

Book Guide

Between Threats and War

In this book, CFR Fellow Micah Zenko examines thirty-six discrete military operations carried out by the United States and evaluates U.S. policy choices, recommending ways in which limited military force may be applied in the future. Teaching notes by the author.

Summary

When confronted with a persistent foreign policy problem that threatens U.S. interests, and that cannot be adequately addressed through economic or political pressure, American policy and opinion makers have increasingly resorted to recommending the use of limited military force—that is, enough force to attempt to resolve the problem while minimizing U.S. military deaths, local civilian casualties, and collateral damage. These recommendations have ranged from the bizarre, such as a Predator missile strike to kill Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe or assassinate Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez; to the unwise, the preemptive bombing of North Korean ballistic missile sites; to the demonstrably practical, air raids into Bosnia and Somalia and drone strikes in Yemen and Pakistan.

However, even though they have been a regular feature of America's uses of military force through four successive administrations, the efficacy of these discrete military operations (DMOs) remains largely unanalyzed, leaving unanswered the important question of whether they have succeeded in achieving their intended military and political objectives. This book examines thirty-six DMOs undertaken by the United States over the past twenty years, in order to discern why they were used, if they achieved their objectives, and what determined their success or failure. In the process, Zenko both evaluates U.S. policy choices and recommends ways in which limited military force can be better used in the future. The insights and recommendations made will be increasingly relevant to decisionmaking and predictions about the development of American grand strategy and future military policy. This book, along with the teaching notes, discussion questions, and suggestions for further projects, is ideal for courses on U.S. foreign policy and international affairs, security studies, military history, and counterterrorism.

Discussion and Essay Questions

Courses on U.S. Foreign Policy and International Affairs

1. What are discrete military operations (DMOs) and how do they fit within the United States' foreign policy toolbox?
2. What competing interests were at stake in the decision not to strike Khurmal, Iraq in 2002? What does the negative case demonstrate about foreign policy decisionmaking in the U.S. government?
3. How can U.S. policymakers reconcile the political pressure to "do something" in response to threats or terror attacks with the difficulty of implementing a comprehensive government-wide strategy?

Courses on Security Studies

1. What differences explain the divergence between civilian and military views on limited uses of force?
2. Are the three political categories of compellence, deterrence, and punishment sufficient to assess the efficacy of discrete military operations? What alternative categories might you suggest?
3. Are there situations in which discrete military operations are justified despite, or even bolstered by, the lack of a comprehensive strategy toward the country in which they occur?

Courses on Military History

1. Why have discrete military operations become more prevalent since the end of the Cold War?
2. What are the structural differences in the way civilian and military officials are trained to make decisions? How has this training changed over time?
3. What recent and historical events have shaped the military's perception of the utility of limited force?

Courses on Counterterrorism

1. How and why have discrete military operations emerged as a counterterrorism tool since the terrorist attacks of September 11?
2. Based on Zenko's argument in *Between Threats and War*, what is the effectiveness of discrete military operations as a counterterrorism tactic? Based on current events in countries like Pakistan, Somalia, and Yemen, do you judge DMOs to be effective?
3. How should policymakers weigh the costs and benefits of targeted killings? What specific factors should be taken into consideration when deciding on a DMO like the one in Yemen that targeted Qaed Salim Sinan al-Harethi?

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