

H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences



Everett Carl Dolman. *Can Science End War?* New Human Frontiers Series. Malden: Polity Press, 2015. 200 pp. \$45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7456-8595-3; \$12.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7456-8596-0.

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Commissioned by Margaret Sankey

Political scientist Everett Carl Dolman examines the historical links between war and technology and speculates on the future of warfare in *Can Science End War?* He argues that science alone will not end war, and in fact, new technologies, such as nuclear weapons, have enabled increasingly destructive outcomes. “Science is the most promising route to a future of prosperity, equality, and peace,” he writes, “but its output will always be subject to cooption by those who see it in the surest route to political control and victory in war” (p. vi).

Dolman considers a two-thousand-year history of technological development driven by wartime imperatives, and notes that state support was given to research that might yield military gains. These stories suggest a technological determinism that some scholars might find dated, but the lineage might be useful for the popular audience for whom this book is intended. By the time Dolman gets to the twentieth century, he notes that “a few groups protested the military use of pure science” (p. 71). He is referring to the scientists who had participated in the Manhattan Project, which was not state co-option of an undefined “pure” science. This program was not financed for knowledge production but for the development of a weapon, and the regret of these actors begat a vast literature that laments the creation of the military-industrial complex.

Dolman tenuously claims that “science cannot abolish war because science has become war, and war become science” (p. 168). Instead, he suggests that the solution to war would be to eradicate its underlying causes, which he identifies as human aggressiveness and the existence of nondemocratic societies (because democracies rarely go to war with one another). For the most part, when Dol-

man writes “science,” he means “technology.” He does, however, point to the potential for medicine to end war in a rather shocking suggestion. That is, drug and behavioral therapies could be implemented to make humans less warlike. While he does not fully endorse eugenics and notes the potential for “horrifying results,” he does suggest it as an option, one that could be accomplished in the future by advances in bio- and nanotechnology (p. 85). He does not consider the irony of using such unethical means to an end.

He advocates for the use of “non-lethal weapons technology development” as a way of not ending war, but limiting it (p. 90). These technologies would disable or disrupt enemy technologies, or would temporarily dull the senses of combatants. Dolman fails to acknowledge that deterrence as a solution today is not any more viable than it was during the Cold War, when it instigated a decades-long arms race.

Dolman then discusses possible future military technologies, such as Internet-connected contact lenses, new Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs), and replicators. The possibilities for 3-D printing are considered both exciting and terrifying: “It may even be possible to print an atomic bomb. In your kitchen” (p. 115). He advocates for the use of space weapons, and also encourages commercialization of space. He might have made the argument that harnessing solar power to increase access to energy and resources might limit war through promoting widespread higher quality of life, but instead he discusses it in terms of national security. Coupled with attention given to the coming singularity, this work reads much like a futurist manifesto.

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