The Defense Acquisition Professional Reading List is intended to enrich the knowledge and understanding of the civilian, military, contractor, and industrial workforce who participate in the entire defense acquisition enterprise. These book recommendations are designed to complement the education and training vital to developing essential competencies and skills of the acquisition workforce. Each issue of the Defense Acquisition Research Journal will include one or more reviews of suggested books, with more available on our Website http://dau.mil/library.

We encourage our readers to submit book reviews they believe should be required reading for the defense acquisition professional. The books themselves should be in print or generally available to a wide audience; address subjects and themes that have broad applicability to defense acquisition professionals; and provide context for the reader, not prescriptive practices. Book reviews should be 450 words or fewer, describe the book and its major ideas, and explain its relevancy to defense acquisition. Please send your reviews to the managing editor, Defense Acquisition Research Journal at DefenseARJ@dau.mil.

Featured Book

How Everything Became War and the Military Became Everything: Tales from the Pentagon

Author: Rosa Brooks
Publisher: Simon and Schuster
Copyright Date: 2016
Hard/Softcover/Digital: Hardcover, 448 pages
ISBN-10: 1476777861
DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/03071847.2017.1418637
Reviewed by: Dr. Trevor Taylor, Professorial Fellow in Defence Management, Royal United Service Institute (RUSI)
Review:
This book’s central concern is the changing nature of violent conflict and the future of law as a moderating and constraining influence. It makes clear that currently law is not keeping up. The author’s background is that of an academic lawyer who has spent considerable time in the developing world in a private capacity, and who also served for a short but meaningful period in the Pentagon during the administration of former U.S. President Barack Obama. Her range of knowledge and experience is brought to bear and apparent through the work. Her exploration of the historical and cultural approaches to the phenomenon of war and of the development of professional militaries helps to put today’s world into a meaningful context.

The book’s analysis recognises the complexity of modern life: it makes clear that the 9/11 attacks were not an “armed attack” in the traditional sense of the use of force by a foreign military, “but if the wilful killing of thousands in an attack originating abroad wasn’t an ‘armed attack,’ what was it?” (p. 250). Similarly, when discussing the responsibility of a government to protect its own population, she observes that “it’s not clear how an intervention intended to protect civilians from predation from their own government could avoid morphing into regime change in the face of continuing attacks on civilians” (p. 247).

When she looks at the United States, she draws attention to the use of the term “war” in political discourse and with specific focus on the phrase “war on terror.” She says that because such a struggle can never be won in a traditional sense, it is used to justify many actions that are not transparent or accountable such as the execution of specific individuals who have not been dealt with through a judicial process. These matters are addressed not just in principle, but also through detailed examples and the author’s personal experience, including a visit to Guantanamo Bay.

Brooks asserts that congressional powers have been eroded by the campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan, and that the executive, under both Presidents George W. Bush and Obama, exceeded the powers granted in the 2001 Authorization for Use of Military Force legislation.

Another topic, referred to in the second part of the book’s title, is about how the U.S. Army has evolved, through its counterinsurgency and stabilisation roles, into a body concerned with more than the threat and use of lethal force. When she asked U.S. soldiers how they had spent their recent deployments, most had “supervised the building of wells, sewers, and bridges, helped resolve community disputes, patrolled territory, worked with the local police, analysed intelligence data, [and] engaged in cyber operations” (pp.
While she is not optimistic about the U.S. Army’s international engagement programmes, the book brings out well how this expansion of the U.S. Army’s agenda has, among other things, sparked resentment in the State Department and the Agency for International Development, which tend to become swamped when the Department of Defense shows up.

The book’s limitations are first, its somewhat cursory treatment of the role of contractors in the support of U.S. operations. Second, some will find its final chapter of recommendations to be strong on exhortation, but weaker on detail and application, with its stress on the need to see war and peace on a continuum rather than as a binary and its assertion that some form of war is the norm not the exception in human history.

However, she is surely right to regret that discussions in Washington about war are dominated by legal issues, and that what is not prohibited is allowed. However, in real life, policy and morality matter, and “you have to argue about right and wrong, good and evil, fear and hope, cruelty and compassion. Few lawyers are good at that sort of conversation, but it’s a conversation we need to have” (p. 363).

Every so often a reader is lucky to encounter a book that ticks a series of boxes: it deals with important issues in international relations and national security governance and management; is clear and easy to read; presents evidence in an authoritative manner; and is both provocative and persuasive. Brooks has written such a work, but which senior member of the current U.S. administration will read it?

Note: This review was first published in the RUSI Journal, 162(6), December 2017. It is reprinted here with the permission of the author, RUSI Journal, and Taylor & Francis Group.