

New York: Free Press, 2011

375 pages

\$30.00

Conquered into Liberty: Two Centuries of Battles Along the Great Warpath that Made the American Way of War

by Eliot A. Cohen

Reviewed by Walter Nugent, Professor Emeritus of History, University of Notre Dame, and author of *Habits of Empire: A History of American Expansion*

This engaging new book by Eliot A. Cohen recounts and reflects on the imperial clashes for control of eastern North America along the “Great Warpath,” the corridor between Albany and Montreal. It was the scene of numerous battles throughout the colonial period, the Revolutionary War, and the War of 1812. Cohen takes us up and down the Great Warpath with often fast-moving prose—the book is a page-turner especially when it describes battles—and its sources, both primary and secondary, omit very few items and provide a solid foundation. Though light on Canadian sources and perspectives, the author has made good use of archives particularly in London and New England.

A “Prologue” colorfully describes the Great Warpath. Ten chapters then retell key battles from 1690 to 1814 and beyond. Frequently the author points out how these battles shaped “the American way of war.” Cohen has walked (or sailed or climbed) most of the places he writes about, as did the great historian, Francis Parkman, and like Parkman, Cohen fills the mind’s eye with vivid landscape. To this reviewer, the descriptions of the battles and the analyses of strategy and tactics are the most engaging parts of the book; the “lessons” are thoughtful but sometimes arguable.

First comes a raid on Schenectady in February 1690 by about two hundred French and Indians from Montreal, “killing most of the inhabitants, carrying off others.” The raid itself occupies just a couple of pages, but it is an entrée to a lucid discussion of French, English, and Indian strategy and tactics of the late 17th and early 18th centuries. Here, Cohen draws his first lesson: “Frontenac [governor of New France] had, unwittingly, given birth to an enduring American notion about war. His Anglo-American opponents had concluded that war was not a game of political advantage and statecraft, to be suspended from time to time by diplomacy and treaties but rather, a brutal struggle, to be resolved by complete, crushing, and definitive victory.” Ulysses S. Grant probably did more than Frontenac to instill this, but it is an intriguing connection.

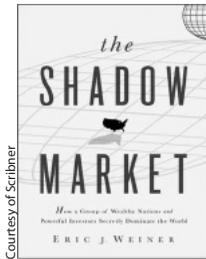
Subsequent chapters follow this pattern—a colorful lead-in event, a description of a battle, analysis of the tactics and strategies, and lasting lessons. After the Schenectady chapter come three on engagements during the Seven Years (French and Indian) War: Montcalm’s capture of Fort William Henry at the southern tip of Lake George in 1757, meticulously described; then “The Battle on Snowshoes, 1758,” in which Robert Rogers of his eponymous Raiders

suffered “a debacle” on the western shore of Lake George; and thirdly, the British failure in July 1758 to push the outnumbered French out of Fort Carillon (Ticonderoga), because of a superior siege defense and poor English intelligence. From this, Cohen writes, Americans formed a low opinion of British generalship (fortified by Braddock’s disaster of 1755 in the west), giving the colonials the courage to take on the British in 1775. “British condescension [toward colonial officers] and . . . British brutality” [toward American ranks] also inspired the soon-to-be rebels.

Four chapters on Revolutionary War events along the Great Warpath come next. “St. Johns, 1775” begins with Benjamin Franklin’s winter trek to Montreal in early 1776 to try to get Canada to join the American cause. Nothing doing; the Quebec Act of 1774 infuriated Protestant New England and comforted Catholic Canada, and the American invasions of summer 1775 up the Great Warpath and up the Kennebec under Benedict Arnold both failed. The long-term effect: “In years to come, Americans in many other places—from Mexico to the Philippines, Vietnam to Iraq—would behave similarly, waging wars for liberty and interest, conquering others into freedom, and as in Canada, with mixed motives and uncertain outcomes.” “Valcour Island, 1776” describes the campaign on Lake Champlain, when American forces under Benedict Arnold took heavy losses but (citing Alfred Thayer Mahan here) forestalled British capture of Ticonderoga. Cohen sees Arnold as “the most disturbing figure in American military history, perhaps because he is one of the most extraordinary.” He greatly admires Arnold’s generalship and has much empathy—not sympathy—for his defection. To Cohen, the Americans “who doffed blue for gray uniforms” in 1861 were much worse traitors. Events of 1777 are next, opening with a skirmish leading to Burgoyne’s capture of Ticonderoga in July 1777, Arnold’s halting of Barry St. Leger at Fort Stanwix, and the huge win at Saratoga, “a turning point in the Revolution” for the usual reasons. Here Cohen contrasts General Arthur St. Clair, the regular officer, with Colonel Seth Warner, the citizen soldier, followed by reflections on how the militia tradition endured “until, in the late twentieth century, the professional soldiers finally triumphed.” The fourth chapter on Revolutionary War events provides a quick tour of 1778-1783, when the Great Warpath was no longer so central. Cohen jumps ahead to the naval battle off Plattsburgh in September 1814; “decisive” because thereafter the British “gave up on the idea of seizing American territory.” The last full chapter traces American-Canadian relations and cross-border incidents up to the 1871 Treaty of Washington, some but not all of them along the Great Warpath.

A few pages of “Legacies” conclude the book, asserting that “the way of war that emerged along the Warpath shaped the manner in which America fought the conflict that brought her to global preeminence,” i.e., World War II. This is a rather large claim. Like anything else, traditions come and go, change and fade, are kept or discarded as contingencies require. Has there been an “American way of war” and do we still have it, given the ability of nineteen maniacs with cheap box cutters to destroy billion-dollar buildings and thousands of lives?

Cohen does not conclusively prove that we do, or that the Great Warpath produced it. But he provokes much thought and in the process, greatly entertains.



New York: Scribner,
2010

304 pages

\$26.00

The Shadow Market: How a Group of Wealthy Nations and Powerful Investors Secretly Dominate the World

by Eric J. Weiner

Reviewed by Michael J. Fratantuono, Associate Professor, Department of International Studies, Department of Business & Management, Dickinson College

Since the mid-1990s, the global system has been characterized by rising interdependence and a reconfiguration of power among a wide range of state and nonstate actors. Many analysts have commented on these developments. In this highly-readable but somewhat foreboding account, financial journalist Eric J. Weiner contributes to that general line of discussion. He defines the shadow market as “a collection of unaffiliated, extremely wealthy nations and investors that effectively run the international economy through their prodigious holdings . . . of financial instruments, which they keep in unregulated investment vehicles such as hedge funds, private equity funds, and government-run sovereign wealth funds, as well as in vast government-owned companies.” His label suggests that shadow market transactions have been conducted absent the bright light of public scrutiny.

Mr. Weiner's central argument is that over the past 15 years, China and the oil exporting countries have amassed stockpiles of highly-liquid financial capital, which in the current era are an increasingly important element of geopolitical power. Furthermore, those countries are learning how to transform that element of power into an effective instrument of power as they pursue their foreign policy objectives. That development does not bode well for the United States, which has structural weaknesses in its financial and external balances and is to an ever-greater degree reliant on inflows of foreign capital. Nor does it bode well for Europe, which was confronted with economic challenges even before the onset of the still ongoing Greece-centered financial crisis.

Mr. Weiner begins his discussion in startling fashion. He describes a crisis-simulation exercise conducted in Washington DC in March 2009. Players representing the United States pursued a broad range of global security objectives. Meanwhile, players representing China remained conservative and focused in their play. They inflicted damage on a vulnerable United States by releasing a relatively small portion of their holdings into the financial markets, thereby sending asset prices into a tailspin and undermining the US economy. Did such actions reduce the value of the assets still in the hands of the Chinese?