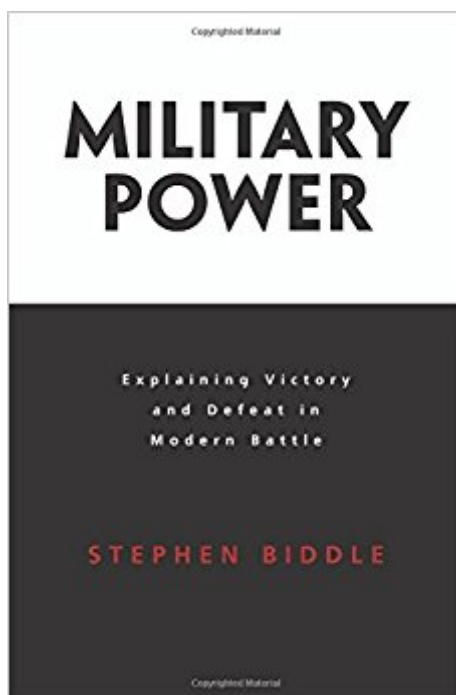


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# Military Power: Explaining Victory And Defeat In Modern Battle



## Synopsis

In war, do mass and materiel matter most? Will states with the largest, best equipped, information-technology-rich militaries invariably win? The prevailing answer today among both scholars and policymakers is yes. But this is to overlook force employment, or the doctrine and tactics by which materiel is actually used. In a landmark reconception of battle and war, this book provides a systematic account of how force employment interacts with materiel to produce real combat outcomes. Stephen Biddle argues that force employment is central to modern war, becoming increasingly important since 1900 as the key to surviving ever more lethal weaponry. Technological change produces opposite effects depending on how forces are employed; to focus only on materiel is thus to risk major error--with serious consequences for both policy and scholarship. In clear, fluent prose, Biddle provides a systematic account of force employment's role and shows how this account holds up under rigorous, multimethod testing. The results challenge a wide variety of standard views, from current expectations for a revolution in military affairs to mainstream scholarship in international relations and orthodox interpretations of modern military history. *Military Power* will have a resounding impact on both scholarship in the field and on policy debates over the future of warfare, the size of the military, and the makeup of the defense budget.

## Book Information

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Book Award, U.S. Army War College Foundation Winner of the 2005 Koopman Prize, Institute for Operations Research and the Management Sciences Winner of the 2004 Huntington Prize, Olin Institute at Harvard "Superlatives hardly do this book justice. It simultaneously makes major contributions in political science, military history, social science methodology, and contemporary policy debates. Stephen Biddle comprehensively and convincingly dismantles two of the most important literatures in international relations theory in the United States: realism and the offence-defense balance."--Ted Hopf, *International History Review* "Stephen Biddle has written perhaps the best volume on the causes of battlefield victory and defeat in a generation. . . . This is a seminal work on an issue of critical importance."--Spencer D. Bakich, *Virginia Quarterly Review* "Biddle's focus is on medium--and high--intensity land war; he combines a sophisticated formal model with analysis of critical case studies of actual battles. His argument has important implications for the structure of all modern military forces and shows persuasively that troops skilled in executing the modern system, not high-tech weapons alone, assure victory. It is a major achievement."--Choice "Stephen Biddle has written a worthy book on the never-ending debate over why land wars are won and lost. It contributes to the academic literature, and his policy judgments deserve attention. . . . It is well worth reading, owning, and remembering."--Richard L. Kugler, *Perspectives on Politics* "Stephen Biddle's *Military Power* deserves serious attention from military historians. *Military Power* makes a powerful argument that has redefined thinking within political science and policy circles on why armies win battles. . . . Biddle has produced an outstanding work that addresses a question central to historians, political scientists, and policy-makers."--Carter Malkasian, *Journal of Military History*

"Steve Biddle may be the best American defense analyst of his generation, and this book is quite possibly his career masterpiece to date. Few are as well qualified as Biddle to weave together vivid descriptions of the modern battlefield, clear explanations of historical lessons, a detailed understanding of defense technology, and a sophisticated use of military models and war games. Biddle does all these things, helping the reader understand modern warfare more than does any other book on the market. His argument about trends in warfare transcends the popular theory that a revolution in military affairs is now underway. He replaces this theory with a more convincing, more historical, and less technology-obsessed view of the modern battlefield."--Michael O'Hanlon, Senior Fellow, Brookings Institution "Stephen Biddle's *Military Power* is one of the most important contributions to strategic studies in recent decades. Presenting a very powerful case for a very surprising argument on a very important question, it will be controversial in some quarters, but critics

will be hard-pressed to refute the case."--Richard K. Betts, Columbia University, author of *Military Readiness* "Fascinating, precisely written, indeed, brilliant, *Military Power* is among the most important books ever published on modern warfare. Stephen Biddle fundamentally rethinks the causes of victory and defeat in modern war and challenges almost the entire corpus of scholarship on assessing force capability and the role of offense and defense in determining war outcomes. Presenting his argument with power, balance, and subtlety, he synthesizes many partial historical explanations and provides a basis for understanding why so many 'rules of thumb' and other explanations are misleading. A landmark work."--Lynn Eden, Stanford University, author of *Whole World on Fire* --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

An extremely important book, one of the best analyses of the efficacy of military power I have encountered. The author argues convincingly that the crucial variable determining the outcome of battles is not so much the difference in power or the difference in weaponry, etc. but the espousal of the "modern doctrine". A detailed evaluation of the outcome of Operation Michael and even more so the unexpected and counterintuitive outcome of Operation Goodwood bears out the author's claims.

Prof Terry Tucker, Senior Doctrine Developer, Saudi Arabian NG Modernization Program; The author presents a balanced, provocative and well presented case for how victory or defeat occurs in battle. This book is designed for both the technical numbers kind of person and also the less technical. The chapters can be read as a stand alone or you can also go through the entire book. Either way it has immense value. The thesis of this book is that force employment, or the doctrine and tactics by which forces are used in combat is centrally important. This book is great reading, is controversial in its presentation but clearly provides both empirical and quantitative analysis to support his position. **THIS BOOK IS A MUST READ.**

I was a history major in college and am a Vietnam-era veteran. Dr Biddle's work is perhaps too complex for most other than professional soldiers or academics, but it gave me an insight into our armed forces and into the involvement of the United States in the various wars during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. This is a book that involves both strategy and international relations. I think it would be of interest to military professionals (Biddle was on the faculty of the U. S. Army War College in Carlisle, PA), historians, academics, and those interested in international relations.

Biddle's main thesis is that past a certain point force employment is more relevant to military

capability than technology, and he does a good job reviewing historical cases. Moreover, he breaks down the modern underpinnings of force employment into very basic, easily understandable mechanics. This thesis not only counters much of the public's wisdom concerning military capability but apparently much of the wisdom among many members of the US armed services. I'm not sure that the thesis holds up as well in regards to air and naval warfare, but that does not seem to detract from the overall conclusions drawn in the book.

The author's main thesis is that technology and material factors are less important than how force is applied (or 'force employment' as is Biddle's preferred phrase). Biddle argues that the US military (particularly post Gulf Wars) is too technology focused and that the "Revolution in Military Affairs" is placing too much emphasis on material factors to the detriment of doctrine. He argues that the basic military doctrine which evolved in late WWI (which he terms the "Modern System") is still key to victory and technology has modified some of the specifics of how it is applied, but has not changed the fundamental doctrine in a 'revolutionary' way. Overall, he gives an interesting analysis (and a semi-predictive model) of how proper application of this "modern system" influences the outcome of battles. He focuses on how the Modern System includes the use of dispersion, cover, concealment, small independent units, and combined arms in a very interesting way. The book is largely a rebuttal to the more extreme arguments made by advocates of the Revolution in Military Affairs, and I feel that sometimes the author overplays his arguments to counter the RMA advocates.

It was a gift for my daughter. She was happy with it!

Stephen Biddle attempts to make the case that force employment methods and associated human skills are a more important determinant of military success than high technology. Of course, this argument runs contrary to most thinking in the US military establishment, where a techno-centric viewpoint reigns supreme. As a 30-year participant in the military systems development process in a number of capacities, I happen to agree with most aspects of Biddle's argument. However, I don't think that reading his book necessarily would have made me a believer. Also, I think his argument is more applicable to ground warfare than to sea or air operations. The argument presented in Biddle's book is actually an expanded version of a similar position advanced in a Military Operations Research paper he co-authored in 2002 titled, The Interaction of Skill and Technology in Combat. For people interested in this subject and how future military capabilities should be structured, Biddle's book is well worth the read. However, making any headway against the conventional

wisdom with respect to military concepts or the big bucks involved in weapons procurement is likely to be an uphill slog.

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