

AMERICAN POWER IN THE NEW ERA

War, Welfare, & Democracy: Rethinking America's Quest for the End of History

By Peter J. Munson

Reviewed by Major Nathan K. Finney, US Army, strategist and veteran of Iraq and Afghanistan, and a current student in the Basic Strategic Art Program at the US Army War College

In the wake of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, much ink has been spilled relating servicemembers' personal experiences or discussing the misapplication of American foreign policy. Few of them do both, let alone place such events in the greater context of history. In *War, Welfare, & Democracy*, Peter J. Munson does both by providing the reader a deep look into the driving factors in American foreign policy, punctuated by vivid images from his personal travels. Readers will find this book both enlightening and engrossing.

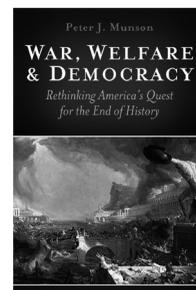
The thesis of this book is that the major challenges in the world today stem from the same source—the states' struggle to manage the flows of economic activity driven by globalization and the sociopolitical modernization that comes with it. In seven quick chapters, Munson synthesizes international relations theory, history, and economics to describe how the modern international system has developed into one of stark inequality, driving the instability and conflict seen across the globe today. Wealth and power are not distributed equally, with Western states providing too many resources to their populations through welfare states and developing nations failing to provide enough.

In addition to economic disparity, Munson uses Fukuyama's "end of history" theme to suggest that America's belief in the inevitable triumph of western liberalism helps explain the last decade's foreign policy choices. Munson describes how, as a nation, we have forgotten where, and the historical context in which, these concepts originated. His comparison of the morally dubious attempts at state-building in medieval Europe to the attempt to build government in societies dominated by tribalism and corruption particularly resonates.

Quoting from Kalyvas' *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*, he suggests that modern insurgencies can be seen "as a process of competitive state-building." In Munson's view, our recent quest to drive foreign nations to speed the "end of history" through military adventurism, has stymied local attempts at state-building, not supported them. America tried to spread Western values through force, mistaking the illusion of elections for good governance and modernization for progress.

Munson balances his pessimism with optimism about the American propensity for change. In his view, instead of exporting their perceived success, Americans need to focus on re-creating the conditions at home that made our country great. In so doing we will act as an exemplar in foreign policy, not a crusader.

If these prescriptions sound both obvious and vague, you are not alone. While Munson does an outstanding job describing the historical



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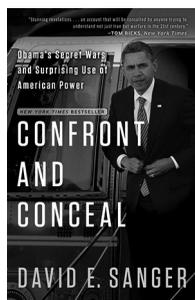
narrative leading to today's issues as well as illustrating them with examples from his own travels around the world, his solutions are easier said than done. Many American presidents have come into office focused on improving the economic standing of the country and reducing our commitments overseas. Both the complexity of the task and the complexity of the contemporary world make this a more difficult task than it seems.

Overall, *War, Welfare, & Democracy* is a well-researched and authoritative look at what drives us as a nation and how we arrived at where we are today. Munson's fluency with international relations theory, contemporary history, and economic theory provides the reader with a clear picture of global trends and provides a useful framework that points the way into the future. While his solutions lack specificity, Munson's framework is valuable for national security professionals to understand. This book is highly recommended.

Confront and Conceal: Obama's Secret Wars and Surprising Use of American Power

By David E. Sanger

Reviewed by Dr. W. Andrew Terrill, Research Professor, Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College



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In *Confront and Conceal*, David Sanger, the chief Washington correspondent of *The New York Times*, examines President Obama's approach to US national security. He considers the president's actions in Afghanistan and Pakistan, the Middle East, China, and North Korea, and argues an "Obama Doctrine" of sorts has emerged. It calls for the United States to confront the actions of its adversaries through a variety of ways including engagement, sanctions, covert actions, propaganda war, cyberwar, working closely with allies, and employing drones and Special Operations Forces. Conversely, the use of massive conventional military force is something the Obama Doctrine seeks to avoid except in cases involving US national survival. This reluctance is motivated by the president's concern about developing open-ended commitments and long occupations "that we can no longer afford" (page 421). Throughout the work, Obama is portrayed as deeply engaged in foreign policy, which he views through a realist lens (an approach that James Mann has without irony called that of a "Scowcroft Democrat"). He is also presented as seeking to manage other world powers and friendly states through intensive diplomacy and a keen understanding of their interests and goals.

Sanger maintains that Obama's approach to national security is reflected in his willingness to accept what the administration was reported to have called "Afghan Good Enough" as the basis for a US withdrawal from that country. This policy seeks a decent outcome in Afghanistan but is primarily concerned with ensuring the country never becomes a sanctuary for al Qaeda or other international terrorist organizations. Sanger maintains that Obama considers Pakistan and Iran to be more difficult problems than Afghanistan, and the president is described as viewing a loose Pakistani nuclear weapon as his most frightening foreign policy contingency. The Obama administration has struggled a great deal with this question but never reached a satisfactory solution