

Military Persuasion in War and Policy by Stephen J. Cimbala

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The topic of military persuasion is complex and difficult to define. At first glance, this book's title may cause readers to think it is a study that investigates the field

of Psychological Operations or Military Psychology. Rather, political scientist, Stephen Cimbala, uses the term military persuasion more generally and describes it as a form of knowledge strategy. Through the course of nine chapters he investigates how military persuasion acted as a deterrent in preventing past wars and how it may be used as a deterrent or force multiplying tool in future conflicts. Cimbala's stated goal with the book is to demonstrate the need for new strategic thinking in the Information Age which, like military persuasion, unfortunately is ambiguous and shape-shifting.

Although it was published in 2002 and much of the work may seem anachronistic, Cimbala's efforts are potentially useful for intelligence professionals, particularly those working at strategic planning levels. In a larger sense, the author frames the topic of military persuasion as key to successful crisis management. In order to prevent or resolve conflicts, the most critical component is achieving some kind of mutual understanding between opponents which, on the face of it, is glaringly obvious.

In the context of case studies presented in the book however, achieving such understanding is not a common occurrence in world politics. For example, the eventual resolution of the Cold War between the U.S. and Soviet Union was contingent (in very

general terms) on a shared understanding of each other's capabilities and intentions. How opposing sides utilized appropriate and successful persuasion as a deterrent to conflict thus depended on accurate reading or understanding of opponents.

In order to provide background, Cimbala uses chapters one through three to outline his concept of persuasion, and the Cold War historically frames the majority of his work. These first three chapters also review a number of relevant books on the topic of deterrence and coercive diplomacy. He differentiates these terms by describing deterrence as steps that prevent action by an opponent. Coercive diplomacy, on the other hand, causes an opponent to reverse or change a course of action once initiated.

In chapters four through six, the author demonstrates how the Cuban Missile Crisis (chapter 4) and tensions in 1983 in particular (chapter 6), demonstrated ruptures in shared understanding of intentions between the U.S. and Soviet Union. As a result of these political showdowns, both powers learned to read each others' intentions to a greater extent despite a great deal of distrust and conflicts that convulsed the politics of the United States (Vietnam) and the Soviet Union (Afghanistan).

The historical framing of mutual understanding and mutually assured destruction is an important element of the author's work. Unfortunately, he bypasses the Viet Nam and Soviet-Afghanistan conflicts; that they are not discussed even briefly is surprising because both conflicts, along with other Cold-War era proxy wars, arguably impacted the use of persuasion in the Cold War. Despite this, Cimbala continues to emphasize crisis management in past conflicts, largely in terms of deterrence through nuclear arms. The key to successful

crisis management during the Cold War regarding nuclear war, the author seemingly contends, was a reliance on clear-eyed perspective of intentions. Cimbala provides numerous case studies to support his perspective, but the thesis often gets lost in the mix of case studies and overly detailed reliance on quantitative figures of, for example, nuclear strike capabilities.

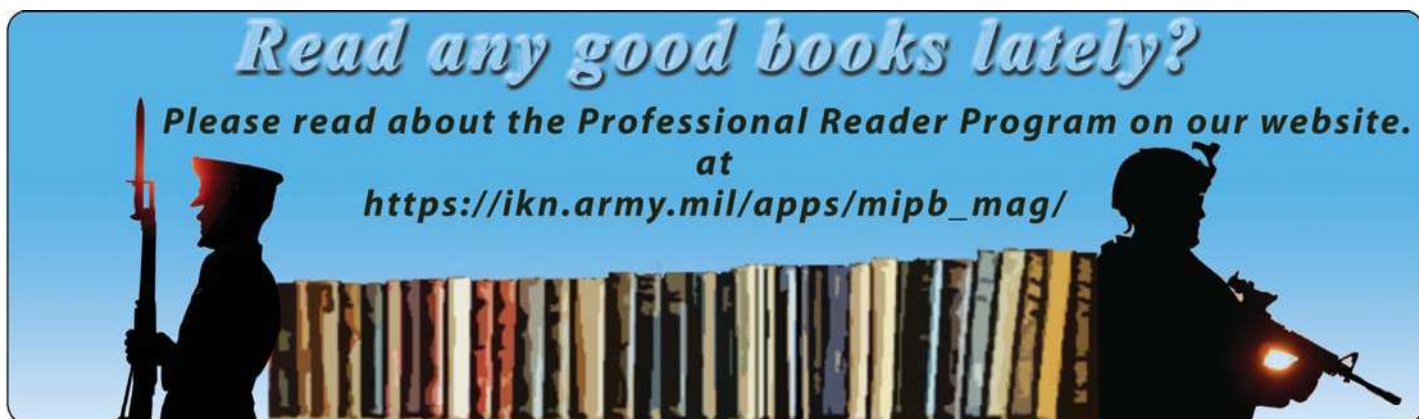
Unfortunately, the book attempts to cover too much. This is demonstrated by one chapter on Clausewitz's concept of Friction and its bearing on nuclear deterrence (chapter 7), which is then followed with a much too short chapter on small wars and counterinsurgency. Transitioning between these major topics is too wide a gulf to bridge in this book's case. Considering the publication date of 2002 and the proximity to 9/11, it appears that world events possibly skewed Cimbala's thesis and writing completed prior to that world-changing event. A lengthy introduction and concluding chapter that detail the problems of failed intelligence analysis also indicate that Cimbala and his publisher may have driven on with outdated arguments. In the realm of writing on current events, this is not an uncommon occurrence. Then again, it is certainly no fault to seek answers for the type of paradigm shift that 9/11 represents.

Despite these criticisms, the author investigates warfare in the Information Age at various points in the book and does so in a meritorious way. In those

brief sections, he cites several key scholars who have significantly contributed to this evolving field of study, notably, John Arquilla, David Ronfeldt, and Dorothy Denning. Unfortunately, Cimbala's writing style also trips up a number of his more useful points on interesting topics. For example, in his chapter on cyberwar (chapter 9), readers are confronted with overly dense writing. One example includes: "Preemption for want of information on account of cyberdistortion intended by the other side as intimidation is a possible path to war in an age of information complexity." (221). Unfortunately, too many examples of this kind of confusing writing exist throughout the book.

On a positive note, there are many useful larger lessons to be gained from *Military Persuasion in War and Policy*. When read in context of debates surrounding Iran and nuclear capabilities, and the possibility of proliferation, Cimbala's efforts are worthwhile. The book is also a reminder of how political, religious, and social factors remain inextricably linked to military capabilities, particularly in the contemporary environment where both state and non-state actors must be accounted for and understood. These obligations being recognized, Intelligence officers will find more timely writing on the subject of persuasion in the works of others, particularly John Arquilla and Doug Borer's *Information Strategy and Warfare: A Guide to Theory and Practice*. ✨

Reviewed by Nate Moir



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2012 MI Hall of Fame Activities



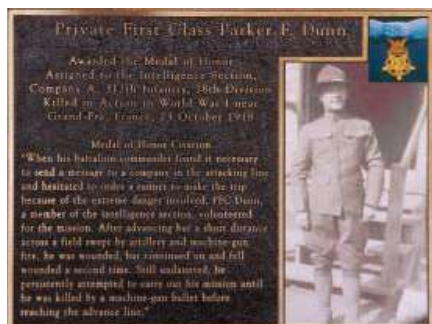
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MG Potter looks at new display case in PFC Dunn Barracks, dedicated 14 September 2012.

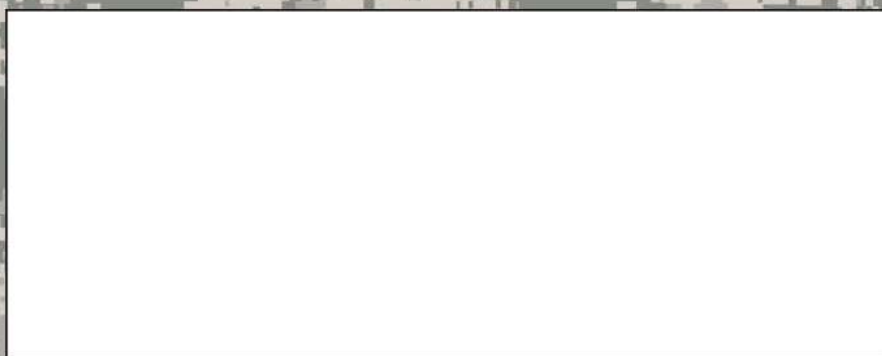


CPT Gilbert Juarez receives the 2012 LTG Sidney T. Weinstein award from Ms. Halee Weinstein (daughter of LTG Weinstein). The Weinstein Award is given to a company grade officer for excellence in Military Intelligence.



Dedication of the PFC Parker F. Dunn Barracks in Weinstein Village. PFC Dunn was a WWI Medal of Honor Recipient for actions under fire while serving in an intelligence section.

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