

Book review

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Łukasz Kamieński, Shooting Up: A Short History of Drugs and War.

(New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), hardcover, xxix+381 pp.

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Abstract: From alcohol to LSD, Łukasz Kamieński takes readers on a unique 300-page journey through the history of warfare as seen through the prism of drug use. Beginning with the Greek city-states and ending with the contemporary consumption in the American Armed Forces, the text overflows with witty anecdotes, eloquent prose, and heart-wrenching realities found on drug-fueled battlefields. Drawing on literature, unclassified military and pharmaceutical studies, and private accounts of soldiers, *Shooting Up* is brilliant work that needs to find itself on every political science and history undergraduate reading list.

Keywords: drugs, pharmaceuticals, medicine, war, military history, child soldiers

Be it opium for the ancient Greek warrior or marijuana for the contemporary American soldier, narcotics play an important role in the way combatants kill on, survive in, and cope with the battlefield. Professor and military historian, Łukasz Kamieński gives readers a thoughtful and well-researched glimpse into this often-neglected aspect of war: pharmacologically enhanced militaries. His prose is direct, filled with insightful anecdotes, and, above all, takes a sweeping historical look—starting with the premodern times and ending with the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq—at the consequences that narcotics have on the mental and physical wellbeing of soldiers.

Kamieński's subtle weaving of the Greek idea that a hero is both needed by the people while simultaneously being dangerous to them is refreshing. The motif comes up numerous times throughout the text be it the ferocity of the Zulu warriors or the dedication of the Afghan mujahedeen, and provides the overall narrative with a moral complexity that makes the reader recognize that drugs are both a vice and a benefit to those who see and do things that normal men and women can never really understand. A curious quote from Jonathan Shay: "Achilles harmed the Greek army during the war; Odysseus harmed his people after the war," (Kamieński, 43) rings throughout the chapters on the Vietnam and USSR-Afghan Wars. The horrors seen by the soldiers who fought in these conflicts stay with them, so to calm their nerves and, in some way, heal their shattered psyche, they turn to drugs during their deployment. The emptiness and stillness of their post-deployment life as civilians make these same men and women yearn for a gulp from the river Lethe, which is exemplified by downers such as heroin. The author understands this, and it is a wonderful surprise that the subject—often backed up with numerous statistics—comes up several times throughout.

The role of alcohol in combat cannot be understated. What the author calls "the vodka ethos" is a chilling reminder that what is sometimes perceived as a habit, norm or "integral part of the national character," as is the case in Russia, is just excessive alcohol consumption. The quick gulp of "liquid courage" both in the killing fields and on-base grounds is a result of a horrid duality of bloodshed and boredom. This is best exemplified by the examination of the vodka-fueled Russian-front during the two World Wars, the rum-filled decks of the British warships during the Napoleonic Wars, or the whisky-drenched battlefields of the American Civil War.

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In part two of his work, titled "The Cold War," Kamieński turns to a subject that could have been explored in much more detail, but which gives the latter part of the book, a very sinister feel, and that is the role of the pharmaceutical sector in the production and distribution of drugs to soldiers. While the author mentions government issued drugs in the section on the two World Wars, it is not until the discussion of the Korean War that the reader begins noticing the bread crumb trail left by Kamieński, which culminates with us asking, "Why did governments provide drugs to its soldiers?" Kamieński is quick to answer: performance, and while drug use is officially discouraged by the rules and guidelines of most militaries, the social subsystem encourages their use itself, whose goal is the creation of the perfect pharmacological army. This is made more chilling when the author mentions that the "Army Chemical Corps regularly received samples of 'rejects' from pharmaceutical companies." (178) A truly thought-provoking line that makes President Dwight D. Eisenhower's speech on the military-industrial complex, and the modern opiate crisis, that much more potent.

The most heart-breaking aspect of Kamieński's work is the chapter on child soldiers. The author mentions that this part of the book was the hardest to write and research, and it shows. The relationship between children and their battlefield commanders is akin to that of a junkie and their dealer. The horror that Kamienski express in the brief twenty pages on the subject is powerful. The section that really stands out among the chapter that dives into the bloodshed in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, or Sierra Leone, was that of the "hit boys" of Mexico, not only because of how malicious the whole aspect of drug-fueled child assassins is, but because it is happening today, in what we often consider, the most moral of times. This is a gut-wrenching chapter and one that will take a lot out of the reader.

The biggest problem with the text is its length, it comes in at just over 300 pages, excluding notes and bibliography. While the length seems adequate, one gets the feeling that a lot was either left or cut out completely. The text would benefit from additional editions and expansions, especially when it comes to premodern drug use, opium wars, and drug use during the Napoleonic campaign. However, what is here is adequate in providing an audience with an introduction to the meatier chapters on Vietnam, Afghanistan, and the World Wars. The text is a phenomenal introduction for any undergraduate political science or history program.

In the end, *Shooting Up* is a must-read for anyone interested in war studies, drug use, or addiction. The book is well-researched, the subject matter flows and references itself throughout, all the while, taking the reader on a journey into a bizarro world of the famous American mantra of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.