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Gérard Chaliand, *A Global History of War: From Assyria to the Twenty-First Century*. Trans. Michèle Mangin-Woods and David Woods. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2014. Pp. xiv, 294. ISBN 978-0-520-28360-2.

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This uneven book offers a sweeping overview of the history of warfare—with chapters on the Assyrian empire, the Byzantines, the rise of Islam, Central Asian nomads and their descendants, and the settled empires of Europe and Asia—but little deeper analysis of the critical contexts of politics, strategy, finance, and the relationship of state (or elites) and society. Political sociologist Gérard Chaliand (Nanyang Technological Univ., Singapore) has published widely on questions of war and warfare, often taking a *longue durée* approach.¹ *A Global History of War* is an ambitious work concerning themes its author has explored over the last half-century—specifically, how different cultures and civilizations fought their wars, with an emphasis on tactics, military organization, weapons technology, and leadership. Since the narrative is patently well informed by a wide range of historical literature, it is disappointing that Chaliand forgoes conventional footnotes, apart from a few explicatory ones in cases where he discusses particular books. A too brief bibliography omits many works pertinent to war in its global dimensions.² The French original of the book³ has been revised here to include a few more recent works and its conclusion has been updated to reflect ongoing conflicts in the Middle East.

Chapter 1 is a long, often breathless overview of fundamental changes in the nature of warfare and armed forces from ancient China, India, and Iran (via Egypt and Asia Minor) to Greece, Rome, and early modern and modern Western Europe. Certain topics receive more detailed treatment, including Macedonian combined arms warfare under Philip II and Alexander, the renewed dominance of infantry in late medieval Europe, the early modern military revolution, and the tactical and organizational reforms of Frederick the Great. Strategic considerations are sometimes lost sight of, for example, in the discussion of the operational acumen of Frederick and Napoleon, wherein Chaliand develops his thesis of battlefield victories as a function of leadership and institutional and tactical reforms.

Chaliand's approach lends itself to broad assertions, for instance, in his terse statements about German logistics on the eastern front in World War II: "The success of Blitzkrieg was based on logistics. After Stalingrad, logistical failures compelled Germany to a gradual retreat in good order that would last two years" (41). These claims need to be supported more directly with relevant evidence. The same goes for the contention that Britain and the United States aimed "to remodel the region (Syria-Lebanon and Iran)" in their own and Israel's interests when they invaded Iraq in 2003 (47). Finally, the introductory chapter touches only lightly on the warrior traditions of nonwestern civilizations, before quickly moving toward the traditional framework of western civilization.

Chaliand's perspective on war in world history is geopolitical, stressing the civilizational struggle between settled and expansionist empires. Thus, in the book's chapters on nomad empires of the Eurasian steppe, the author portrays them as marking a long transition from pre-modern to modern history and driving change in the empires of sedentary peoples that emerged after the death of Tamerlane. For him, Scythians, Huns, Mongols,

1. E.g., *Guerrilla Strategies: An Historical Anthropology from the Long March to Afghanistan* (Berkeley: U Calif Pr, 1982); *The Art of War in World History: From Antiquity to the Nuclear Age* (id., 1994); and, with Arnaud Blin, *The History of Terrorism: From Antiquity to al-Qaeda* (id., 2007).

2. Exceptions are Michael Howard, *War in European History* (NY: Oxford U Pr, 1976), and John Keegan, *A History of Warfare* (NY: Knopf, 1993), but conspicuous by their absence are Jeremy Black's studies on war and the world; William H. McNeill, *The Pursuit of Power: Technology, Armed Force, and Society since A.D. 1000* (Chicago: U Chicago Pr, 1982); Geoffrey Parker, *The Military Revolution: Military Innovation and the Rise of the West, 1500-1800*, 2nd ed. (NY: Cambridge U Pr, 1996); and Azar Gat, *War in Human Civilization* (NY: Oxford U Pr, 2006).

3. *Guerres et Civilisations* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2005).

and others shaped Asian and European history over many centuries and forced states from China to Western Europe to adapt to the military challenges posed by the spread of gunpowder weapons and the centralization of power in larger and stronger empires. While admitting that this is not a new argument, Chaliand yet believes that the significance of these nomadic peoples in military history has until recently been missed, at least in part because they left little textual or archaeological evidence, forcing modern scholars to rely heavily on the accounts of their victims, when they are available.

The book is not in fact a *global* history of war. Its geographic focus is deliberately European and Asian: as R. Bin Wong notes in his foreword to the volume, it is an attempt “to understand and communicate a Eurasian based knowledge of war and civilization over more than two and a half millennia” (x). Chaliand himself writes that “the current book aims at describing the main strategic cultures that dominated the Eurasian continent over the course of its history” (xii). But even within those parameters, his choice of subjects is highly selective. The Persian Achaemenid Empire (unlike the Safavids) hardly appears; pre-Ming dynasty China gets little discussion; and Japan and India are almost entirely ignored. Given the book’s Eurasian orientation, it is not surprising that Africa and the Americas (aside from the United States) appear primarily as victims of colonization and imperialism. One begins to realize that the book’s French title—“wars and civilizations”—was truer to its contents.⁴

As for analytical threads, Chaliand consistently stresses the role of strong leaders in systems of extreme centralization of power (Assyria), the delicate interplay of force and diplomacy in grand strategy (Byzantine Empire),⁵ and the power of religion as a disciplining factor for Arab armies and a force for consolidation during the rise of Islam in the decades after the death of Mohammad. The four chapters on nomad empires, emphasizing the Mongols and Tamerlane, illuminate the scale and rapid pace of their expansion, but also the fleeting nature of steppe polities.

Most of Chaliand’s short chapters—often ten pages or less—are delivered in a crisp, matter-of-fact prose style. The rise of Islam gets seven pages; Ming and Qing China together get nine pages, including a bullet-point outline of “some highlights of early imperial Chinese history” (178–80). The long-lived Byzantine Empire, by contrast, receives over forty pages of detailed narrative and deeper analysis. Chaliand quotes extensively here from the *Strategikon* of Emperor Maurice (63–66), which he rates as the greatest theoretical treatise on the art of war in the millennium between Vegetius and Machiavelli.

In the early modern age, Chaliand moves briskly from the Ottoman Empire to the Safavids, Ming and Qing China, Mughal India, and the emergence of a Europeanized Russia to the ascent of Western Europe based on maritime power, trade, and war since the Age of Exploration. Finally, he addresses major changes in the art of war as nineteenth- and twentieth-century civilizations waged it in three thematic chapters: “The Time of Revolutions,” “Guerrilla Warfare,” and “From Total War to Asymmetrical Conflict.” Chaliand allocates half of his six-page treatment of the changing nature of war between great powers in the twentieth century to an excerpt from Charles de Gaulle’s 1932 World War I memoir portraying the horrific effects of the firepower and machines of industrial-age, mechanized warfare (244–47).

In a concluding chapter, Chaliand predicts that the world of the twenty-first century will remain torn by asymmetrical wars and continuing geostrategic conflicts in the Middle East, where the regional interests of Iran and Russia intersect with the global interests of the United States. If the past may be taken as a guide to the future, “dominance in the world of tomorrow will largely depend on the economic and educational dynamism of different regions and countries. Nevertheless, successful strategies will continue to depend on the understanding of the cultural and historical traditions of other societies” (257). Ultimately, Chaliand is warning Americans in particular that sound strategy requires serious interest in other countries and cultures (248–49). As a concise, accessible introduction to the behavior of civilizations at war, *A Global History of War* provides a good point of departure for further, more in-depth study of the issues Gérard Chaliand identifies as part of a bigger picture of geopolitics, culture, and strategy.

4. For a persuasive brief for centering world history on the empires of Asia and Europe see also John Darwin, *After Tamerlane: The Rise and Fall of Global Empires, 1400–2000* (NY: Bloomsbury, 2008).

5. He makes good use of Edward N. Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Byzantine Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard U Pr, 2009).