

Book Reviews

DRUGS AND WAR

Shooting Up: A Short History of Drugs and War

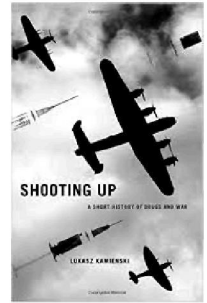
By Łukasz Kamiński

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It is rather rare to do a *Parameters* book review of a military-related work initially written in Polish—in this instance, the new work *Shooting Up*. In regard to this review, it has turned out to be an extremely fortuitous experience. The original manuscript published in 2014 by Łukasz Kamiński, a Polish academic, has been painstakingly translated into English by the author and two associates for publication by Oxford University Press, a prestigious publishing house.

At more than 400 pages in length, this in-depth chronological study of the subject of “psychopharmacology in warfare” is a unique document. Indeed, very few works so far have attempted to explore the historical impact of drug use in warfare and the co-evolution of the two over time. The book, influenced by an “interpretivist” epistemology, social constructivism, and the concept of war as “an essentially social and cultural phenomenon” (xxv-xxvi) is composed of a preface, an acknowledgments listing, 14 chapters, a conclusion, an epilogue, a notes section, a bibliography, and an index. The chapters are organized into three themes grouped into the premodern through the Second World War, the Cold War, and the contemporary periods. Chapter foci include the Napoleonic era, the Opium Wars, the American Civil War, the Colonial Wars, the First and Second World Wars, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the Red Army in Afghanistan, our present conflicts with irregular combatants (including intoxicated child soldiers), and contemporary American armed forces. The work is extremely well researched and well referenced with the inclusion of an extensive bibliography.

Given US societal—and military (as a federal agency of that society)—perspectives on illicit (recreational) and licit (medically prescribed) narcotics use, this significant book—exploring the “taboo subject” of psychoactive compounds (xxiv)—can be analyzed on two levels. The first is the detrimental level of addictive substance abuse, including alcohol and harder illicit commodities such as heroin and cocaine, upon military organizations and the societies they represent. Second, is the beneficial level of licit (and at times illicit) alcohol and narcotics use—such as enhanced performance, as a psychological coping mechanism, and as a reward for troops—upon military organizations. Of course, a vast gray area exists between these levels of use, along with the fact a psychoactive compound may have both simultaneous positive and negative effects upon soldiers at the same time. There is an interplay between what may be beneficial for military operations and what would later be detrimental with regard to societal costs, stemming from high addiction levels of veterans returning home—and this is also an underlying theme of the work.



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