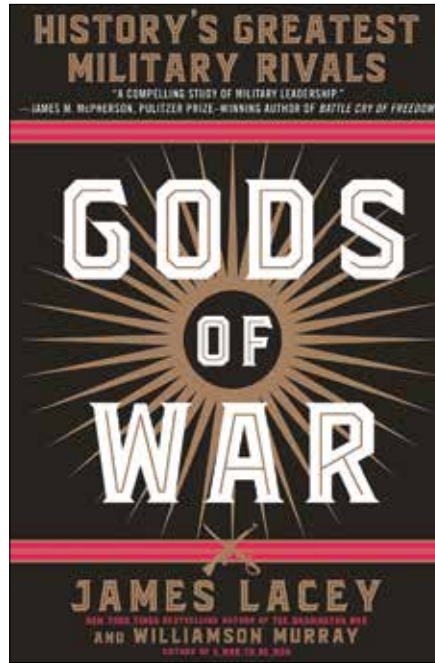


what?” and “What’s next?” Recognizing that a social scientist would likely steer away from the policy realm allows staff to calibrate their principals’ expectations, and thus, paradoxically, create a better opportunity to gain useful insights. Given this tradeoff, it also raises the possibility that turning to a practitioner-scholar in the first place, the kind the academy eschews, might ultimately be more useful.

In *Cult of the Irrelevant*, Desch does an admirable job exploring the gap between the policy community and the social sciences. Perhaps because he is an academic himself, however, the enduring relevance of his book rests solely with the academy, not with policy practitioners. Does the academy feel a need to leave its ivory tower to reinvigorate its policy relevance? Absent significant change, Desch leads the reader to a resounding “no.” While the book will be interesting to policymakers and their staffs, Servicemembers’ reading time is better spent on works that help them understand and solve policy problems, rather than on academic programs and individuals irrelevant to their solutions. JFQ

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Gods of War: History's Greatest Military Rivals

By James Lacey and Williamson Murray
New York: Bantam Books, 2020
402 pp. \$32.00
ISBN: 978-0345547552

Reviewed by Jon Mikolashek

Since humanity has waged war, scholars have debated the greatest captains, commanders, and warriors. Continuing this long tradition of friendly and sometimes competitive discussion is James Lacey and Williamson Murray's *Gods of War*. In this highly accessible book, both esteemed historians take the reader through the millennia to examine not only the greatest commanders in military history but also the greatest rivalries. The book focuses on contests between peers because they often are the greatest rivals. *Gods of War* does not examine one-off battles, but focuses instead on campaigns in which either side shared victories and defeats. Those expecting more on figures such as Gustavus Adolphus and Alexander the Great will be slightly disappointed that their favorite commander did not make the cut, but the focus of *Gods of War* is about the

greatest rivalries, and it overwhelmingly succeeds.

Gods of War highlights six rivalries between some of the most revered and studied military figures. The book is evenly divided between war in the ancient world, the Middle Ages, and the modern era. There are two chapters that introduce the concept and a conclusion, and the first rivalry considers Hannibal versus Scipio Africanus during the transformation of Rome into a Mediterranean power. The succeeding chapters follow in chronological order: The political and military rivalry between Julius Caesar and Pompey the Great. The Middle Ages get attention with the rivalry between King Richard I and Saladin during the Third Crusade. The modern era begins with the Napoleonic Wars and the multiple conflicts between Napoleon and the Duke of Wellington, followed by the bloody contest between Ulysses S. Grant and Robert E. Lee in the American Civil War. The discussion of World War II shifts gears and focuses on the rivalry between Erwin Rommel, Bernard Montgomery, and George S. Patton.

There is no discussion of rivalries in World War I or conflicts post-1945, but the theme of the book is to examine the rivalries between equally great commanders. To put it in a sports context, this is akin to Larry Bird versus Earvin “Magic” Johnson, Tom Brady versus Payton Manning, and Roger Federer versus Rafael Nadal. There are plenty of great athletes, but not all great athletes had peers they competed with equally, and more than once. So while great military commanders such as Alexander and Gustavus Adolphus are indeed “great,” they had no near peers to repeatedly compete with over the ages.

Despite the emphasis on rivalries and commanders, *Gods of War* offers some depth to strategic thought and planning. While there is a focus on tactics and tactical outcomes, the two authors discuss the idea of “master strategists” and how even the greatest commanders often lacked strategic thinking. Lacey and Murray conclude that out of all the commanders covered in *Gods of War*, only Saladin and Grant possessed a strategic vision and won. Renowned figures such

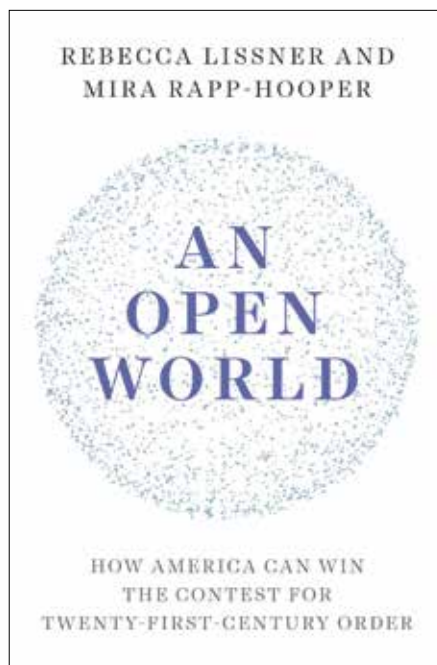
as Hannibal, while a master tactician, lost his war to a better strategic commander in Scipio Africanus.

The joint force will find worthwhile lessons in this discussion of “strategic genius.” As we focus on the operational and strategic levels of war, the United States and the Western world in general are often overly focused on creating master strategists or the next god of war. In reality, that is impossible.

As wars grew in size and scope following the rise of nation-states and the rapid evolution of technology, it is unlikely that a Napoleon, Grant, or George C. Marshall will ever again emerge to fully command war as some historical figures appeared to do. And even if the next god of war arises, it will likely have little to do with what school of joint professional military education he or she attended or if every known joint publication was successfully digested. That does not mean we should not try. But perhaps we should shift away from canned lessons, pedantic rubrics, and poor assessments and toward a clearer focus on history, writing, and critical thinking. That is, perhaps, the greatest lesson of *Gods of War* to joint military education professionals.

Gods of War is an excellent example of what professional military historians should strive to write. It is easy to read and neither pretentious nor overwrought. It strikes a fine balance between popular or narrative history and scholarly or professional history. Joint professional military education students and professors will see elements of Williamson Murray’s edited collection *The Dynamics of Military Revolution: 1300–2050* (Cambridge University Press, 2001) throughout the text, which is still read by all students at the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College. While the book lacks rivalries between naval commanders or any discussion of airpower, *Gods of War* is a useful book that will appeal to the most scholarly of historians and nascent strategists, as well as to those who simply desire a more cerebral book for the beach. JFQ

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An Open World: How America Can Win the Contest for Twenty-First-Century Order

Rebecca Lissner and Mira Rapp-Hooper
Yale University Press, 2020
202 pp. \$22.93
ISBN: 978-0300250329

Reviewed by Christopher P. Mulder

In *An Open World*, Dr. Rebecca Lissner and Dr. Mira Rapp-Hooper provide a compelling argument for a new U.S. strategy of “global openness.” Readers will find much to consider as the book is presented as an executable blueprint for a new Presidential administration. It is worth noting that many elements of their strategy are already in motion on the global stage.

The authors bring a wealth of foreign policy experience and fresh perspectives to the topic. Rebecca Lissner is an assistant professor at the U.S. Naval War College and Mira Rapp-Hooper is a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations and Yale Law School. Familiar names such as Jake Sullivan (President Joseph Biden’s National Security Advisor), Michèle Flournoy, James Mattis, Stephen Hadley, Emma Ashford, and Chris Preble were listed in the

acknowledgments and should be a leading reflection of the policy prescriptions one will find within.

According to Lissner and Rapp-Hooper, global openness is a “novel strategic framework” that diverges from past grand strategies and falls somewhere between Neo-Isolationism and Primacy. It is an approach resigned to the fact that the United States will not remain the sole global superpower. Therefore, to maintain global order, the authors argue that the United States needs to remain globally engaged by courting new and emerging relationships, reinvigorating atrophied relationships, or developing new and unconventional relationships that are favorable to U.S. objectives. The United States will not be able to rely on its military primacy or rest on old institutional laurels; it must advocate for creative ways to maintain order and reform legacy institutions—or create new ones.

The authors offer a foundational perspective on the post–World War II international order and its evolution into the current state of affairs. Lissner and Rapp-Hooper take the time to examine domestic issues such as political polarization, disinformation, income inequality, technology investment, and workforce challenges, alongside global issues such as technology governance, China’s rise, Russia’s slow descent, and other regional challenges, pulling these threads together with a unique strategy (and thoughtful policy recommendations) that ultimately attempts to “prevent closed spheres of influence, maintain free access to the global commons, defend the political independence of all states, modernize existing institutions, and build new forms of order.” In essence, “openness” is a nuanced strategy with the flexibility to adapt to evolving global dynamics.

The authors illustrate how a global approach based on openness would apply to each of the world’s primary regions—Asia, Europe, the Middle East, the Western Hemisphere, and Africa. They broadly outline the goals, aspirations, and limitations inherent to their strategy in each region. The authors were thoughtful in their examination of potential downsides. Projecting winners and losers