

Boot, Max. *The Savage Wars of Peace: Small Wars and the Rise of American Power*. New York: Basic Books, 2003. 472pp.

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Max Boot, a senior fellow for National Security Studies at the Council for Foreign Relations, is an expert in US foreign policy and military history.

The book casts a look upon American small wars in Eastern Asia, China, Latin America, and many other areas around the world. It, in line with Boot's interests, focuses on the history of American wars outside the country, specifically during the 20th century. However, its arguments can logically be extended to the Iraq War, as Boot starts his book by telling the story of the twin towers falling down as if "a Lego toy under a child's fist." Boot expresses his view about the 9/11 disaster as the beginning of a lengthy exploration of the American way of war. Under scrutiny are two major ways of war within the paradigmatic ideals of PAX Americana: big war, vs. small war.

The total war refers to those, like the Second World War, in which trained armies fight on real battlefields. However, small wars are "campaigns undertaken to suppress rebellions and guerrilla warfare...where organized armies struggle against opponents who will not meet them in the open field" (p.xv). In these wars there are only "areas to be controlled, civilians to be protected, hidden foes to be subdued" (p.282). The book's last paragraph invites American decision-makers to "fight the savage wars of peace...to enlarge the empire of liberty" (p.352). For Boot, imperial overstretch is a milder danger in comparison to the "danger of under-commitment and lack of confidence" (p.352).

The last chapter of the book (pp.336-352) is an attempt to categorise US small wars into 8 groups of Boot's own creation; it would be interesting to know whether the Iraq War fits into any of these categories.

"Wars without a declaration of war" are waged under the will of the executive thus ruling out the need for any congressional jurisdiction or public consent. The Iraq War does not belong to this category as President Bush sought congressional permission and public consent by delivering speeches and beseeching help from the media

"Wars without exit strategies" reflect the postponing strategy of the US Army in exiting the invaded region, as in case of the Philippines, which they left 44 years later. The Iraq War can be a good example of this, since now it is nearly 4 years that the American troops have been trying, though against growingly sceptical and hostile public and Congressional opinion, to achieve their goals there.

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The next is “wars that are fought less than wholeheartedly”; “to free hostages, to exact revenge, overthrow a dictator, etc” (p.337). Professional soldiers are not satisfied with such war generally (p.283). In Iraq, the soldiers find no rewards or dignity.

“Wars in which American soldiers act as social workers” defines the US Army as the agents of “disaster relief.” Boot believes that usually after big wars have finished, US soldiers are needed to ensure obedience. While according to Boot “only boots on the ground can guarantee a lasting peace” (p.338), Iraq has proved the opposite.

For “wars in which America gets involved in other countries’ internal affairs”, there are ample examples with relative success, such as in Latin America at the beginning of the 20th century. It includes the Iraq War since the US effort has been to found a government and police the country, albeit with little success.

“Wars without a vital national interest” exist in the post-Cold-War period. They represent the US either claiming international rights, or pursuing the creation of a new world order. The vital national interests in Iraq are to suppress terrorists and avoid the threat of it being invaded from outside again.

“Wars without significant popular support” suit the Iraq War. The widespread demonstrations before invading Iraq and during its early days are good evidence.

Has the American Army involved itself in “a war in which US troops serve under foreign command”? There has always been unwillingness among American troops to do so (p.341). This was the same in case of the Iraq War also.

Therefore, the Iraq War resembles some and distinguishes itself from the rest of Boot’s American ways of war. He believes it is a small war “to protect American life and property” (p.343). And the great satisfaction, according to him, might be “to see the wrongdoers punished” (p.344). However, minimum troops, kindness, sympathy and tolerance are absent from the Iraq War’s scene.

This war could be even categorised under a new category (other than the 8 categories by Boot): *wars in which the American state and nation feel confused*; this category could clarify the Americans’ current situation in Iraq. Both the US government and its people have confused positions on it; divided views of the members of the Congress over the issue of sending more troops to Iraq is one vivid case. Also, opinion polls show that while a number of Americans advocate the Iraq War, a growing faction of them (especially the soldiers’ families) do not support it. This is the state of confusion that might be of no help to Americans in general.