

## Book Reviews

*Head Strong: How Psychology is Revolutionizing War* by Michael D. Matthews. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014 (262 pages, cloth).

*Reviewed by Charles D. Allen  
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As the United States military reexamines the operational domains of land, sea, and air in the twenty-first century and has recently expanded to include space and cyber domains, perhaps the most important domain is the human one. Most would agree that war is an intensely human endeavor whose impact is psychological as well as social—hence the increased emphasis on the human dimension of military service and warfare. Prospective readers might be leery, however, of a book whose subtitle claims that one thing is revolutionizing something as complex and consequential as war. The title, *Head Strong*, may have been purposely chosen to mimic the “Army Strong” tagline of the twenty-first century and accordingly may dissuade some readers. That “one thing,” however, embraces the human domain and has implications for our future as a species.

Given this context, there are few authors as qualified to review this subject as military psychologist Michael D. Matthews. A professor of engineering psychology at the United States Military Academy at West Point, he is a researcher, educator-scholar, and prolific author. He is also a leader in academia, having served as the president of the American Psychological Association’s Society for Military Psychology. In this book, Matthews sets himself the very ambitious goal of not only conveying the impact of the behavioral and social sciences on historical and current manifestations of war, but also projecting the impact of psychological science on the conduct of war in 2050. In doing so, his presentation is neither pedantic nor pedestrian. In fact, both his style and substance result

in a treatise that is accessible to a broad audience of academics, military practitioners, and the public interested in military affairs.

Military readers will be very familiar with the use of psychology for aptitude testing in the assessment and selection of members into the military. Matthews has firsthand experience as a young U.S. Air Force officer and in research projects involving West Point and foreign military academy cadets. Civilians will be interested in the examination of combat trauma and stress as well as how the U.S. Army addresses posttraumatic stress by building resiliency through its Comprehensive Soldier Fitness Program. Academics have plenty to consider with emerging research from cognitive science, neuroscience, epigenetics, and cybernetics, as well as other fields. In some of his forecasts, Matthews's projections are more scientific reality than science fiction, as in the areas of advanced prosthetics, simulations, and the application of new technologies. His focus on developing competent leaders of character applies to organizations in routine circumstances, as well as those *in extremis* dealing with the danger of harm and death. While one chapter projects the leadership traits and competencies needed to develop "Pattons for 2050," these attributes and talents might be more important as we seek strategic leaders more in the mold of George Marshall, Dwight Eisenhower, or Colin Powell, rather than Patton—those with the cognitive and interpersonal skills to lead our future U.S. military.

Of particular interest to this reviewer was Matthews's discussion of the ethics of scholars lending support to activities that can cause human suffering. A discomfiting section of the book discusses making members of our society more effective "adaptive killers" by changing "their belief structure" and teaching them "not to have guilt or excessive remorse" about killing (p. 187).

In the past decade, the community of anthropologists has drawn a professional line in the sand and decried the use of Human Terrain Systems teams for operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. Matthews addresses this directly: "Some might argue that such training [for adaptive killing] is unethical. I would argue that as long as our political leaders and the world situation results (sic) in the need to employ soldiers to kill the enemy, it is unethical *not* to employ psychological science to help them do so more effectively . . ." (p. 187; emphasis in original).

In several instances throughout the book, Matthews traverses the boundary between scientist and philosopher as he proffers commentary on political decisions that led to the military operations of the past decade and the resulting consequences for military service members.

Rather than a staid literature review of the field of military psychology, he provides insights into the experiences of service members, highlighting the impact on individuals while in uniform and as they reintegrate into society. Accordingly, the implications of war and peace require the prudent study of human behavior—hence the value of this book. *Head Strong* is an important contribution to those who seek to learn more about military psychology and consider its application not only to military service members but also to society in general.

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*Conscientious Objectors in Israel: Citizenship, Sacrifice, Trials of Fealty* by Erica Weiss. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014 (204 pages; cloth).

*Reviewed by Hadar Aviram*  
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Deviating from the bulk of conscientious objection scholarship, which focuses on questions of philosophy and legal doctrine, Erica Weiss's book offers a careful and detailed ethnography of two groups of conscientious objectors to military service in Israel: Combatants for Peace, a group of former combat soldiers now refusing to engage in reserve service and touring the country to provide "confessions" and personal testimonies of their experiences as enforcers of the occupation in the Palestinian territories, and New Profile, a far-left feminist organization protesting against the militarization of Israeli society.

Weiss sets her examination of these movements against the backdrop of the Israeli ethos of sacrifice, backed by an ardently Zionist mainstream. Her analysis weaves together cultural and religious themes with practical concerns: the sacrifices of military service (the potential risk to life and health involved in military service, glorified in Israeli culture, as well as the less explicit sacrifice of conscience in submitting to the state's will) versus the sacrifices involved in refusal—namely, the waiver of the instrumental rights and cultural prestige acquired in Israeli society through military service.

While Weiss does not go into social movement theory in depth, she astutely uses the contrast between the two groups she studies to highlight important differences in their strategy and messaging. Both groups enjoy a status of privilege: Combatants for Peace are able to leverage