



LITERATURE REVIEW

Edward N. Luttwak and Eithan Shamir, *The Art of Military Innovation: Lessons from the Israel Defense Forces* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2023), 288 pp.

In their masterful book, *The Art of Military Innovation: Lessons from the Israel Defense Forces*, authors Edward N. Luttwak and Eithan Shamir trace the origins of the culture of innovation within the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). If necessity is the mother of invention, and innovations proved necessary given how outgunned and outnumbered the Jewish state found itself in 1948, it does not make Israel's culture of innovation any less impressive.

The authors, well-versed in the IDF's culture from first-hand experience, discuss several factors that have contributed to Israel's agile and bureaucratically lean system of military research, development, and procurement that other countries might envy. Initially, Israel had to build its forces from scratch while being invaded by numerically and technologically superior Arab armies. At the time, the economy and the small number of people in Israel could not support a professional standing army, and so was born the reserve-centric organization of the IDF that prevails to this day. That most Israelis have military experience (military service is mandatory for large parts of population, including women) continues to be a powerful source of innovation, because general familiarity with practical problems that IDF faces inspires solutions that might save brothers and sisters, friends, and neighbors. Shared experience and contacts also make a wider acceptance of particularly well thought-through solutions to such problems easier to implement on a broad scale (personal contacts reign supreme).

The scarcity of people and resources has forced innovation to counter Israel's ever-present threats, including under conditions of an arms embargo in the first decade after Israel's founding. The IDF had to be comfortable with taking risks in its research, development, and deployment decisions that would be intolerable in other militaries. The forces have not had the luxury to spend time practicing proper salutes or parade-ground drills, contributing to the IDF's informal culture. Yet, as the book convincingly illustrates, the IDF learned that the pay offs of risk-taking and making the IDF more approachable have vastly outweighed the occasional setbacks of high-risk taking strategies.

The recent short development and deployment time of the Iron Dome system, some two years from the proper contract for a "technology demonstrator" to the first operational deployment in 2011, would be unthinkable in the United States. The government's risk-averse bureaucracy (or bureaucracies as the case might be) usually slows down the system development to the point of components being obsolete by the time the system gets closer to the deployment phase. This obsolescence leads to further delays in the system's development. Moreover, U.S. strategic depth allows the nation the luxury of "admiring problems" for extended periods of time rather than solving them as a matter of existential priority.

The IDF began as and continues to be a one-service military, and includes land, air, and naval forces. The IDF's relatively young and lean officer corps enables bottom-up innovation;



Israel's difficult omnipresent adversaries require it if the Jewish state is to prevail. Lean officer corps discourages micromanagement; there simply aren't enough hours in the day and enough people to generate the kind of detailed orders that border on micromanagement and impede bottom-up thinking and discourage initiatives. Specialized teams come together to solve specific problems and disband when they are successful, even though their *esprit de corps* continues to shape the IDF.

The ever-present theme in the IDF's ability to innovate is its continued effort to assess, analyze, and learn from failure, processes quintessential for innovation. One cannot but feel discouraged thinking about the U.S. inability to learn from its national security failures, and repeating similar mistakes several times over. A worsening threat environment could end up catching up with the U.S. lackadaisical approach to its weapon development, hopefully not before it is impossible to prevail. The book is a must-read for any national security practitioners wanting to do better before it is too late.

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Herman Pirchner, Jr. and Ilan Berman, *The New Imperialists: How China, Russia and Iran are trying to remake the world*, American Foreign Policy Council (Estes Park, CO: Armin Lear Press, Inc., 2025), 112 pp.

The United States today faces a dangerous consortium of adversaries, acting independently and in concert, to undermine American security and global interests. This consortium, often referred to as an "Axis of Authoritarians," consists primarily of Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea. Understanding the historical and cultural roots that motivate the aggressive behavior of these state actors is the first step toward developing sound American foreign and national security policies that can effectively deter and counter their malicious machinations.

The New Imperialists serves this purpose. Written by two of the foremost experts in the field—Herman Pirchner, the founding President of the American Foreign Policy Council, and Ilan Berman, Senior Vice President of the American Foreign Policy Council—the book clearly and comprehensively explains the worldviews of these authoritarian powers and how their histories influence the behavior of these anti-Western regimes.

Pirchner and Berman are on solid ground when describing what motivates the imperial drives of the Chinese and Russian leaderships. They note that "No other country in the world can match China's thousand-year history of imperialism," citing Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) as an effort by China "to establish an empire of dependence with itself at the center." Indeed, although BRI now encompasses agreements with more than 140 countries, some countries that have been lured into the BRI debt trap have had second thoughts about the wisdom of ceding sovereignty or control over critical national infrastructures to China and expanding Chinese investments in their national economies. For example, both Italy and

the Philippines withdrew from BRI in 2023, and India and Brazil have expressed reservations about joining.

With respect to Russia, the authors note that “Moscow’s continued embrace of imperial ideology is unique among Europe’s major powers,” and characterize Russia’s aggressive moves against some of its former Soviet republics as evidence of a “reinvigorated drive for a Greater Slavic State.” Moscow’s “informational onslaught” has not only been directed against former Soviet republics such as Georgia, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and Moldova, but has also sought to undermine the sovereignty of and increase Russian influence in NATO states such as Poland, Finland, Denmark, Sweden, and Norway.

Iran is also described as having “an Islamist impulse for expansion” with the Ayatollah Khomeini’s 1979 revolution codifying a “religious-based imperialism.” The authors explain Tehran’s use of proxy forces and other means of influence to dominate several Middle East countries, including Syria and Iraq. The United Arab Emirates and Bahrain have also been under pressure from Iran. And Qatar is described as “a geopolitical and geoeconomic captive of the Islamic Republic.” The historical background presented by the authors succinctly explains the rationale for Iran’s moves to impinge on the sovereignty of its Gulf neighbors, its support for destabilizing proxy forces in the region, the malign intentions of the clerical Islamic leadership, and the desire to establish what is essentially a *Pax Irannica* in the region.

Despite the valuable historical and cultural contexts that underpin the authors’ assessments of the dangerous activities of these authoritarian regimes, occasionally real-world events change the geo-strategic landscape in unanticipated ways. Since the book’s publication, Operation Midnight Hammer and Operation Epic Fury (along with Israel’s Operation Roaring Lion) decapitated much of the Iranian leadership and decimated Iran’s military capabilities. Yet, concerns over the future direction of the Islamic Republic remain, as Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei was apparently replaced by his son, another staunch anti-Western Islamicist; the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) remains the dominant power center in the country; and the hoped for popular uprising to restore democracy has, at the time of this writing, yet to materialize.

The New Imperialists also assesses the role of “fellow travelers” North Korea and Venezuela in supporting Beijing, Moscow, and Tehran’s efforts to diminish U.S. global influence and create a world order decidedly in their favor. While North Korea remains solidly in the “Axis of Authoritarians,” the capture and extradition to the United States of Nicolas Maduro and the changes in Venezuela since the success of Operation Absolute Resolve and the application of the “Trump Corollary” to the Monroe Doctrine may alter the dynamic of Venezuela’s relationship with the United States, lessen Venezuela’s imperial appetite for much of neighboring Guyana, and diminish, if not eliminate, Caracas’ efforts to align with the anti-democratic forces seeking to overturn American primacy in world affairs.

Despite these recent changes in the geo-strategic landscape, the authors draw conclusions that are of enduring value for deterring aggression against U.S. interests. They correctly note that “The United States today faces the most complex deterrence challenge since the Cold War” and that successful deterrence “depends not only on raw military strength but on whether that power is believed to be useable and sustainable.” They also

argue that America's global alliances provide the United States with its "greatest asymmetric advantage," though they properly call for greater burden sharing among allies, asserting that Europe remains "dangerously reliant on American leadership and material." Finally, they argue that the United States "will need to tailor its strategies to the unique political, cultural, and military contexts of each of today's potential adversaries in order to shape their "internal political calculations." This tailored deterrence approach is perhaps the most significant and insightful recommendation that flows from the authors' analysis.

To implement such a strategy, *The New Imperialists* recommends common sense actions, including adopting a "whole-of-nation" approach to deterrence, including mobilizing the U.S. defense industrial base and reversing the drastic decline in U.S. public diplomacy and messaging to counter adversary disinformation. It is not too late to push back against the coordinated efforts of America's adversaries, but time is growing short.

Pirchner and Berman have performed a public service in clearly explaining the imperialist tendencies of America's most pernicious adversaries and what must be done to counter them. Hopefully, their analysis and the recommendations that flow from it will not fall on deaf ears.

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