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Jeffrey Grey

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The decades between 1945 and the Gulf War of 1991 saw the British Army engaged almost continuously in wars or warlike operations to an extent matched by few other Western armies. Colin McInnes uses this wide-ranging and intense operational experience in order to demonstrate the development in the British 'way in warfare' since the Second World War. To do this, he discusses the Army's role in broader British defence policy, its experience of conventional operations in Korea and the Gulf and its planning for war in a NATO context, and the involvement in counter-insurgency in both the empire and Northern Ireland.

The focus of the book is largely at the operational level, as the author pursues his aim of identifying the way in which the British Army has prepared for and fought its wars. The core of the book, and the most satisfying section, deals with developments in thinking about conventional mid-intensity conflict. McInnes argues that the British Army emerged from the Second World War lacking a formal doctrine for war, and with an excessive concentration on attritional, set-piece battles: the Army's 'comfort zone' was at the tactical level. The peculiar circumstances of the Korean War, and the hurried and improvised nature of Britain's initial force contributions, seemed to confirm many of the established traits. Between Korea and the Gulf War, however, the British Army gradually evolved a more sophisticated approach to the problems of fighting conventional conflicts, and McInnes discusses at some length the part played in this by General Sir Nigel Bagnall while commanding I British Corps in Germany in the early 1980s.

The last part of the book, dealing with counter-insurgency, is solid and thorough but will offer less to the informed student of the subject because so much has been written on it lately, not least by the American historian Thomas Mockaitis. It is also too selective in its case studies - the comparison between the Emergencies in Malaya and Kenya is an obvious one in some respects, but discussion of the development in counter-insurgency techniques might have been better served by comparing the Malayan Emergency with Confrontation, fought in the same theatre in the following decade. The three page conclusion is little more than a summary, and disappoints.

McInnes' book is a useful addition to the literature, not only for what it tells us about the modernization and gradual professionalization of the British Army but for what it suggests about the development of Western armies generally in the postwar period. The US Army devoted itself to the intense cultivation of operational level thinking after the Vietnam War, with fruitful consequences during Desert Storm. Smaller, British-pattern armies, such as those of Canada and Australia, have likewise sought to develop thinking about doctrine and 'war fighting', although the resource constraints imposed on small organizations have limited this to some extent. What this book suggests, above all, is the need for an integrated study of the development of the operational level of war and the diversification in doctrine in Western armies over the last half century. J.F.C. Fuller noted in 1926 that doctrine forms 'the central idea of an army,' and McInnes demonstrates that we still know too little about it.

Jeffrey Grey
University College, Australian Defence Force Academy