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The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World

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BOOK REVIEWS

NOT THE DAYS OF CLAUSEWITZ

Smith, General Sir Rupert. *The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World*. London: Penguin, 2005. 428pp. £25

Military theorists around the globe have noted changes in the landscape of warfare—nonstate actors, asymmetric threats, technology proliferation, etc.—and suggested that the military forces currently fielded by Western nations are not equipped to respond to them. The latest product of this analysis is *The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World*, by General Sir Rupert Smith.

Smith certainly has the appropriate credentials to write about the topic. He commanded the British 1st Armoured Division in the first Gulf war and was commander of UN forces in Bosnia at the time of the Dayton Peace Accords in 1995. After three years as General Officer Commanding Northern Ireland, he became Deputy Supreme Allied Commander Europe (DSACEUR), serving as second in command to a U.S. general, Wesley Clark, during the NATO air campaign in Kosovo.

The variety of the author's experiences throughout his distinguished career is critical, because these experiences constitute the framework for his thinking about war. First, he emphasizes the

importance of separately considering the effects of force at the three levels of war: tactical, operational (or theater, as Smith prefers), and strategic. Having held commands at each level, he has gained his appreciation of this firsthand. Second, much of Smith's command experience has been as part of coalitions, which he recognizes will continue to play a significant role in future warfare. Finally, he taxonomizes modern warfare—which he dates from the wars of Napoleon—into three distinct forms of war, corresponding roughly to three historical periods: interstate industrial war, the Cold War (which he regards as primarily an anomaly of the era of mutually assured destruction), and "war amongst the people." Just as Smith has commanded troops at each of the levels of war, he has served in some capacity in all three forms of war.

The most novel contribution Smith makes is his discussion of the implications of "war amongst the people." This is grounded in the idea that troops today are committed for much different reasons than in the days of Clausewitz,

and against much different enemies—enemies who do not wear a uniform but move freely “amongst the people.” Smith uses this idea to examine past conflicts, touching on the guerrilla fighters operating on the Iberian Peninsula in the Napoleonic wars before moving on to analyze the British successes in Malaya, the French and American failures in Vietnam, and the two Gulf wars. Thereafter, he develops a series of questions for commanders to ask prior to the employment of force and devotes the penultimate chapter to applying these questions, albeit post hoc, to his experience in Bosnia.

The Utility of Force is not a scholarly work, nor does it claim to be; it has few footnotes and no bibliography, but neither does it need them. The book is not military history but rather a skillfully presented interpretation of certain trends in the history of warfare. Meanwhile, it raises a number of important questions that all future strategic leaders should be considering.

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Fontenot, Gregory, E. J. Degen, and David Tohn. *On Point: The United States Army in Operation Iraqi Freedom*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 2005. 539pp. \$34.95

On Point, as stated in its opening pages, is clearly intended for a professional military audience. General Eric K. Shinseki, former chief of staff of the Army, commissioned this work in 2003 as an after-action review. The overarching purposes were to educate soldiers and defense professionals with respect

to the conduct of combat in Operation IRAQI FREEDOM (OIF) and to suggest implications for continued U.S. Army transformation.

In telling the story of the Army in OIF, the authors appeal not only to the target audience but to the general public at large through objective and informative analysis. *On Point* provides a clear appreciation for the complexities involved in planning, preparation, and execution of military operations across the range of military operations. Further, *On Point* provides the lay reader insight into the after-action-review process, which remains critical to advancing institutional learning and improving the future application of the armed forces as an instrument of national power.

On Point tells the story from a decidedly Army perspective. The discussion encompasses topics essentially in three parts, from the strategic-operational level down to the tactical level of war. The first discusses the Army preparation for OIF. The second focuses on the ground war through the conclusion of major offensive combat operations. It is discussed in four phases: Phase I—preparation, Phase II—shaping the battlespace, Phase III—decisive offensive operations, and Phase IV—post-hostilities. Finally there is an analysis of the campaign’s implications regarding future conflict, Army organization, and transformation to a future force. Army successes and failures are clearly delineated, along with the authors’ recommendations for the future.

Like many military books written by military officers and professionals, *On Point* often suffers from an overemphasis on acronyms and abbreviations, making the writing sometimes dry and overly detailed. Nonetheless, the