

the lessons were not learned was that the Siberian adventure was felt even at the time to be an insignificant sideshow. House insists that it provides valuable experience as “an example of the problems that can be encountered when military forces are used to achieve limited objectives” (p. 178). With this approach in mind, the book is a valuable contribution, a solid brick placed in an edifice that still needs much work, and one that will definitely serve as a starting point for much future research.

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Margin of Victory: Five Battles that Changed the Face of Modern War. By Douglas Macgregor. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 2016. ISBN 978-1-6125-1996-8. Maps. Charts. Tables. Notes. Select bibliography. Index. Pp. xvi, 268. \$34.95.

Douglas Macgregor’s latest book combines masterful campaign studies and thoughtful analysis of their long-term implications for today’s military establishments. *Margin of Victory* explores five battles that Macgregor argues changed the direction of twentieth-century warfare. In each instance, the author describes how armies that adopted forward-facing, rather than backward-looking, policies to adjust their organization, technology, and human capital to “relentless change in society, technology and world affairs” produced decisive “margins of victory” in future battle.

Macgregor writes from the perspective of a career soldier, combat leader, and military thinker. A West Point graduate and armor officer, Macgregor fought with the 2d Armored Cavalry Squadron during Operation DESERT STORM and served as the Director of the Joint Operations Center during the Kosovo air campaign. He holds a doctorate in international relations from the University of Virginia and is the author of four books on military affairs. Macgregor’s previous calls for significant reform and reorganization of land forces in *Breaking the Phalanx* (1999) and *Transformation under Fire* (2005) influenced the army’s thinking about force structure and war in the twenty-first century.

The over-arching themes of *Margin of Victory* stress military preparedness and adaptability to the changing character of major wars. Macgregor addresses these threads largely through an Uptonian outlook. A post-Civil War military reformer, Emory Upton examined past military policies that contributed to woeful battlefield performance. In *The Military Policy of the United States* (published posthumously in 1904), he called for greater peacetime military preparedness and increased officer professionalism, focused on winning a war against another major power.

Macgregor similarly focuses on “wars of decision”—interstate conflicts fought for vital strategic interests or national survival. The author contends that the United States “squandered its surplus military power on interventions against weak insurgents, criminals and tribal peoples” in post-9/11 “wars of choice” (pp. 188 and 2). Accordingly, American land forces must re-orient their capabilities to win

inevitable wars of decision, which pose the highest danger to U.S. vital interests. This argument resembles the military’s switch in emphasis from counterinsurgency to conventional warfare, and the reforms that produced a post-Vietnam renaissance in officer professionalism.

Macgregor’s battle selections are all from conventional wars. Making good use of his sources, he dissects land combat at Mons (World War I, 1914), Shanghai (World War II, 1938), Belorussia (World War II, 1944), Suez (the Yom Kippur War, 1973), and 73 Easting (Persian Gulf War, 1991). Each chapter examines the belligerents’ prewar strategic thinking, military preparations, and execution during war. While some nations’ policy makers and generals crafted their armies to re-fight the last war, more successful armies anticipated future developments and organized to fight accordingly. The British, Russian, Israeli, and American armies fell into the second category. In each battle, opposing armies tried to adjust to actual combat conditions; those that had intellectually prepared their human capital and re-organized with modern technology adjusted more flexibly and rapidly, providing a decisive margin of victory.

Macgregor’s concluding chapter dwells on the policy implications of his historical analyses. He postulates a new national strategy of “limited liability partnerships.” To provide better unity of purpose and make more effective military expertise available to policy makers, a general staff manned by a cadre of officers with lifetime expertise—especially in cyber warfare and regional issues—would serve the secretary of defense directly. In future operational environments flooded with sensors and precision munitions, land forces will need to be smaller, more mobile, and with greater firepower at the operational and tactical levels. His solution, therefore, involves large-scale restructuring and reorganization of land forces into joint (interservice) task forces formed around combined arms armored task forces that could plug into air and naval forces’ capabilities. Macgregor stresses that success in war requires foresight and the ability to adapt to constant geopolitical and tactical changes.

Margin of Victory is a well-written study of five key battles in the last century. The author successfully links the battles thematically by demonstrating the relationships between strategy, operations, tactics, organization, and technology. Constant honing of land forces’ war-fighting expertise to win wars of decision remains a vital necessity. Macgregor’s disdain for using military force in other lesser forms of conflict is palpable and debatable.

This book is especially well suited for policy analysts, military professionals, war college students, and academics in the national security and military history fields. Whether one agrees with his conclusions or not, Macgregor’s central theme and recommendations are well worth pondering in an era of immense geopolitical change. As the armed forces grapple with future warfare, *Margin of Victory* provides a forward-looking frame for debating changes in military organization, acquisition of new technologies, and investment in human capital.

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