

Shadows on the Wall: Deterrence and Disarmament

By Keith B. Payne

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Reviewed by John Mark Mattox

Despite pretensions to the contrary, the academic mind rarely makes room for discussions of first principles—those basic assumptions taught in first-semester undergraduate classes that undergird any given discipline. Instead, the traditional path for the aspiring academic is to obtain a terminal degree, carve out an esoteric research niche, and demonstrate talent by identifying the nuances of the niche. This approach, which the academy has taken ever since there was such a thing as a “terminal degree,” is not without merit. The academy does aim to create new knowledge, some of which turns out to be useful. On the other hand, it also breeds cottage industries churning out new, nuanced knowledge for new, nuanced knowledge’s (and tenure’s) sake in a way that can obscure first principles. As a result, once in a while, someone needs to come in with a chain

saw and lop off all the undergrowth that conceals the forest floor. It is that much-needed task that Keith Payne undertakes in *Shadows on the Wall* in the long-established cottage industries surrounding nuclear deterrence and disarmament.

Instead of examining the merits or demerits of myriad policy proposals recycled over decades, Payne returns to first principles—not only to the genesis of the nuclear age but also to the foundations of the international system. He identifies three divergent philosophical paths—each with its own a priori assumptions—from which flow deterrence theories and eventually deterrence policies. While all paths acknowledge the anarchic state of the international system, each contemplates different reactions to that anarchy vis-à-vis nuclear weapons: one idealistic, holding that, despite systemic anarchy, national interests can be subordinated in such a way that all parties would deem nuclear weapons unnecessary; one realistic, holding that, while flawed human nature underlies all expressions of national interest, nuclear deterrence can be achieved relatively easily; and a second brand of realist that regards nuclear deterrence as difficult to achieve as it is necessary. Payne argues that to the extent policy discussions lose sight of these bedrock assumptions, those who disagree on policy directions cannot understand why they and their interlocutors cannot agree or make concessions that would alter landscapes dictated by *Weltanschauung*. In short, the answer to “Why can’t you see nuclear policy my way?” must essentially be “Because my foundational views about human nature and the system of nations in which it operates is fundamentally different.”

This confusion is compounded by the pseudo-philosophy of the transactional “deal-making” approach to international relations, which ignores the reality that some who pull the levers of power in the world’s different polities simply see the world differently. Thus, what may seem obvious from the perspective of the nation that introduced the world to nuclear weaponry may not be so obvious from other vantage points—especially ones

that might be interested in reordering the world in terms of a socialism “with Chinese characteristics” or another that wants to introduce weapons based on “new physical principles.” The problem is further complicated when blind tribal commitment to pro forma political party positions du jour obscures the reality that questions such because how or whether to deploy nuclear weapons rests on assumptions about human nature that have almost nothing to do with contemporary politics. Hence, Payne suggests that undue focus on these distractions renders almost impossible a proper focus on the basic propositions he reasserts.

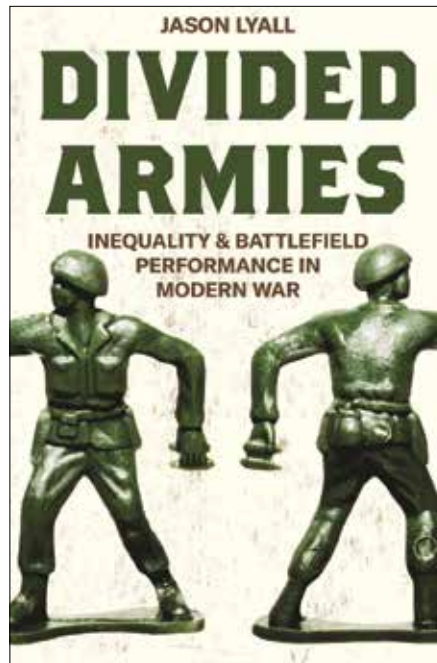
While Payne’s argument constitutes a good reminder for those who wish to engage in serious policy discourse, his focus is on nuclear weapons. Not unlike Alfred North Whitehead’s famous observation that “The safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato,” Payne argues compellingly that 75 years of nuclear policy debates are really footnotes to the philosophical views set out by some of the greatest minds of the mid-20th century and the purveyors of nuclear policy change, but nothing is really new.

However, Payne’s purpose is not to hinge a critique on this point. Rather, it is to demonstrate that incommensurability within positions on nuclear policy stems not from the personalities or parties in power at any given time but from the most fundamental divergences: “Can one entertain serious idealistic assumptions leading to the disarmament of the international system, or not?” “If one cannot, and assuming that nuclear deterrence is preferable to nuclear war, is deterrence relatively easy or difficult to achieve?” These questions are not trivial, and if joint force planners miss this point, they will be missing *the* point. One might be tempted to respond to Payne by stating, “Yes, but deterrence and disarmament are more complicated than that.” However, Payne does not suggest that there are no details to work out or compromises to be made. He simply reminds us not to miss the forest for the trees.

Payne supplements his discussion of first principles with useful tables comparing policies and their outcomes based on the fundamental positions outlined. These comparisons will aid the novice and the expert alike and reveal that deterrence discourse is not necessarily as burdened with nuance as some cottage industrialists assumed. The clarity of this comparative work goes hand in hand with the dutifully researched and well-sourced argumentation. Payne's sweeping command of the full constellation of political science and deterrence theory literature makes him an excellent guide through the undergrowth-cluttered forest, beyond which one must see in order to home in on essential principle.

Shadows on the Wall provides the reader with a rare occurrence—a clear view of the fundamental principles that form the basis of deterrence discourse. Payne does the entire field a service by acknowledging that there is a lot of undergrowth to be removed if one is to understand the essence of what might otherwise seem to be a bewildering array of nuanced policy choices. Joint force policymakers, planners, and national security practitioners would be wise to take up this book and absorb its first principles before any other that claims to expand on the merits or demerits of nuclear deterrence and disarmament policy. JFQ

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Divided Armies: Inequality and Battlefield Performance in Modern War

By Jason Lyall
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Reviewed by Larry D. Miller

Why armies win wars or suffer battlefield defeats has long piqued the curiosity and interest of military historians, war planners, and strategists alike. Theorists commonly attribute military effectiveness (or not) to force ratios, firepower, technological superiority, material/resourcing advantages, or exceptional leadership (possibly aided by surprise or dumb luck). Jason Lyall, however, advances a groundbreaking analysis for understanding who wins, who loses, and why. In the process, he suggests equality as a key element in better designing military forces positioned for battlefield success.

His argument is that political communities necessarily and invariably import existing ethnic, racial, religious, and/or societal hierarchies into military organizations—organizations that are political

extensions of the state poised to inflict violence. Preexisting inequalities create friction, promote division, diminish organizational cohesion, and undercut battlefield performance to varying degrees. *Military inequality*, a measurable construct introduced by Lyall, is a function of identity as it relates to group membership and relational standing within the political community weighted by inclusion, discrimination, or repression. This concept includes all group members who enjoy full standing, those who are marginalized, those who suffer sanctioned discrimination, and those who experience collective repression. Lyall's extensive, detailed, and well-crafted book effectively demonstrates the validity of his hypothesis and how high levels of military inequality negatively affects battlefield performance. Armies rife with politically sanctioned inequalities, therefore, are flawed by their very design.

The evidence Lyall presents is original and compelling. The opening chapter overviews the genesis of his thinking while detailing essential concepts, terms, and definitions. The balance of the book, eight chapters and two appendices, is organized under three major headings: "Theory and Initial Evidence," "Historic Battlefield Evidence, and "Extensions and Conclusions." The chapters present detailed historiography, quantitative analyses of data drawn from Project Mars, and case studies purposefully selected to challenge and assess the strength of his argument from various angles. Project Mars, the culmination of a 7-year research effort, documents direct force-on-force conflicts between 1800 and 2011. Building the Project Mars database required the support and expertise of 134 coders tracking primary documents and secondary sources across 21 languages. The goal was to construct a global military database documenting armed conflicts in the modern era. Containing 825 observations of belligerence, the database complements, and will possibly supersede, portions of the Correlates of War Project database.

Throughout the book, Lyall employs statistical analyses and historiography—a potent combination of quantitative and