

The Nature of the War on Terrorism

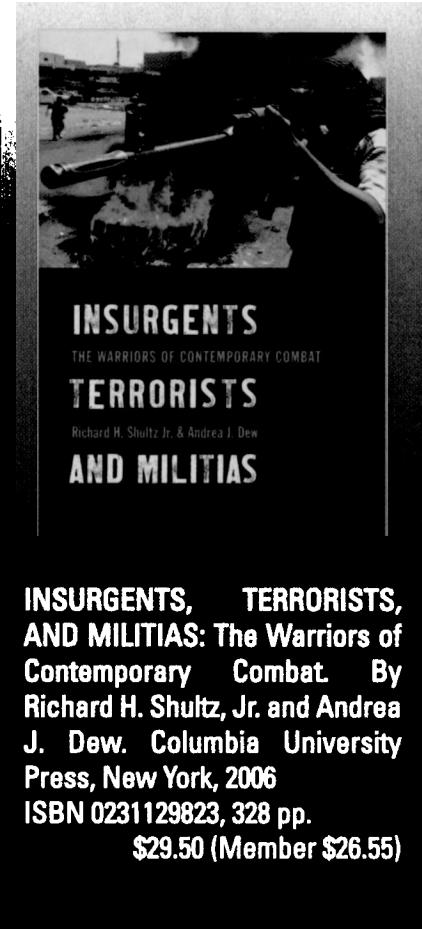
reviewed by LtCol Charles L. Armstrong,
USMC(Ret)

In a new addition to the growing contemporary work on counterinsurgency and asymmetric warfare, Richard Shultz and Andrea Dew use four post-Cold War conflicts to make their point that the nature of war has, for the foreseeable future, changed. Using Sun Tzu's edict, "know your enemy," as both a launching pad and capstone for their study, the authors examine the Soviet experience in Afghanistan, Russia's continuing battle with Chechnya, America's defeat in Somalia, and the development of modern Iraq (with an emphasis on current, fledgling efforts toward democracy) to make their case.

Key to their argument about the changing nature of war is the premise that the Western way of war, as defined by Carl von Clausewitz, is obsolescent in the modern world. Von Clausewitz believed—and sold to a succession of post-Napoleonic war military professionals—the notion that war is a continuation of state politics. War is declared or initiated by states against other states, then prosecuted by armies with clear purposes and cohesive, organizational structures. This, say the authors, has been the pattern of major warfare from Waterloo to Operation IRAQI FREEDOM. With the interesting exception of former Marine Commandant Charles C. Krulak, post-DESERT STORM military leaders were (according to the authors) virtually unanimous in their contention that future wars would resemble past wars, fought with states as primary protagonists and decided by overwhelming military force.

The authors believe, and argue persuasively, such has not been the case. With the exception of DESERT STORM and the warfighting phase of IRAQI FREEDOM, wars are now fought within states and transnationally. These wars have pitted states against nonstate armed groups—ethnic, tribal, clan, religious, and communal warriors. The authors make a clear distinction between soldiers (even professional soldiers) and warriors. The former are organized and deployed in cohesive units with formal chains of command, distinctive uniforms, and rules of engagement. They fight at the behest of the states that recruit them. The latter base their loose organizations and warfighting techniques on cultural, tribal, clan, or religious imperatives. They may come from cultures where more or less continuous warfare across generations is the norm. They fight at the behest of local chiefs who often lead them personally into battle. Failure to understand such warriors and the cultures that produce them is the worst kind of ignorance with respect to knowing the enemy.

The book is valuable reading for the detailed, relatively unemotional background on the four conflicts the authors examine, as well as the strident nagging about understanding warrior cultures. Despite the constant state of war that exists almost nonstop between and among some cultural, tribal, or religious groups, many Americans find it hard to believe that other people can't accept Western notions of peace and democracy. The book helps drive home the point that some cultures and



**INSURGENTS, TERRORISTS,
AND MILITIAS: The Warriors of
Contemporary Combat.** By
Richard H. Shultz, Jr. and Andrea
J. Dew. Columbia University
Press, New York, 2006

ISBN 0231129823, 328 pp.
\$29.50 (Member \$26.55)

subgroups don't even like their own state's official stance on what is best for its citizens. Such groups are unlikely to flock blindly to foreign concepts spun in Washington or Moscow.

The book concludes with a short list of lessons learned that the authors believe can and should be applied to potential battlefields of the future. Their discussion of the lessons makes excellent sense in the context of their book and is reason enough for military professionals to read it. The book is both carefully researched and easy to read. The background information on Afghanistan and Iraq makes it a good investment for Marine leaders, many of whom are likely to have repeat performances in those countries.



>LtCol Armstrong, a retired infantry officer, is a frequent contributor to the Gazette. He is an expert on counterinsurgency strategy, tactics, and techniques. He resides in Texas.

Books may be ordered from our online edition by clicking on the book cover.