



Andrew J. Bacevich, Eliot A. Cohen, eds. *War over Kosovo: Politics and Strategy in a Global Age*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2001. 256 pp. \$30.50 (paper), ISBN 978-0-231-12483-6; \$83.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-231-12482-9.



Reviewed by Peter N. Funke (Department of Political Science, University of Pennsylvania)

Published on H-Diplo (February, 2003)

The Kosovo War and Beyond

The Kosovo War and Beyond

In the wake of September 11 and the “War on Terrorism,” the Kosovo War of 1999 and its implications seem to have slipped into oblivion. Published on the eve of September 11 and thus unable to address the attacks on U.S. soil, Andrew J. Bacevich and Eliot A. Cohen’s edited volume, *War over Kosovo: Politics and Strategy in a Global Age*, nonetheless provides valuable insights into the emerging security challenges of the twenty-first century.

The most pressing questions of the “victorious” Kosovo War pertain to what it potentially tells us about the use of force in the first half of the twenty-first century. Bacevich and Cohen’s introductory chapter claims that the Kosovo War crystallized a fundamentally new “American way of war” and that “in many respects the Kosovo War holds the key to understand that decade” (p. x). Placing this conflict in broader perspective, the implications of this war for NATO’s role in the post-Cold War era, strategy, the “Revolution in Military Affairs,” civil-military relations, and just-war theory are addressed in the volume’s seven chapters.

Many observers viewed the Kosovo War as paradigmatic especially as it was allegedly won by air power alone. Various contributions to this volume make clear, however, that it would be a grave mistake to take the Kosovo War as proof of winning wars exclusively by aerial bombardment or regarding it as the paradigmatic war of the twenty-first century.

In his chapter, William M. Arkin convincingly argues that “to see in Operation Allied Forces the validation of any theory about warfare or doctrine would be sheer nonsense” (p. 26). Against the background of a crisply written history of the seventy-eight-day air campaign over Kosovo, Arkin shows that while NATO’s strategy involved the most precise application of air power it also concealed “a legion of political, military, intelligence, and leadership mistakes” (p. 28). For him, NATO’s real plan “rested on a single unstated assumption: As soon as Milosevic saw that NATO meant business, he would sue for terms” (p. 7). This plan was unsuccessful but Milosevic’s own strategy to erode NATO’s political consensus failed as well. Thus, according to Arkin the most likely key to success was NATO’s cohesion despite internal struggles.

Anatol Lieven's paper strikes a similar sober note concerning the implications of the Kosovo War. He contends that it neither represents an absolute confirmation of air power and the "Revolution in Military Affairs," nor should it be regarded as the characteristic war of the first half of the twenty-first century. Invoking Somalia, Lieven maintains "that orderly, 'sanitized,' limited war such as the kind NATO fought over Kosovo has been very much the exception historically and is likely to remain the exception in the future" (p. 104). Lieven identifies failing states, "where chaos, organized crime, and terrorism have supplanted the civil order" (p. 102), as the most complicated dangers, resonating with well-known arguments of shifts from war between states to war within states. In face of these new security challenges, Lieven concludes that the U.S. military's overall approach "displays a dangerous degree of wishful thinking" (p. 114). In addition, Lieven engages arguments about the United States's broader strategy as the sole remaining superpower in the post-Cold War era, suggesting that campaigns such as those in the Balkans resemble old-fashioned "imperial policing" (p. 98). Lieven highlights, however, contemporary differences to past campaigns, predominantly the decline of public tolerance for failure despite greatly increased risks. He sees the greatest threat from "the commitment of U.S. forces to occupy territories, and above all great cities, in the face of a bitterly hostile population and amidst a mixture of cultural ignorance, poor intelligence, racist hostility, brutality, and demoralization that affect its own forces and civilian population" (p. 119).

Elliot A. Cohen's essay "Kosovo and the New American Way of War" argues that the Kosovo War illustrated and crystallized the extent of America's departure from its traditional way of war. Along the lines of Arkin's argument, Cohen stresses the pivotal role of NATO, recognizing a "coalition habit" of contemporary American strategy (p. 51). In fact Cohen claims that "the maintenance of a coalition became something of an objective in itself," stemming from the desire for political legitimacy abroad and at home (p. 51). Furthermore, Cohen warns of a new military centralization, ushering in what he characterizes as a troubling development: the rise of the theater Commanders in Chief (CINCs) as "imperial proconsuls" (p. 58).

Similarly, James Kurth's chapter stresses the pivotal role the new U.S. grand strategy plays in a thorough understanding of the Kosovo War. Spurred by post-Cold War transformations (security system, global economic system, and American social system) U.S. grand strategy

under President Clinton converted Wilsonian "liberal internationalism" into "liberal globalism," characterized by an ideology of human rights and open society, aiming "ultimately to eliminate all economic or social borders everywhere in the world" (p. 69). Resembling the prototype of Huntington's "clash of civilizations" (p. 74), the Kosovo War, Kurth upholds, "was the first war that the United States undertook to carry out its grand strategy for the global era" (p. 93), waging it for institutional and ideological purposes. Above all, the conflict sought to further NATO's *raison d'être* in the global era. Despite victory, Kurth suggests that it might have been a "Pyrrhic one" in terms of facilitating future out-of-area operations and informal NATO enlargement (p. 84). Moreover, in Russia, China, and India, Kurth identifies major sources of resistance to this "American-led global revolution" (p. 70). In sum, humanitarianism is still more of a fig leaf than an actual motive and for Kurth "the United States does not seem likely to undertake a humanitarian war in large areas of the world where it has no traditional or obvious national interest" in the future (p. 83).

Albert R. Coll's contribution ultimately warns against this "humanitarianism as fig leaf." Examining the moral complexities of the Kosovo war by utilizing just-war theory along its two fundamental axes (rightness of causes and rightness of means), Coll characterizes the Kosovo War as morally justified in "light of the responsibilities the United States faces today as the world's preeminent power" (p. 124). However, it seems hypocritical and might undermine American credibility should the United States resist "the Wilsonian logic on issues where its application does not serve America's own interests" (p. 148). Strikingly absent from Coll's account is an engagement with Appendix B of the Rambouillet negotiations and with the controversial genealogy of "just-war theory."

Referring explicitly to Cohen's notion of a "new American way of war," Andrew J. Bacevich's chapter, "Neglected Trinity: Kosovo and the Crisis in U.S. Civil-Military Relations," links this new American style of war to a mix of strategic aspirations and domestic cultural constraints. He maintains that the reconciliation of strategy and culture produced a new realignment of Clausewitz's pivotal trinity (state, military, people) governing armed conflict. This "post-liberal, postindustrial, post-modern, and postheroic" (p. 171) civil-military compact, being on display for the first time in Kosovo, is inherently flawed since it "is incompatible with traditional military professionalism and it poses an unacceptable risk to democratic practice" (p. 183).

Michael G. Vicker's final chapter of the volume, "Revolution Deferred: Kosovo and the Transformation of War" explores "the connection between the RMA [Revolution in Military Affairs] debate and the war in Kosovo" (p. 190). Vicker argues that the Kosovo War highlighted the discrepancy between capabilities and requirements. For him the major lesson of the Kosovo War lies in its exposure of "institutional impediments to a real transformation of the American military" (p. 191).

As a whole, *War over Kosovo* is a strikingly heterogeneous collection of essays. Seemingly unconstrained by overarching conceptual or organizational principles, the volume illuminates the conflict from multiple angles, rendering seven independently refreshing and original accounts. The editors' introduction acknowledges the range of contributions, which often share not much more than the "conviction that the Kosovo War merits something more than self-congratulations or instant oblivion" (p. xiv). This is at times, however, very little and the reader is left wondering about the motive of selecting

this set of contributions. It is all the more astonishing since similar themes surface in various chapters and an attempt at more explicitly relating the individual contributions with one another would have benefited the flow and continuity of contributions and thus the volume's coherence. This is amplified by the absence of a concluding chapter, the only real shortcoming of *War over Kosovo*. It would have provided an opportunity to more explicitly connect the individual chapters and condense the overall implications. Furthermore, the lack of engagement with International Relations theory is striking. As such, the reader is at times not only left in the dark with respect to the author's theoretical (ideological) bent but crucial insights could have been elaborated on more succinctly as, for example, the notion of "unipolarity" or "openness" as it relates to liberal theories of international relations. Nevertheless, *War over Kosovo* is an intellectually stimulating collection of essays, not limited to international relations specialists. It provides insightful engagements with the Kosovo War and its implications for the security environment of the twenty-first century.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-diplo>

Citation: Peter N. Funke. Review of Bacevich, Andrew J.; Cohen, Eliot A., eds., *War over Kosovo: Politics and Strategy in a Global Age*. H-Diplo, H-Net Reviews. February, 2003.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=7185>

Copyright © 2003 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at hbooks@mail.h-net.org.