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DIVIDED ARMIES: INEQUALITY AND BATTLEFIELD PERFORMANCE IN MODERN WAR

BOOK REVIEWS

DIVIDED ARMIES: INEQUALITY AND BATTLEFIELD PERFORMANCE IN MODERN WAR

Jason Lyall. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020. Tables. Figs. Maps. Appx. Biblio. Index. \$35.

This is not a trivial book or an "easy read" left casually on the nightstand or positioned strategically on a coffee table for others to peruse. Rather, Jason Lyall's *Divided Armies* is one of those texts that anyone attending a war college or planning on service as a senior policy advisor should read. A profoundly detailed effort, it quantifies and codifies how social stratification, in particular ethnic inequality, influences battlefield performance. And while the conclusions are unsurprising--social inequality and ethnic divisions are corrosive to military success--that does not diminish their importance to modern military strategists and planners or the criticality of this effort.

While effectively case-study driven, this research is distinguished by the scope and scale of the underlying dataset. Project Mars, a database funded in part by the Air Force and capturing the role of ethnic inequality in more than 250 largely state-on-state conflicts since 1800, is used first to assess how socially unequal a state's military forces are; and then uses those measures of inequality to create a battlefield performance index (BPI). Variations in BPI are then compared across forces to predict their relative performances both in actual and hypothetical conflicts through time.

If that sounds complicated, it is. However, this complexity allows the creation of a variety of counterfactual scenarios to gauge the thresholds where inequality begins to adversely affect battlefield performance, and in what ways. Specifically, the analysis allows estimation of how likely a force is to experience disproportionate casualties, suffer mass desertions, or require deployment of "blocking forces" (such as those used by the Soviets during World War II) to ensure battlefield discipline.

The research also provides insights into the point when ethnic inequality leads to "double wars"--that is, when military forces start engaging perceived domestic enemies as much as, and in some cases more than, external threats. By including this measure, Lyall helps identify the threshold where inequality starts dissolving the bond between soldiers and the state they serve and provides a key insight into how and where multiethnic states start to collapse during conflicts. Knowing and understanding how that occurs provides valuable perspective into ongoing conflicts in both the Middle East and Africa.

Taken as a whole, Lyall's book is as thought-provoking as it is challenging. It provides one of the most profound appraisals of how social divisions translate into weakened performance on the battlefield. Furthermore, Lyall seeks to explain how creating socially and politically inclusive institutions before periods of conflict ultimately translates into stronger, more capable, and above all, more durable military forces. As such, *Divided Armies* both provides an appraisal and points toward a prescription. Both of those will only grow in relevance. The global prevalence of societies fractured or fracturing along ethnic lines means Lyall's research will increase in its applicability and value over time. His observations deserve to be shared and discussed at all major war colleges and in the halls of the Pentagon. But no one will ever leave this on the coffee table.

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Reviewed by Eric Schuck, Commander, U.S. Navy Reserve

COMMANDER SCHUCK is a Supply Corps officer and currently commanding officer, Defense Logistics Agency Disposition Services Unit One at Joint Base Lewis-McChord. On the civilian side, he is professor of economics and Dean Dave Hansen Chair in Economics at Linfield University in Oregon and holds a doctorate from Washington State University.

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