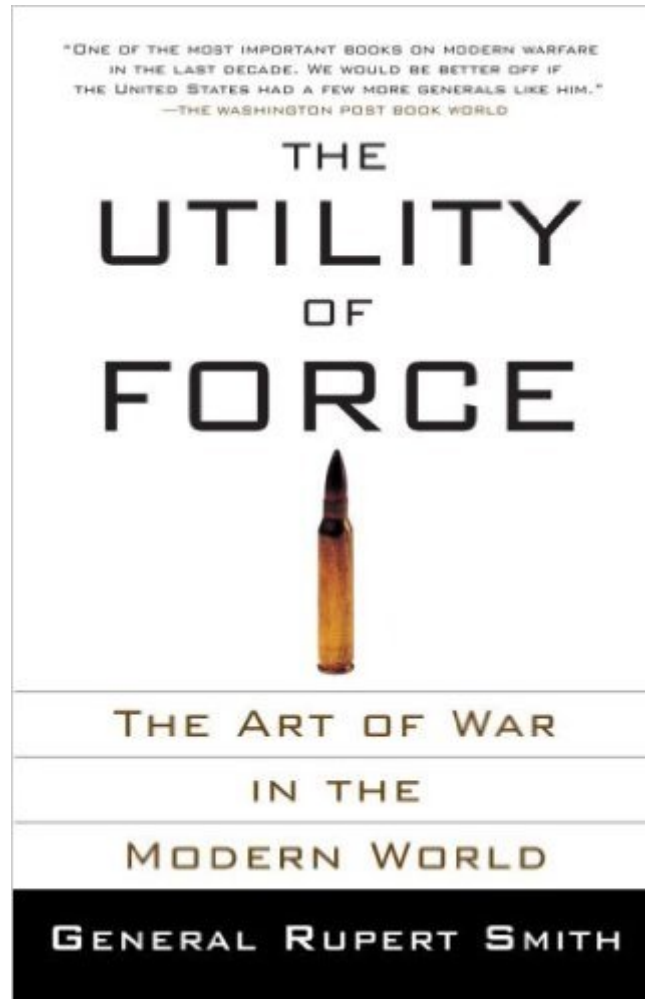


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The Utility Of Force: The Art Of War In The Modern World



Synopsis

From a highly decorated general, a brilliant new way of understanding war and its role in the twenty-first century. Drawing on his vast experience as a commander during the first Gulf War, and in Bosnia, Kosovo, and Northern Ireland, General Rupert Smith gives us a probing analysis of modern war. He demonstrates why today's conflicts must be understood as intertwined political and military events, and makes clear why the current model of total war has failed in Iraq, Afghanistan, and other recent campaigns. Smith offers a compelling contemporary vision for how to secure our world and the consequences of ignoring the new, shifting face of war.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

There are 3 things you need to know about this book: 1. There are parts where it's repetitive and he could've used an editor. 2. If you agree with his main premise - that we will no longer (and haven't been for decades) fight nation-state to nation-state (ala WWII) and that it's all going to be battles for what he calls "will of the people" (aka "hearts and minds") - then you can probably skip this book completely unless you want all the detailed why's and how's we got to this point from Napoleon to 2006. 3. The last third of the book is devoted to his approach to start resolving these issues: - stop building industrial-complex level machines and technology; focus money on information-gathering, intelligence gathering and analysis and building force flexibility - the military should be used to achieve military goals only; and then the rest of the "hearts and minds" battle turned over to agencies that train for that (in the US, that'd be AID, State dept, Commerce, etc.) - the only time that the small level non-state enemies we face (insurgents, terrorists, warlords, etc.

General Rupert Smith's "The Utility of Force" is an excellent book that explains how modern "war" has evolved from full-scale "industrial war" to modern "war amongst the people." General Smith drew on his long and distinguished military career in the British Army and his own experiences in Kuwait, Bosnia, and Ireland to produce this book. In "The Utility of Force," he brings Clausewitz to the 21st century and attempts to explain why the Western militaries are not always successful. After an excellent discussion of Clausewitz, the Napoleonic era, and the development of the general staff, Smith traces the evolution of warfare through the 19th century through WWII, tracing the gradual transformation of conflict into total "industrial war." General Smith argues that, although nations still prepared for total war during the Cold War, the "industrial war" that culminated in WWII was made obsolete by the development of nuclear weapons. Smith's overview of military history is solid, but although he interjects Clausewitzian insights and begins to develop his concept of "war amongst the people," at times it is a bit mundane. The post-WWII world has seen the emergence of "war amongst the people," and this is what Smith argues too many current leaders - political and military - have not adapted to. Algeria, Vietnam, Afghanistan, the Balkans, and now Iraq are all examples of war amongst the people.

Hindsight is always going to be more clear than trying to predict the future, and in this book where General Smith traces the history of war from the Napoleonic to the current age it is no surprise that he is far more clear and insightful looking backward than he is in looking forward. The major thesis of his book is that war has shifted from what he calls "War Between the People," typified by separate nation-states fighting till decisive victory on a distinct battlefield, to what he calls "War Amongst the People" which will feature conflict including non nation states, waged indefinitely and indecisively on an amorphous front that includes both physical lands and intangible ones such as the media. The book is very strong in several regards. First, General Smith's elucidation of Clausewitzian strategy, as well as providing the historical backdrop for when, how and why it was developed, is simply first rate. The biggest lessons drawn from Clausewitz that are still relevant today are that force must be applied to achieve some pre-determined purpose (hence the "utility of force," it is not merely the destruction of your opponent), and the concept of the trinity of government, military and the people. The best way to defeat an enemy is to break this trinity. In War Between the People this could be done conceptually more simply by flat out destroying the enemy military or their government, or perhaps more elegantly by dissolving the people's allegiance to the policies of their government and military, more effective against a democracy such as North Vietnamese efforts to reinforce and

inflame the anti-war movement. Second the book's military history from Napoleon to the end of the Cold War is truly outstanding, worth the price of the book itself.

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