



## *The Weaponisation of Everything: A Field Guide to the New Way of War*

by Mark Galeotti.

New Haven: Yale Univ. Press. Pp. 235. ISBN 978-0-300-25344-3.

Review by Heather Venable, Air Command and Staff College (heather.pace.venable@gmail.com).

The premise of *The Weaponisation of Everything* is (bear with me a moment) that pictures of adorable kittens, among other things, really matter to warfare. Indeed, such images may actually be contributing greatly to the evolution of war making (10). Since the image of a kitten spreads so quickly via social media, it bespeaks the power to disseminate ideas and information nearly instantaneously. This same functionality may now have become more important to warfare than weapons like tanks and guns. Author Mark Galeotti (Royal United Services Institute) observes that, if “old style conflicts had war stories,” then “modern ones are increasingly wars of stories” (164). This development reflects in part a new reality: large-scale traditional wars have become too costly to be fought frequently (28). But, to return to cute cats, nations increasingly struggling to “impose their will bluntly,” have required “subtler weaponisation” (93), that is, “positive reinforcements” in tune with their targets’ societal preferences and culture work better than negative ones (94).

The extent to which Galeotti truly believes a new way of war is emerging is not clear, perhaps even in his own mind (11). In any case, he aims to provide a holistic description of various “sources of threat,” beyond those identified in the existing literature, such as cyber warfare or lawfare.<sup>1</sup> He seeks to provide more solutions, but never establishes that those reached by previous authors have failed (19), lamenting that “properly addressing responses to the new world of war would take a book in itself” (210). He does urge Western nations to bridge the gap between rhetoric and reality. And he discusses the intriguing example of a Nigerian bank that distinguished itself in a corruption-ridden nation by refusing to compromise its values. Having shown its good faith, the bank has increasingly profited by doing the right thing (219).

Galeotti is a specialist in transnational crime and Russian security affairs. Such a background could enable him to offer timely insights to his readers by shedding light on recent history. Ironically, however, his work shines most in his discussions of historical examples going back centuries. He constantly reminds us that, in Hedley Bull’s bon mot, the “future may be found in the past” (13).

The pace and scale of the changes the author describes may be increasing. The Soviet Union, for example, spent almost a decade trying to convince American citizens that the United States had created AIDS as a “biological weapon” (163). Over those ten years, some 15 percent of Americans came to accept this claim. By contrast, in a mere few days, almost 30 percent of Americans were convinced that Chinese scientists had created COVID-19 (163–64).

Still, Galeotti is not all doom and gloom. In fact, he rarely tells a completely dystopian tale. Instead, he assesses both the downsides *and* upsides of an increasingly messy world. Regarding lawfare, for instance, he maintains that Western nations have unused options to rein in criminals

---

1. See *Wikipedia*, s.v., *Lawfare*.

able to undermine nations' stability (157). He argues, too, that strategic "bullying"—the preferred approach of authoritarian nations—may work in the short term but lacks staying power (188).

Readers familiar with the work of P.W. Singer and Merson Brooking or Sean McFate<sup>2</sup> will find little that is new here. In that regard, the helpful recommendations for further reading that end each chapter suggest that Galeotti envisages readers unfamiliar with the national security topics he explores. The same may be said for the lack of citations or footnotes of any kind. It is precisely the work's concision and lucid prose that make it ideal reading for undergraduates and other non-specialists seeking insights into national security at a time when everything is being weaponized.

---

2. Respectively, *LikeWar: The Weaponization of Social Media* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2018), and *The New Rules of War: Victory in the Age of Durable Disorder* (NY: William Morrow, 2019).