
Reviewed by Major Brian Babcock-Lumish

Having the hindsight of twice deploying to Iraq unceremoniously from the Tucson, Arizona airport, USA, it is the experience of this review’s author that scholars and practitioners alike will benefit from Carlton-Ford and Ender’s edited volume, *The Routledge Handbook of War and Society*. Just as I went from the American southwest to a combat zone in Southwest Asia in under 48 hours, this volume considers “…the blurring of lines within and between these two geographical spaces”: “the war front and the home front” (p.2).

The changing character of war, particularly the compression of time and space with the increasing speed of communication and transport, requires a diverse set of methodological tools to understand the sociological implications of war in the 21st century. The contributors to the volume, which Carlton-Ford and Ender intended as a comprehensive introduction to research on the first ten years of wars after 9/11 in both Iraq and Afghanistan, stretch disciplinary boundaries to draw upon sociological, anthropological, psychological, and other relevant academic perspectives. While the volume first appeared in hardback in 2011, its reissuance in paperback increases its accessibility, making it a valuable addition to the bookshelf for anyone interested in understanding how the wars have shaped both American society and the American military. While the likelihood of continued American participation in the two conflicts has ebbed and flowed, Carlton-Ford and Ender were prescient in deciding not to wait for the conclusion of either to publish their volume, as it remains relevant to the continually evolving wars.

The *Handbook* is logically structured into four sections, the first two focused on the war on the ground and the latter two on the war back home: (1) Combat and Its Aftermath; (2) Non-Combat Operations, Non-Combatants, and Operators; (3) The Social Construction of War, Its Heroes, and Its Enemies; (4) Families and Young People on the Home Front. The contributors themselves represent a wide range of academicians and practitioners, with a mix of civilians and service members in both groups.

The first section of the book tackles an eclectic mix of topics under the heading “Combat and its Aftermath”. Susan Ross examines recruiting and retention, while Brigit Myers Pavilonis considers the US difficulty in transitioning from combat to stabilization. Ian Roxborough evaluates the challenges of organizational learning while fighting a counter-insurgency, and Ryan Pengelly and Anne Irwin take an anthropological approach to

* The views expressed here are solely those of the author and do not purport to be those of the United States Department of the Army, US Department of Defense, or the US Government.
understanding Canadian soldiers’ storytelling and perceptions of morality. Wilbur Scott, David McConne, and George Mastroianni assess the impact of divergence between expectations and reality for two US Army units deployed in Iraq. Brian Reed and David Segal bring together the traditional sociological study of networks with the more applied version from the military (intelligence preparation of the battlefield), using unclassified data to explain how analysts assessed the network surrounding Saddam Hussein in order to find him when he went into hiding after the invasion. Mastroianni and David Reed argue that the classic Milgram and Zimbardo research is insufficient to explain the abuses of Abu Ghraib, while Ryan Ashley Caldwell and Stjepan Mestrovic apply sociological classics to several cases of abuse in Iraq.

The strongest chapters in the first section are: Scott, McConne, and Mastroianni; Mastroianni and Reed; and Caldwell and Mestrovic. Scott, McConne, and Mastroianni use oral histories to show the complexity of soldiers’ motivations, “financial, ideological, and relational” (p.65), to serve in uniform. They conclude that – at least at the time of their interviews in 2004 – soldiers did not view the disconnect between what they had trained for and what they had to do in Iraq as being their unit’s fault, but there might be a belief in either Army higher-ups or civilians being in the wrong for the mismatch. Mastroianni and Reed convincingly argue that Milgram and Zimbardo are insufficient to explain the behaviour of US Army soldiers at Abu Ghraib, which is not analogous to either an experimental lab or the simulated prison in a Stanford University basement. Caldwell and Mestrovic evaluate whether the modern US military takes into account the findings of classical sociology, namely the research of Durkheim, Stouffer, and Marshall. Depressingly, they conclude that the Army “…has ignored and is ignoring fundamental, classic findings…regarding social integration and its effect on unit morale and effectiveness” (p.95).

The second section, while still focused on the war front, shifts focus to non-combat. The six chapters examine policing in Iraq (Mathieu Deflem & Suzanne Sutphin) and Afghanistan (Deflem), humanitarian information in Iraq (Aldo Benini, Charles Conley, Joseph Donahue & Shawn Messick), contractors (Shawn Cupp & William Lantham), psychological operations (James Griffith), cholera in Iraq (Daniel Poole), and Iraqi adolescents (Carlton-Ford, Ender & and Ahoo Tabatabai). This section is the strongest in chapters that clearly bridge the academic-policy divide, but retain a strong theoretical grounding and empirical evidence. Poole, for example, expands the discussion of civilian health impact beyond the often-studied psychological issues to medical epidemiology. The policy implication for both civilian and military actors in conflict zones is the need “…to focus on health issues centered around food, water, and sanitation to prevent excessive morbidity and mortality associated with war” (p.171). Carlton-Ford et al. offer unique empirical research based on field surveys of Baghdad youth relatively early in the Iraq War. The unexpected conclusion they reach is that perceptions of national threat (vice family threat) are closely correlated with self-regard, contrary to past research on conflict-related trauma (p.183).
The third and fourth sections of the volume shift focus away from the battlefield and those on it to the home front, broadly conceived. The chapters use even more diverse methodological approaches than those in the first half of the volume. Taking a critical theory approach, Daniel Egan cogently argues that critical theorists are wrong to discount the centrality of the nation-State in globalization, and that they miss “…the ways in which coercion simultaneously reinforces and undermines consent for global capitalism” (p.198), based on his analysis of the invasion of Iraq. Christopher Pieper likewise offers a compelling analysis of mass media coverage of the war on terror as a domestic risk management strategy for subsequent terrorist attacks. He finds that the government was able to coopt the media after 9/11 to portray its actions in a less critical manner than at a time of lower risk. He is candid in the model’s shortcomings to explain the loss of popular support for the Iraq War in 2005, but still retains utility “…under certain circumstances, [when] these social forces have the potential to paint pictures of reality far more controlled and ideological than might normally be allowed by prevailing social theories” (p.218). Alexander Nikolaev and Douglas Porpora offer a statistical analysis of op-ed writing during the debate prior to the invasion of Iraq, demonstrating that elite press attitudes were not a reflection of Democratic party opposition (which was limited), but instead a “…semi-independent channel of communication on foreign policy” (p.232). Criticism of the invasion was “predominantly of a prudential nature” (ibid.), and demonstrated a lopsided morality. Ethics and law were almost never employed when arguing against the war, only when arguing for an attack.

While the Nikolaev and Porpora research concerned debate about the merits of the war in a national, public context, Mark Hedley and Sara Clark took a micro-level discourse analysis approach to the debate about anti-war protests on a university staff and faculty list-serve far from the public eye, offering insights on framing within social movements. Gregory Gibson et al. and Erin Steuter and Deborah Wills offer analyses on opposite sides of the coin: construction of heroes and enemies. Through survey data analysis, Gibson et al. conclude that hero status is most likely for non-professionals in situations risking life and limb, and that certain candidates for hero status are divisive along partisan lines. Returning to discourse analysis, Steuter and Wills examine how the enemy-Other, Muslims in this case, has been socially constructed following 9/11 with the definition growing from the specific attackers to all Arabs or Muslims.

The final section of the book, while it has the fewest chapters, is also the most focused: families and young people on the home front. These three chapters examine military families’ use of media, military children’s response to multiple deployments, and the attitudes of American college students to the wars in both Iraq and Afghanistan. In the first chapter, Ender et al. consider the emergence of mass media as a third “greedy institution” placing demands on both a service member and her or his family, compounding the already-identified dynamic of the military itself and the service member’s family as competing greedy institutions often in conflict for the service member’s loyalty. Ender et al. based their findings on interviews collected from the
spouses of a combat unit in the early days of the invasion of Iraq, when family members at home had 24/7 access to live reporting from an embedded journalist with their spouses’ unit. From a policy perspective, the adoption of the “greedy institution” framework is likely to alienate the very military families that are the subject of the research, given the connotations of the term. Despite this danger of the findings being lost in translation, the authors are right to conclude that modern war further complicates the familial relationships of soldiers with the introduction of an information-thirsty mass media seeking anecdotes from the battlefield and home front to increase viewership.

As Christopher Dandeker – the now-Emeritus Professor of Military Sociology at King’s College London’s War Studies Department – notes in the foreword, the ambitious goal of the volume is to “…shift the curriculum of the discipline…” of sociology, because war “…is too important a subject to be left to the other disciplines of international relations: military history and political science” (p.xxi). As a political scientist interested in war, I welcome these contributors’ efforts to bring a methodologically ecumenical approach to understanding the most destructive human endeavour. Further, I hope Carlton-Ford and Ender consider an updated edition or companion volume in the future to bring the research agenda even further, accounting for the years since the volume was first published, as well as the cumulative effect of another five years of war on American society and its military.

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