

## **Peters, Ralph. Fighting for the Future: Will America Triumph? Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1999.**

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**Peters, Ralph. *Fighting for the Future: Will America Triumph?* Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1999.**

Just as NATO's OPERATION ALLIED FORCE in Kosovo intensified, a new book hit the shelves examining how to win the battles of the twenty-first century. *Fighting for the Future* is a collection of essays previously published in various military science journals describing the nature of future warfare and the new types of adversaries the United States is likely to face. Writing from first-hand experience as an officer in the US Army, Ralph Peters graphically illustrates that, while magnificently trained to defeat opponents on a conventional battlefield, US forces are ill-prepared to face a new class of enemies who do not play by the time-honored rules of warfare.

*Fighting for the Future* was not written for an academic audience. Rather, Peters targets his "effort on a broad front" to policy makers and the general public. Perhaps as a consequence, the book contains no citations or references. Despite the book's topical relevance, Peters' insights and conclusions are hardly as original and controversial as he himself would have readers believe. Although a skilled writer, trite epigrams and pointless musings such as "we are the giant afraid of mice," "the purpose of the military is to kill" or "revolutions happen, above all, in the minds of men" spoil the utility of Peters' argument. While deeply unsatisfactory from the standpoint of academic rigor and innovative scholarship, Peters effectively presents likely scenarios for the nature of future warfare and raises legitimate questions about American political, military, strategic and moral readiness for the next century. However, when discussing the processes of globalization, the effects of economic and cultural dependencies, and the politics of identity, Peters exceeds the generalizability of his purely anecdotal evidence.

Peters' main argument is that in the future we will see fewer classic wars. Prepared to fight only "mirror images of ourselves," he explains, "we face constituencies of the damned, of the hopeless, from whose midst arise warrior classes for whom peace is the least rewarding human condition." (p. 10) The high-tech results of the much heralded revolution in military affairs, Peters claims, do not effectively address the complex threats posed by today's many low-tech adversaries. Instead of relying on evermore brilliant warfighting machines, battling enemies who do not play by the rules will require a thorough understanding of who these enemies are.

Peters suggests the new warriors come in five basic classes: members of the largely underskilled underclass who have no stake in peace; young males deprived of education and orientation for whom the warrior milieu provides a powerful behavioral framework; opportunists who expect some form of personal gain from the conflict; patriots and "true believers" who fight out of strong ethnic, national or religious convictions; and disillusioned ex-soldiers who either could not function in a traditional military environment or who emerged from a dissolving military establishment.

Understanding the motivations of these warriors, Peters argues, are prerequisites for defeating them. Deploying troops to enforce and maintain peace deals that fail to address these warriors offer a poor rationale for military intervention. What to do? How to fight

the future battles? Peters' answer: First, separate the warriors from the population. Next, disconnect those warriors who are not fully committed to the cause and neutralize them (some will respond to enticements and threats, others will abandon their cause for fear of their lives). Once the active warrior population is reduced to its fanatical inner circle, relentless military engagement can bring victory.

One of our main dilemmas in fighting the wars of the future - and here Peters presents his perhaps most controversial argument - is distinguishing just from unjust conduct. If we are to succeed on the battlefields of the future, we are to change our notions of just behavior. We must be prepared, so Peters argues, to permit the use of deadly force against "child warriors" carrying guns and grenades, condone the assassination of political or military leaders responsible for atrocities and violence and resist our moral inclination to help the disadvantaged and dispossessed and "learn to watch others die with equanimity." (p. 132)

While America will continue to flourish, Peters predicts, life for most of the world will remain "nasty, brutish, and short." We, he asserts, live in an age of multiple truths characterized by both a "clash of civilizations" as well as increasing cooperation among civilizations. Although there is no global culture yet, information technology has made American pop culture "increasingly accessible and wickedly appealing" - "Hollywood goes where Harvard never penetrated . . ." (p. 137) American television, movie and music "heroes" have permeated rogue warrior cultures. Even though "we rule the skies and seas . . . we have not learned to understand, much less rule, minds and hearts and souls." (p.198) And, Peters asserts, "it is a purpose of all successful civilizations to avoid understanding competitors, since the greatest ethical and political freedom of action historically has been obtained by denying the Other a valid identity." (p. 50) Remorse of a Realist? Hardly. Peters elaborates further: "the poor inmates of the un-Westernizable world have become exotic pets in the minds of those who have appointed themselves as our cultural conscience." (p. 50)

Having a conscience explains our current difficulty in dealing with warriors. Peters shows little compassion for those who sympathize - perhaps because they understand - with the Other, accusing them of responding to "emotional needs, heightened by the nonsense of postcolonial guilt." (p. 132) Thus, understanding, for Peters, becomes self-serving. It has value so long as it enhances our ability to exploit, marginalize and ultimately defeat those who do not want to play by our rules.

"Those who fall by the wayside in global competition," Peters maintains, "will have themselves, and their ancestors to blame." (p. 182) However, since we, by exporting Western pop culture, created much of this desire, are we not also accountable for its effects? We gladly claim the profits but do not want to share responsibility for costs or causes. While the current US foreign policy of engagement and enlargement envisions strengthening US national security through global cooperation, Peters, in the best Realist tradition, advocates preponderance by defeat. His argument sends a paradoxical message: to understand the dispossessed, yet to ignore and belittle their frustration, anger and in many instances hatred.

"Will America triumph?" Peters asks in the subtitle of his book. The future, he asserts, "will never be fully predictable, but globalization means the imposition of uniform rules by the most powerful actors." (p. 170) Fulfilling leadership responsibilities as the sole remaining superpower turns into a quest for cementing American superiority in the twenty-first century. Without the United States, Peters concludes, "the twentieth century would have experienced the triumph of evil. With America, the twenty-first century might see the triumph of good . . . We will be in a position to bring the world lasting peace. But to do so, we must say good-bye to the crippling notions that all cultures, no matter how odious, enjoy equivalent validity . . ." (p. 200) Peters leaves readers with a daunting choice: "Shall we dominate the earth for the good of humankind? Or will we risk the enslavement of our country and our civilization?" (p. 210)

The Cold War was a black-and-white contest. The twenty-first century will see different conflicts. We face unprecedented challenges, but we may also explore unparalleled opportunities. Instead of pitting our civilization against other civilizations, why not aim our scientific and technological advances, our social progress and political ideas at building commonalities rather than destroying difference? Instead of battling the symptoms, i.e., the rogue warriors, of future conflicts, why not target their causes? Instead of fighting for a future where only America triumphs, why not focus on building a peaceful century that will celebrate democratic values, cultural diversity and joint efforts to combat evermore complex global problems?

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