

BOOK REVIEW:

The culture of war

by Martin van Creveld

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A controversial but respected scholar, Martin van Creveld is the author of 17 books on military history and strategy of which *Supplying War: Logistics from Wallenstein to Patton* (1977), *Command in War* (1985), *The Sword and the Olive* (1998) and *The Rise and Decline of the State* (1999) are among the best known.

Van Creveld's 1991 book *The Transformation of War* was of particular significance. In this treatise of military theory, van Creveld developed what he calls the non-trinitarian theory of warfare, which he juxtaposes to the famous work by Clausewitz. Clausewitz's trinitarian model of war (a term of van Creveld's) distinguishes between the affairs of the population, the army, and the government. Van Creveld criticized this philosophy as too narrow and state-focused, thus inapplicable to the study of those conflicts involving one or more non-state actors.

In *The Culture of War* van Creveld argues that there is much more to war than just soldiers killing one another for whatever reason. War has always been a topic of deep intrigue. Fighting itself can be a source of great, perhaps even the greatest, joy; out of this joy and fascination an entire culture has grown "from the war paint of tribal warriors to today's tiger suits, from Julius Caesar's red cloak to Douglas MacArthur's pipe, from the decorative shields of ancient Greece to today's nose art, and from the invention of chess around 600 A.D. to the most modern combat simulators. The culture of war has had its own traditions, laws and customs, rituals, ceremonies,

music, art, literature, and monuments since the beginning of civilization."

Throughout the ages, the culture of war has usually been highly esteemed. But today's advanced countries tend either to mock it or to denounce it as militaristic. This provocative book sets out to show how wrongheaded, and even dangerous, such attitudes are. Van Creveld argues that men and women, contrary to the hopes of some, are just as fascinated by war today as they have been in the past. A military that has lost touch with the culture of war is doomed not merely to defeat but to disintegration.

Van Creveld has lectured or taught at many strategic institutes in the Western world and holds degrees from the London School of Economics and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. *The Culture of War* includes several images throughout the text, comprehensive notes and a detailed index.

As China and Russia once again become major national security concerns for the West, *The Culture of War* remains a relevant treatise – particularly regarding a clash of cultures between West and East. Authoritative and riveting, this is a major work by one of the world's greatest and most insightful military historians on the evolution of the culture of war over the ages and the importance of that culture to the modern political scientist, strategist and soldier alike.

Marcus Fielding