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Max G. Manwaring, *The Complexity of Modern Asymmetric Warfare*. Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 2012, Pp. xvi, 208. ISBN 978-0-8061-4265-4.

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This is the third book of a trilogy by Max G. Manwaring, professor of military strategy at the US Army War College. In his Foreword (vii–xiv) to this volume, John Fishel (Univ. of Oklahoma) summarizes the content of Manwaring’s two earlier books,¹ which concern, among other subjects, ubiquitous individual violence, revolution within states, and/or war between states. The three categories have coalesced, today, into an untidy amalgam of crime, civil disorder, and clashes of national interest that often fall short of war.

Max addresses the complicated and complex world of the drug-infested insurgency in Colombia and how it interacts with gangs, drugs and organized crime in Central America and Mexico. He ties these phenomena in very interesting ways to U.S. immigration policy, noting that the gangs (*maras*) of El Salvador were born in the prisons of California and compounded by the American policy of deporting criminals without informing their countries of origin that these hardened criminal gang members were coming home. By the time the communication issue was resolved, it was too late; the gangs had been transplanted from Los Angeles and San Quentin to San Salvador and were then reimported to Washington D.C. (vii)

Fishel reiterates Manwaring’s frequent observation that asymmetric threats are nothing new. Indeed, Carl von Clausewitz pointed out that “The first, the supreme, the most far reaching act of judgment that the statesman and commander have to make is to establish ... the kind of war on which they are embarking, neither mistaking it for, nor trying to turn it into something that is alien to its nature” (xiv).

Manwaring’s Introduction (3–9) presents his research objectives: (a) to give strategic leaders new insights into the complexity and effectiveness of contemporary irregular conflict; (b) to articulate the means non-state actors have adopted to achieve national, regional, and global hegemonic goals, and to illustrate effective countermeasures that have been deployed against them; and (c) to help civilian and military leaders to think strategically about the many “wars amongst the people” that emerged out of the Cold War as significant forerunners of the irregular wars that the United States and its allies are facing in the present and will face in the future (3).

To achieve these wide-ranging objectives, Manwaring, proceeding more or less chronologically, mixes historical case studies, military/revolutionary theories, and compilations of lessons learned. His chapter titles, like the explanation of his aims, are overlong; it is difficult, at first, to relate the individual chapters to each other. The author dashes around the world—South America, Africa, Europe, the Middle East—reflecting upon the writings of military philosophers—Clausewitz, Liddell-Hart, Lenin, and others—exposing the increasingly complicated behavior of nefarious, violent humanity. Most readers will quickly accept the premise that modern asymmetric warfare is complex, but many will yearn for intelligent, prioritized simplification. Unlike the military philosophers he cites, Manwaring does not distil a few clear, forceful conclusions from his plethora of observations. A summary of the contents of his chapters follows.

In chapter 1, “Salient Antecedents to the Present Array of Conflicts: Algeria (1954–1962) and El Salvador (1980–1992)” (9–29), Manwaring analyzes Algeria’s anti-colonial struggle against France, in parallel with the American-influenced Left-Right struggle in El Salvador. He dips into the work of Clausewitz, Sun Tzu, Lenin, Liddell Hart, Jorge Verstryngne, and Che Guevara. After each case study, he extracts lengthy “Key Points and Lessons.” While each of these lessons is valid, many are already well understood today. For example, Manwaring gleans from the revolution and civil war in El Salvador that

1. *Insurgency, Terrorism and Crime: Shadows from the Past and Portents for the Future* (2008) and *Gangs, Pseudo-Militaries and Other Modern Mercenaries: New Dynamics in Uncomfortable Wars* (2010).

[T]he Salvadoran government and FMLN strategies were altered from time to time in recognition of changing political-military considerations, but both parties to the conflict relied primarily on a strong military component in their efforts to “win.” In the end, after a negotiated settlement in 1992, the government achieved the goals it put forward in 1984 and again in 1987. At the same time, the insurgents were incorporated into the democratic political process. That was the validation of the idea that there is a viable alternative to violent models for achieving fundamental political change. (29)

Chapter 2, “New ‘Kindler [*sic*] and Gentler’ Revolutionary Lessons from Peru: The Resurgence of Sendero Luminoso” (30–50), describes the native Peruvian Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path) insurgency against the hierarchical legacy of Spanish colonial rule in the author’s customary manner:

this chapter illustrates what Verstryngge calls the “revalidation of guerrilla warfare.” A translation of Marxist-Leninist rhetoric dictates that concepts of traditional guerrilla warfare are being superseded by those of Sun Tzu’s “indirect war,” Clausewitz’s “war by other means,” and V.I. Lenin’s “war by all means.” Importantly, the term “revalidation” now dictates that the insurgency phenomenon must move from Che Guevara’s violent military oriented (*foco*) approach to compel rapid radical change and revert to Lenin’s, Mao Tse Tung’s (or Mao Zedong’s), and—now—Verstryngge’s softer and more subtle use of multidimensional combinations of propaganda, corruption, subversion, coercion, and time (30–31)

The conclusions reached in chapter 3, “Four Trojan Horses of Different Colors: Vignettes from Al Queda in Spain, the Cuban Popular Militias, Haiti and Brazil” (51–75), are best summed up by one the following Key Points: “Gangs—working from Trojan horse ‘zones of impunity,’ nonterritorial communities, or any other kind of virtual state within a state—represent a significant threat to the authority of a targeted government, and to those of its neighbors” (74).

The discussion in chapter 4 of “State-Sponsored Internal and External Persuasion and Coercion: The Russian Youth Group Nashi” (76–96) is condensed in Manwaring’s first and last Key Points: “The most recent of the Russian youth organizations, Nashi emerged with the intent of building metaphorical Trojan horses, generating divine surprises, and influencing public opinion at home and abroad.... Nashi, then, appears to be a powerful nonkinetic power abroad, as well as an instrument for generating public opinion and influencing decision and policy makers at home” (94).

In chapter 5, “Guatemala at Risk: Drugs, Thugs, and Radical Political Change” (97–119), Manwaring points out that “Violent crime, immunity from prosecution, political inaction, weak institutions, and widespread corruption are generating the correlation of forces that make for an unstable security situation in Guatemala” (118). Reassuringly, the philosopher Jacques Maritain has the answer: “the highest functions of the state [are] to ensure the laws and facilitate the free development of the body politic.... [O]nly then will the State achieve its true dignity, which comes not from power and prestige, but from the exercise of justice” (119).

In chapter 6, “Traumatic Attacks at Another Level: Cyber and Biological War” (120–35), we learn that “War is changing. The aim is, increasingly, not to kill people or capture territory but to sap the ability and will of an adversary to use conventional military power, no matter how superior. The main means will be nonexplosive traumatic war. Accordingly, current and future threats arise from the use of new asymmetric means—predominantly information (cyber) and biological warfare” (133). It is not clear why Manwaring foresees biological but not chemical war; and he omits “nuclear Jihad” altogether.

Chapter 7, “The Road Ahead” (136–54), envisages the American public’s “U.S.-centric vision—a situation with battlefields that are well understood, with an enemy who looks and acts more or less as we do, and with a situation in which the fighting is done by the military” (137). This is fanciful: many will remember Vietnam; most will have heard of improvised explosive devices (IEDs); all will know of 9/11. That said, Manwaring is right to say “We can see change in several different ways, ranging from the identity of the enemy to the very nature of conflict” (137).

Manwaring’s very ambitious objectives, his case studies, and his frequent quotations of military philosophers generate a veritable barrage of facts and theories. Information overload will leave many readers struggling to imagine any practical applications of their newfound knowledge. Many of the book’s conclu-

sions will strike military planners, working against the clock to forestall a looming disaster, as erudite but irrelevant. On the other hand, an Israeli civilian strategist pondering the success of Hezbollah in 2006 will find analyses like the following most enlightening.

Perceived moral legitimacy of purpose and behavior was the most important strategic principle operating in the conflict, in that Hezbollah was perceived as the defender of the Lebanese people. Military force is still a key element in determining the final outcome of a conflict, but that force must be supplemented by other dimensions of power, and the organization, equipment, training, and education to deal with the reality of existential asymmetric warfare. The need to isolate enemies politically and physically from external and internal sources of support cannot be ignored, because the political risk of not doing so is greater than the risk of making an effective effort. Human intelligence and culturally effective political-psychological information and propaganda campaigns are vital to success; and unity of effort at all levels (not just a unity of military command) is essential to success. (146)

An Afterword (155–68) by Edwin G. Corr (Univ. of Oklahoma) offers background to Manwaring's research and relates it to the work of others in the field, including himself. Corr also summarizes the theoretical paradigms and counterinsurgency models that Manwaring devised at the behest of the US military. He also identifies the strengths and weaknesses of American interventions in Vietnam, El Salvador, Iraq, and Afghanistan. Finally, he joins John Fishel in suggesting that Manwaring write a brief manual for top US policy and decision makers, titled *The 28 Strategic Articles: A Primer on Counterinsurgency and Other Uncomfortable Wars*.

This concluding volume of Manwaring's trilogy is well written and easily understood; it includes twenty-five pages of notes and a six-page index. The book's strength lies in the geographic/campaign focus of individual chapters, although the overall breadth and intricacy of its subject matter make it difficult to assimilate or to derive conclusions. For this reason, *The Complexity of Modern Asymmetric Warfare* will interest higher level strategic thinkers, rather than soldiers on the ground seeking a quick fix for a sudden, unexpected insurgency.