulk of this correspondence, apart from a regular update on the two leaders' birthdays and various health problems. As Boyle points out in his introduction, many of the letters have already been used by historians, and all are now available in the respective national ar-