The Future of War: A History
Lawrence Freedman (Public Affairs, 2017), 227 pp., notes, bibliography, index.

Reviewed by Jason U. Manosevitz

Analysis of forces and operations is the bedrock of military analysis. How policymakers, military officials, and strategists think about war underpins how they organize and apply forces and operations. This also includes how militaries adopt and adapt new technologies and tactics to achieve victory. In his new book *The Future of War: A History,* Lawrence Freedman traces the thinking about warfare from the Western perspective, and although he touches on today's new military technology and concerns about cyber warfare, his work is not about what future conflicts will look like. Rather, he warns policymakers to be wary of analysts and strategists who promise a fast track to victory though new technologies and tactics. He covers military theories about war among the major powers, humanitarian intervention and civil war, and counterterrorism.

As one might infer from the title, *The Future of War: A History* offers a short course on macro changes in thinking about war in the United States and the United Kingdom over the past 150 years. Along the way, Freedman harshly critiques American political science's approach to studying war and argues against efforts to make predictions about war. A major flaw of the work is Freedman's lack of attention to how intelligence fits into the thinking about warfare.

Freedman is an accomplished military historian. He has published works on war and strategy for more than 30 years. As Emeritus Professor of War Studies at King's College London, Freedman won accolades in 2013 for *Strategy: A History* (Oxford University Press), which comprehensively reviewed business, military, and political strategy and plumbed the depths of thinking about what strategy is and how it is executed. For *The Future of War: A History*, he takes a historian's approach to how thinking about war and its execution has evolved, drawing on a wide range of sources, including fictional works by H.G Wells and in movies.

Freedman's goal is to examine how different writers have thought about war during the times in which they lived. He aims to "explore the prevailing understanding about the causes of war and their likely conduct and course." He focuses primarily on the United States and the United Kingdom because he knows these states best and because they "have been at the top of the international hierarchy for some time." (xix) As such, he provides no insight into how Soviet, Asian, or African warfighters or policymakers have reflected upon war, let alone non-state actors such as ISIS, which is an invitation for other scholars to fill the void.

Freedman argues there is no dominant model for future war. In his view, from about the middle of the 19th century to the end of the Cold War, theories of war rested on an idealized model of decisive battles. Surprise and overwhelming force were the hallmarks of this thinking and drove a focus on first-strike planning and operations that would deliver a knock-out punch to the enemy. The adoption of technologies and tactics, such as improvements in guns, armored vehicles, aircraft, and missiles, and the targeting of civilian populations—in addition to warfighters—changed warfare's character, but not theories of war. Freedman naturally starts with classic military theorists, such as Clausewitz and Jomini, and also weaves in work by futurists of the time. The development and prospective use of nuclear weapons fits within this first-strike, overwhelming force model, and Freedman points out that these weapons had the greatest effect on thinking about war because they had a chilling effect on the willingness of major powers to consider direct war with each other.

Western states, particularly the United States, stumbled into a range of conflicts following the Cold War. Freedman argues theories about military intervention—humanitarian, peacekeeping, nation-building, and counterterrorism—were underdeveloped, creating difficulties for pursuing goals in such conflicts. US intervention in Vietnam shows both Freedman's point about major

powers' being cautious about direct confrontation and the difficulties of intervention, despite being in the middle of the Cold War. Oddly, Freedman does not focus much on US strategic thinking about counterinsurgency warfare, such as that of retired US Army general David Petraeus or oft-published counterinsurgency expert David Kilcullen.[a] Freedman spends some time reviewing how books and movies on the US experience in Vietnam influenced American thinking of engaging in such conflicts, but he does not explain how this led to humanitarian interventions or nation-building ventures.

Freedman harshly criticizes US political science approaches to studying war. He takes to task the Correlates of War project and the democratic peace theory, focusing on the flaws in quantifying war based on battle deaths and applying quantitative methods to assess the potential for war. Part of Freedman's issue with coding conflicts is that disaggregating conflict into discrete series of dyads obscures the intertwined nature conflicts. For example, as a historian, Freedman sees Iraq's conflicts with Iran, Kuwait, the United States, and ISIS as a stream of interconnected conflicts, not individual wars.

a. See J. R. Seeger, "Tracking the History of a Counterinsurgency Expert: Four Books by David Kilcullen" in *Studies in Intelligence* 61, No. 2 (June 2017). Available at https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/csi-studies/studies/vol-61-no-2/ci-expert-kilcullen.html

It is surprising that Freedman does not touch on the role of intelligence in his review of thinking on war. The United States's adoption of a permanent intelligence apparatus following World War II to guard against surprise attack is a direct reflection of how US policymakers thought about war at the time. Moreover, the focus on surprise attacks, decisive battles, and military technological advances drove US and Soviet intelligence services to steal one another's military secrets, conduct covert operations, and undertake efforts to assess the potential and viability for surprise attacks. Similarly, the use of intelligence services to arm local allies in civil wars, assess developments in humanitarian conflicts, and combat terrorists all fed into the thinking about these kinds of conflicts.

Freedman laces *The Future of War* with side commentary against making predictions about war. He is absolutely right to warn that we should be wary of those who advocate technological advances or new tactics as quick, clean, "silver bullets" to military victory. But Freedman seems to confuse advocacy with analytic prediction. Cyber warfare, the use of drones, and other military advances certainly add new aspects to war, and we need to think through whether or how these change war and how we should think about war. Rather than throw prediction out the window as Freedman suggests, we need to explore predictive assessments about war to gain greater insight.

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