



Margin of Victory: Five Battles that Changed the Face of Modern War

By Douglas Macgregor. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2016. ISBN 978-1-61251-996-8. Photographs. Maps. Appendix. Pp. xiii, 224. \$29.50.

Douglas Macgregor's latest work, *Margin of Victory*, picks up where his most noticeable works, *Breaking the Phalanx* and *Transformation Under Fire*, leave off. Macgregor's position in *Margin of Victory* revolves around the idea that wars are decided long before armies are put to the field, and that in order to win future conflict, political and military leaders must think clearly and without bias about who future enemies will be, the environment in which those enemies will be fought, and how a nation will fight those enemies.

Macgregor argues that institutional conservatism, hubris, and diluted thinking have derailed many military's ability to make headway in conflict. Specific to the American military, Macgregor posits that the U.S. Army's ability to fight and win large-scale campaigns against sophisticated peer competitors has atrophied as a result of becoming overly committed in the Middle East. Portending future conflict, Macgregor offers, "If the U.S. Army cannot rapidly respond in a crisis with superior lethality to a Russian military buildup, the loss of the Baltic littoral or western Ukraine to Russian armored forces would be difficult if not impossible to reverse." As such, he offers that the Army is wholly unprepared for future conflict and that radical reform in organization, doctrine, and manning is required to increase America's margin of victory.

Macgregor uses five case studies from modern history to examine his

proposition—World War I's Battle of Mons; the Second Sino-Japanese War's Battle of Shanghai; the destruction of Germany's Army Group Center on the Eastern Front during World War II; and the Israeli counterattack across the Suez Canal during the 1973 Arab-Israeli War. Macgregor closes the case studies with a personal narrative from the Persian Gulf War's Battle of 73 Easting, in which he served with the 2d Armored Cavalry Regiment. The result of Macgregor's analysis is that nations that fail to anticipate future threat environments and adjust their forces accordingly often come out of the wrong side of victory.

Moreover, Macgregor uses each battle to illustrate the importance of dialogue between leaders in ensuring that what is being asked of the military is truly capable of being accomplished. To illustrate his point, Macgregor states that Germany's political leadership failed to understand that the *Wehrmacht* was "designed from its inception for short, decisive campaigns in central and western Europe" and "was incapable of waging war over hundreds of thousands of square miles in a bitter, unforgiving environment."

Macgregor closes by stating that the changes in technology and operating environments mandate military reform. He suggests the current operating environment rewards dispersed, mobile warfare, and as such, elevates tactical dispersion to the operational level of war. He adds that the Army must restructure

its ground forces to fight and win in that environment. To do so, U.S. ground forces must be capable of closing with the enemy while surviving contact. Additionally, they must be able to fight without reinforcement, as stand-alone formations that are capable of plugging in to the Joint Force. Bigger picture, he suggests that the U.S. military must eliminate single-service commands and develop integrated, joint headquarters.

Margin of Victory is written in the same tenor as Macgregor's previous work—full of provocative thoughts and, in some instances, inflammatory statements. Most notably, Macgregor argues that the U.S. Marine Corps is redundant and needs to be restructured or eliminated. Similarly, he suggests the U.S. military is bloated with light infantry and that they lack the mobility, firepower, and protection to maintain relevance on future battlefields.

In sum, *Margin of Victory* provides a fresh look at a problem that has been vexing Macgregor for years—that of military reform. Macgregor selectively picks examples from history to support his argument for reforming the U.S. military. The book approaches the subject of reform from a less technical aspect than his previous books on the subject, and instead applies the lens of history to the problem.

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