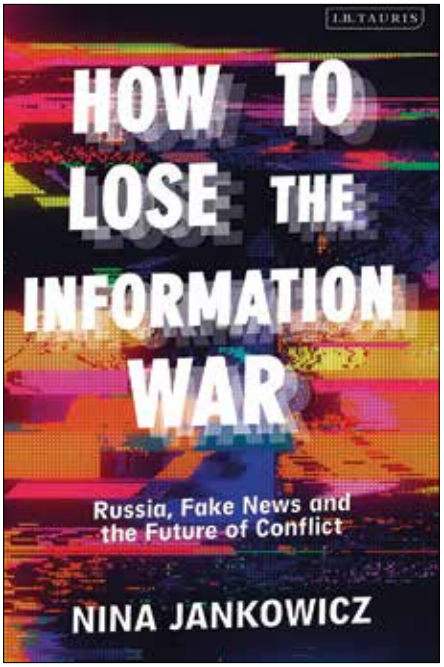

How to Lose the Information War: Russia, Fake News, and the Future of Conflict
By Nina Jankowicz
I.B. Tauris, 2020
288 pp. $27.00
ISBN: 978-1838607685

Reviewed by Sarah Gamberini

In a time with both a global pandemic and a U.S. Presidential election characterized by manipulated narratives, a fresh perspective contemplating disinformation—false information knowingly shared to cause harm—is both timely and important. A book, however, about how to *lose* the information war, as framed by author Nina Jankowicz, is exactly the perspective needed to highlight the high stakes and growing threat of disinformation. *How to Lose the Information War* examines the experience of countries targeted by Russian disinformation, provides needed context for Russia's tactics, and draws potential solutions into focus. Such a unique thought exercise is of immediate value as a new administration seeks to grapple with emerging Great Power competition and the malicious and expanding use of tools of deceit to undermine democratic societies.

Jankowicz, the Disinformation Fellow at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, offers lessons on disinformation from Russia's early "beta tests" in Eastern and Central Europe. Jankowicz's experience managing democracy assistance programs to Russia and Belarus allows for unique insights along the way as she highlights the erosion and crippling of core democratic processes and institutions. The first six chapters offer a breakdown of Russian information warfare efforts in Estonia, Georgia, Poland, Ukraine, the Czech Republic, and a fascinating examination of the 2016 U.S. Presidential election. The deliberate erosion of trust in institutions and poisoning of civil discourse in these Eastern and Central European cases, including the way Russia capitalizes on homegrown conspiracy theories in Poland or amplifies racial and ethnic divisions in Estonia, eerily parallels the current U.S. struggle on the information battlefield.

Jankowicz warns readers that information warfare has no borders and that valuable lessons from Eastern Europe are being ignored. Unfortunately, Russia has already applied these methods of sowing chaos, diminishing faith in government, and dividing societies along preexisting fault lines in the United States, Western Europe, and around the world. While Eastern European case studies are valuable, Jankowicz could also have assessed the many ongoing cases of disinformation observable throughout the West, which might have offered unique insights and perhaps interesting contrasts. Regardless of this quibble, Jankowicz drives home the importance of media literacy, public awareness, and educated electorates to inoculate against disinformation.

The challenge of language to describe information warfare is highlighted with a problematic misnomer in the book's subtitle. The term *fake news* tends to drive further confusion and societal division since it is often used to classify anything that is politically inconvenient. However, Jankowicz adeptly unpacks the issue of disinformation diction early on and notes that a lack of common definition and revision to these buzzwords may hinder the West's ability to appropriately respond to Russian information warfare, which attempts to confuse facts and opinions and has encouraged a rejection of science during a global pandemic. Precise language, as Jankowicz points out, is the first step to improving media literacy.

Another timely contribution of the book is a discussion of the roles and responsibilities of social media companies in the spread of disinformation and misinformation. Adversary disinformation efforts seek to leverage social media and other tools and platforms to exploit divisions within the body politic of the United States and its allies. While social media companies have taken some important steps to flag manipulated media or remove harmful falsehoods, online echo chambers that perpetrate disinformation will continue to pop up despite regulation because of the prolific and inexpensive nature of online media. This compromises the healthy public discourse required for a functioning democracy, thus weakening the ability of the United States to address either its own internal challenges or coordinate a response to the multivariate threats posed by Great Power competitors.

How to Lose the Information War offers many useful recommendations for government, industry, and American society. While no agency or organization can solve this problem alone, the Department of Defense (DOD) plays an important role in countering Russia's information warfare tactics and can begin by codifying Russia's cyber and online influence efforts as dangerous attacks on American society and democracy. Jankowicz's recommendations for the Department of Education to focus on digital and media literacy, for example, can serve as inspiration for similar updates to joint professional military education and to better prepare the joint force for operating in environments shaped by disinformation campaigns. In addition, DOD can better support allies

and partners by training and sharing information and best practices to counter Russia's influence together. To effectively combat disinformation abroad, though, the United States must address it at home, or the division and doubt sown by disinformation will inevitably weaken U.S. efforts to combat enemies whose information warfare campaigns transcend borders and undermine democracies across the globe.

U.S. adversaries and rogue regimes will continue to propagate disinformation to divide and conquer. Russia will relentlessly attempt to widen fissures within U.S. society and separate the United States from its allies. The lessons and insights offered by Jankowicz are a valuable intellectual resource for determining how to combat Russian disinformation and collaborate with partners and allies who have tools and insights from their own battles in the information war.

Reading *How to Lose the Information War* is beneficial not only to those in the national security community, but also to all citizens seeking to understand their information environment. Strong media literacy, as Jankowicz concludes, is crucial to a healthy democracy and is the first and most important step to winning the information war. **JFQ**

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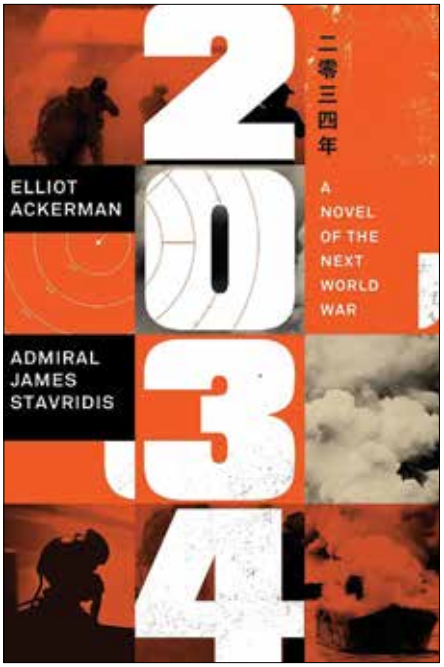

2034: A Novel of the Next World War

By Elliot Ackerman and James Stavridis
Penguin Press, 2021
320 pp. $27.00
ISBN: 978-1984881250

Reviewed by John A. Nagl

After 20 years of grinding war in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Pentagon is trying hard to turn away from counterinsurgency in the Middle East to focus on deterring conventional conflict with Russia and China. Into this situation, Marine combat veteran Elliot Ackerman and retired Navy Admiral James Stavridis have dropped—with impeccable timing—a novel that imagines what could go wrong if that pivot fails to deter America's near-peer adversaries.

To say that *2034* is torn out of today's headlines does not do it justice. This page-turner—I finished it in 24 hours—projects an America unable to recover from its current political divisions, leaving the Nation vulnerable to the more focused will of our authoritarian adversaries. The American President is not named, although we learn that the President is a woman as well as an independent, neither major party being able to unite enough of the country behind its candidate to win in 2032. We also know that she followed a single Michael Pence Presidential term. We also learn that Vladimir Putin is still in charge of an expanded Russia, well into his eighties.

None of that seems entirely implausible in light of the recent Colonial pipeline hack. Neither does the major plot point that renders America's military vulnerable to attack through expanded cyber capabilities from our adversaries. Without giving away too much of the plot, a destroyer squadron *Commodore* in the South China Sea discovers something aboard a distressed Chinese fishing trawler that sets in motion a conflict that spans the globe. The downing of a Marine F-35 in Iranian airspace is a significant complicating factor, as is the Russian desire to cause problems for America wherever possible. The U.S. National Security Council has its hands full, and the Indian-American Deputy National Security Advisor relies on family connections to try to limit the damage.

This is a rip-roaring yarn that should be read by every officer in the U.S. military. It is a classic tale of hubris, overreliance on technology, failure to understand one's adversary and think strategically, and the damage that those mistakes can inflict on a fragile international system. It is sadly plausible and hence an important warning for those entrusted with national security responsibilities.

The book is not perfect. It would benefit greatly from maps laying out the zones in which conflict happens, and a cast list to keep the characters' names straight. The National Security Advisor plays a larger role in the plot than is strictly plausible, and it is unlikely that America's cyber defenses would be as vulnerable to surprise attack as *2034* suggests. But these flaws do not distract from the novel's importance at a time when defense budgets are likely to be substantially reduced—and not evenly across the Armed Forces.

The authors also steer closely toward their Service prerogatives. To my memory, the U.S. Army and Air