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Social Sciences

Beating Goliath: Why Insurgencies Win
Jeffrey Record
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Should the American foreign policy establishment be surprised to find the nation bogged down in a stubborn war in Iraq, despite the United States' overwhelming military superiority? No, says Record, who in this pull-no-punches account tells why victory against Iraqi insurgents is doubtful. The author teaches strategy at the U.S. Air Force's Air War College in Montgomery, Alabama, and has written six books, including *Dark Victory: America's Second War Against Iraq* and *Making War, Thinking History: Munich, Vietnam, and Presidential Uses of Force from Korea to Kosovo*. Record was an adviser in Vietnam and earned his doctorate from Johns Hopkins University. He also served as legislative assistant for national security affairs to senators Sam Nunn and Lloyd Bentsen.

Record presents a cogent investigation of how small insurgencies can defeat major powers when they demonstrate a stronger political will to win, pursue effective strategies appropriate to non-conventional wars, and receive financial and/or military assistance from other countries. America's defeat of the British in the Revolutionary War because France provided both types of support substantiates this. Additionally, American troops fought a successful guerilla war to which the British did not respond effectively.

Unfortunately, Presidents Johnson and Nixon, the military, and the Departments of State and Defense forgot the Revolutionary War lessons during the Vietnam War. Here the communists, bolstered by huge amounts of aid from the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China fought a long, successful war against the United States, whose high tech bombings of North Vietnam had little impact on this largely agricultural society. In addition, the communists had a much greater will to win because its freedom—not America's—was at stake.

In Iraq, the United States faces the daunting challenges of creating a viable Iraqi government and maintaining public and congressional support of the war. Confidence in the Bush administration was jarred by the revelation that Hussein's weapons of mass destruction

and his alleged collaboration with al Qaeda were “figments of the administration’s imagination.” Time is running out, notes the author, as opportunities for creating a stable, insurgent-free Iraq continue to fade. The Iraqi War has become the latest insurgency, following those in Vietnam, Lebanon, Somalia, Bosnia, and Kosovo, to trap the United States in a no-win situation. As a possible solution, Record suggests that America avoid protracted wars by not going “on crusades to promote overseas expansion of abstract American political values.” This reflective critique, illuminated by historical insight, offers much for general readers, specialists, and policy makers to consider.

Karl Helicher