

Sara McLaughlin Mitchell & John A. Vasquez (eds.), *Conflict, War, and Peace*, Thousand Oaks, CA, CQ Press/ Sage Publishing, 2014, 423 pp.

Robert H. Gregory, Jr., *Clean Bombs and Dirty Wars: Air Power in Kosovo and Libya*, Lincoln, NE, University of Nebraska Press/ Washington, DC, Potomac Books, 2015, 306 pp.

Reviewed by Daniel Karell

Conflict, War, and Peace, edited by Sara McLaughlin Mitchell and John A. Vasquez, and *Clean Bombs and Dirty Wars: Air Power in Kosovo and Libya*, by Robert H. Gregory, Jr., offer us two distinct windows into the nature of interstate conflict. The former is a refreshing and innovative undergraduate textbook; the latter is a cogently written and meticulously researched historical account of recent military air campaigns.

Ms. Mitchell and Mr. Vasquez have two goals for *Conflict, War, and Peace*: (1) to introduce students to the scientific study of peace and war and (2) provide an overview of current scientific knowledge about war. These goals, they argue in the preface, together offer a corrective to extant textbooks that too often present simplistic theories and outdated empirical evidence.

To accomplish their goals, Mitchell and Vasquez build the book around peer-reviewed research. Each chapter begins with a reprint of an article from a scholarly journal – such as *International Studies Quarterly*, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, *Journal of Peace Research*, and *World Politics*. Next, the editors present two commentaries. The first is a discussion of the major contributions of the preceding research to the substantive literature. The second is a review of key methodological principles in the research. The commentary section closes with suggested questions for readers and a bibliography of related readings.

The structure of *Conflict, War, and Peace* may sound complicated but I found it to have merit. One of the most challenging things for students new to a subject – such as most undergraduates – is to situate what they are reading in the broader literature, simply because new students are by definition unfamiliar with the literature. The substantive commentary provided after each research study offers help for overcoming this challenge. Similarly – and evoking pedagogical research showing that students learn writing best by writing about something they care about – the methodological commentaries are likely to be of great value to students learning quantitative methods. With these commentaries, students interested in substantive issues of peace and war will have critical exposure to a wide range of methodological topics, from spurious relationships to odds ratios to duration models.

Of course, these pedagogical contributions should not overshadow the primary contribution of the textbook: exposing students to contemporary, prominent, and empirically grounded theories, insights, and arguments about peace and war. *Conflict, War, and Peace*

accomplishes this by beginning with Stuart Bremer's "Dangerous Dyads : Conditions Affecting the Likelihood of Interstate War, 1816-1965" (originally published in the *Journal of Conflict Resolution* in 1992) and then surveying papers discussing territorial conflict, alliances, rivalry, arms races, the steps to war, diversionary theory, democratic peace, economic interdependence, preponderance, territorial peace, nuclear weapons, enforcing settlements, and leader survival.

Such topics offer readers a value *entrée* into the international relations field of political science. As such, the textbook tilts towards macro-levels of analysis; micro foundations are often implied but typically not explicitly theorized and tested.¹ In contrast, *Clean Bombs and Dirty Wars* offers a rich accounting of the micro-level information, assumptions, decision-making, and behaviors driving recent uses of air power by Western militaries. (As a primarily descriptive project, however, these micro-level data are not used to construct causal mechanisms²). Consequently, the volume provides a thorough review of whether air power can indeed achieve what its Western political and military advocates claim.

Mr. Gregory's answer is a qualified "yes." The qualification is key: air power can often *only* achieve its intended goals when used in conjunction with ground forces. In other words, the belief that military campaigns can be successfully waged exclusively with strikes from the air is based on a myth. Instead, Mr. Gregory argues, successful campaigns that relied heavily on air power – the first Gulf War, Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan in 2001-02, Libya – turned on the ability of ground forces to spot targets.

Gregory builds his argument over several chapters that examine the individual and organizational histories of the 1999 air campaign in Kosovo and the 2011 campaign in Libya. The introductory chapter presents a brief history of air power and of the development of air power theory. Here, the main point is that widely held understandings of what occurred during the first Gulf War and the 1995 intervention in Bosnia fuelled an assumption among the United States' public, civilian policy-makers, and military leaders (across the service branches and NATO) that air power alone could effectively degrade the capacity of mobile ground forces. The first, second, and third chapters delve into how these assumptions helped drive the operational phases of Operation Allied Force in Kosovo.

These assumptions driving the Kosovo air campaign, as well as the resultant planning and policies in the service branches and Department of Defense, are critically evaluated in the fourth and fifth chapters. To briefly summarize a large amount of research and reasoning, Gregory shows how rather than being a triumph of air power exclusivity, Operation Allied Force in fact succeed because of the effective cooperation of air and ground forces – just as many so-called "air campaigns" before it.

¹ See Joshua D. Kertzer, "Microfoundations in International Relations", *Conflict Management & Peace Science*, September 2016 : DOI: 10.1177/0738894216665488.

² See Peter Hedström & Petri Ylikoski, "Causal Mechanisms in the Social Sciences", *Annual Review of Sociology*, vol.36, 2010, pp.49-67.

The remaining chapters examine Operations *Unified Protector* and *Odyssey Dawn* in Libya to provide further support for the argument that air power is most effective when coupled with on-the-ground personnel and *matériel*. Chapter seven is a key part of this latter argument. It details how initial NATO air strikes faced difficulty in targeting Gaddafi's forces and became more effective only once they gained access to target information generated on the ground.

Clean Bombs and Dirty Wars is not without weaknesses, especially from an analytical social science point of view. For example, the author's assumptions about the US public's own assumptions about air power are not obviously valid or revelatory: the analysis of the public's assumptions actually focus on statements and decisions by Congressional elites, and the data showing that the public prefers military conflicts with no casualties would likely hold true for nearly all publics across time and space. Similarly, the evidence that social media posts during the 2011 Libya campaign directly improved NATO's targeting efforts is circumstantial – as far as I can tell, there is no direct observation of information from individuals on the ground and communicated via social media applications being incorporated into plans for air strikes.

Moreover, Gregory highlights several contradictions and paradoxes throughout the book – air power being used to attack mobile ground forces instead of command centres and infrastructure; the inability of air power to exclusively achieve stated aims, such as the prevention of ethnic cleansing ; the perception that technology can deliver “clean” warfare; the capacity of an enemy's “low-tech” tactics to bolster resilience in the face of technologically superior air campaigns – while never clearly integrating them into a comprehensive framework for understanding contemporary air power as employed by Western militaries and politicians. Nevertheless, Gregory's point is clear and invaluable: Recent history teaches us that air power alone is not an effective approach for waging – and winning – military operations. Instead, the efficacy of air power depends on close cooperation with ground forces (as it always has).

Both books draw on the aforementioned strengths to provide readers with valuable lessons derived from interstate wars and past conflicts past. Yet, they share a common limitation. Both have surprisingly little to say about the current and future character of conflict. For example, *Conflict, War, and Peace* primarily focuses on the territorial and material dimensions driving the onset of interstate war, thereby offering little insight into the reoccurring, messy, irregular wars that have become more frequent in recent decades³ and that are driven in part by grievances, exclusion, and contention over legitimacy.⁴ Of course, *Conflict, War, and Peace* does not hide that it is implicitly a textbook about

³ See Eli Berman & Alia Matanock, “The Empiricist's Insurgency”, *Annual Review of Political Science*, vol.18, 2015, pp.443-464.

⁴ See Lars-Erik Cederman, Kristian Skrede Gleditsch & Halvard Buhaug, *Inequality, Grievances, and Civil War*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2013; John Hagan, Joshua Kaiser & Anna Hanson, “The Theory of Legal Cynicism and Sunni Insurgent Violence in Post-Invasion Iraq”, *American Sociological Review*, vol.81, n°2, 2016, pp.316-346 ; and Andreas Wimmer, “War”, *Annual Review of Sociology*, vol.40, 2014, pp.172-197.

interstate conflict, rather than the insurgencies, asymmetric wars, civil wars, and rioting unsettling our world today – but are these not “conflicts” and “wars,” as well ?

Indeed, both books skirt discussion on today’s most intractable conflict : the apparently endless wars fuelled by unmanned aerial vehicles, or “drones.” This omission in *Conflict, War, and Peace* is again likely due to its bias towards interstate war, but it is surprising for *Clean Bombs and Dirty Wars*. To be fair, *Clean Bombs and Dirty Wars* is about Kosovo and Libya – not drone “hot spots” like Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, Syria, Iraq, and who knows where else – but its aim is to shed light on contemporary air power, in which drones play a major role.

Gregory does briefly mention drones on page 183,⁵ but there is little consideration of how improvements in drone technology could render his primary argument moot. For instance, could a circulating fleet of surveillance drones make on-the-ground targeting obsolete? Could these machines also neutralize the “low-tech” tactics of past enemies, such as decoys, by following targets for days for validation purposes? Relatedly, will targets soon be solely identified remotely by their on-line traces (*e.g.*, mobile phone metadata, IP addresses, content uploaded or download from the Internet), further making ground cooperation unnecessary?

I imagine that the record of inadvertent civilian deaths attributed to drone strikes lends support for Gregory’s conclusion that air power success relies on cooperation with ground forces. My point, however, is that since significant amounts of brainpower and treasure are being devoted to overcoming the need for ground forces – and, more generally, altering the nature of conflict, war, and peace – both books could have given their respective readerships more insight into what past experience and research suggest is just over the horizon.

Daniel Karell

Division of Social Science
New York University Abu Dhabi

⁵ Further to the point, the terms “drone”, “Predator”, “unmanned aerial vehicle”, or “UAV” do not appear in the index.