Stacey Gutkowski. *Secular War: Myths of Religion, Politics and Violence.* **London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2014. ISBN: 978-17-80-76535-8. Pp. 320. Hardcover. £68.00.**

Carl von Clausewitz has been no stranger to criticism post-9/11; the centrality of *Politik* to his ideas on warfare was a prime target for those who argued that politics did not account for other bellicose motivations, including culture and religion. Debates in Strategic Studies and International Relations rage about whether or not politics are a timeless component of warfare or merely the one that was most relevant to Clausewitz, with wars of religion as key examples in this line of criticism.[1] Setting the merits of this argument aside, it is clear to see that much attention has been paid in recent years to so-called religious warfare, but little, if any, has been paid to its logical counterpart: what Stacey Gutkowski terms 'secular war'.

Rather than looking at issues such as how evangelical Christianity influences American conservative security policy or what effect extreme variants of Islam might have on suicide bombers, Gutkowski focuses instead on the impact that secularism has on the security strategy of an increasingly areligious society. Gutkowski looks specifically at the British participation in the 9/11 wars (Afghanistan, Iraq, the larger War on Terror, and domestic security) through the lenses of both religion and the lack thereof, highlighting certain 'myths' about religion that she believes exist in the largely secular United Kingdom (UK) and the way in which these myths drive security policy. She argues that the British secular *habitus* (using Pierre Bourdieu's terminology) was initially not equipped to deal with issues of religion and Islam in the aftermath of 9/11, and this contributed to many blunders in Iraq and Afghanistan and at home. However, the UK was able to adapt, gaining a better understanding of these issues and changing its policy to accommodate this new understanding.

But this process was not a one-way street: the 9/11 wars also prompted greater reflection in the UK about the role of religion and secularism in British society.

At the heart of this argument, however, lie the titular 'myths' that Gutkowski claims inform the British secular *habitus*. The primary myths that she identifies are as follows: first, '[t]hat Westerners are not the kind of irrational people to fight wars in the name of religion' and that war 'should only be fought over the politics of the state';[2] second, '[t]hat non-Westerners have a tendency towards forms of religion that can be dangerous or unruly' which 'demands the firm hand of the state or even "the West" to keep them in line';[3] and third, '[t]hat, with the exception of the Vatican, it is better for religion to be confined to and kept under the control of states' for the good of the 'global order'.[4] She links the genesis of each myth with 'three particular "war moments": intra-European wars after the Peace of Westphalia; the European imperial "small wars"; and the development of the current international order in the wake of the Second World War.'[5] Using the example of Northern Ireland (1968-75), Gutkowski shows how these historically-conditioned myths operated in British security policy both during the Troubles and then again in the early days after 9/11, creating three tendencies in this policy area: marginalizing the role of religion as cover for politics; seeking political settlements through the guarantee of the state; and seeing religious leaders as important but tangential in the settlement process.[6] All of these tendencies, she argues, can be shown working in the early years of the 9/11 wars when the UK faced many setbacks.

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[1] Perhaps the most trenchant critic in this regard is historian John Keegan. See: J. Keegan, *A History of Warfare*, Pimlico, 1994.

[2] S. Gutkowski, *Secular War: Myths of Religion, Politics and Violence*, I.B. Taurus, 2014, p. 37.

[3] *Ibid*, p. 38.

[4] *Ibid*.

[5] *Ibid*.

[6] *Ibid*, pp. 55-56.

Gutkowski's work is an important interdisciplinary study that is relevant to many key debates in Strategic Studies and International Relations, but also helpful for those more interested in Foreign and Security Policy Analysis. As mentioned above, it fits squarely, if incidentally, into the fundamental Clausewitzian debate about the nature of war and strategy. It shines an even brighter light onto the way in which religion or the lack thereof, in addition to other cultural factors, can shape why and how actors go to war. Furthermore, her utilization of Bourdieu's concept of 'hysteresis (or time lag)'[7] to illustrate the learning curve that policymakers face when confronted with fundamentally new circumstances should be of interest to those working on areas of foreign and security policy decision making in response to crises. But perhaps most significantly, Gutkowski's study illuminates how *we as 'Western' scholars* might think about warfare, pointing out the potential biases faced by those who have spent a significant amount of time in the UK or similarly secular societies. Like the military officers and policymakers interviewed in the book, scholars reading this publication may well view warfare through the lens of these same historically-conditioned myths.

However, this leads to one potential flaw of Gutkowski's work: an underestimation of the transatlantic differences in 'secularism'. Although Gutkowski takes great pains to stress the fundamental differences between American and British/European patterns of secularism, the former largely characterised as the 'freedom to' practice religion and the latter as the 'freedom from' religious practices,[8] this difference seems central to her argument. It is possible that, if she had conducted a similar study on the American experience, she would reach startlingly different conclusions, even though the United States suffered similar setbacks in the same time period in Afghanistan and Iraq. The myths that she identifies have been held by the British because of their own historical experiences, and she would have to drastically expand her argument to convincingly

claim that they are held by the Americans to the same extent. However, this qualm with the potential application of her study does not negate the important contribution that her work makes by opening up the idea of 'secular warfare' in the first place.

A second criticism has more to do with focus and style, which is seemingly trivial but ultimately important when undertaking interdisciplinary work. As Gutkowski is charting new intellectual territory, it is understandable that new and exciting lines of inquiry and argument emerge. However, this adds up to a somewhat unfocused narrative that makes it difficult to identify the central arguments from the emerging or tangential ones. In addition, the language that she employs is laden with jargon. The great appeal of Gutkowski's work is its inderdisciplinarity and broad appeal across the social sciences and possibly into the humanities, but with this potential comes a responsibility to use language that is easily understood in a wide range of discourses. This is by no means a fatal flaw, and hopefully it will not hinder the book's reception beyond the confines of War Studies.

One final question to pose regarding Gutkowski's work is to what extent recent events in Iraq challenge her thesis. Among the myths already discussed, Gutkowski also challenges the 'myth' of the Clash of Civilizations, arguing that the threats of 'jihadist political Islamism' and 'non-jihadist political Islamism' have not materialized in the way feared by many.[9] Indeed, 'the neo-caliphate has not been realized'.[10] Although far from the caliphate envisioned by so-called Islamic State, this rapid development might lend more credibility to an idea that she could confidently dismiss less than a year ago.

Ultimately *Secular War* is an important interdisciplinary contribution that challenges assumptions made not just by British policymakers but perhaps also by actors in the wider politico-military and academic discourses concerned with warfare. Gutkowski suggests it is not just that the religious fanatic 'other' is

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[7] *Ibid*, p. 17.
[8] *Ibid*, p. 25.

[9] *Ibid*, p. 18.
[10] *Ibid*.

motivated by religion; rather, it is also the case that our secular societies are conditioned by a (Protestant) Christian past and an increasingly areligious present. This is a worthy and crucial line of inquiry for future scholarship.

Anne Miles
King's College London