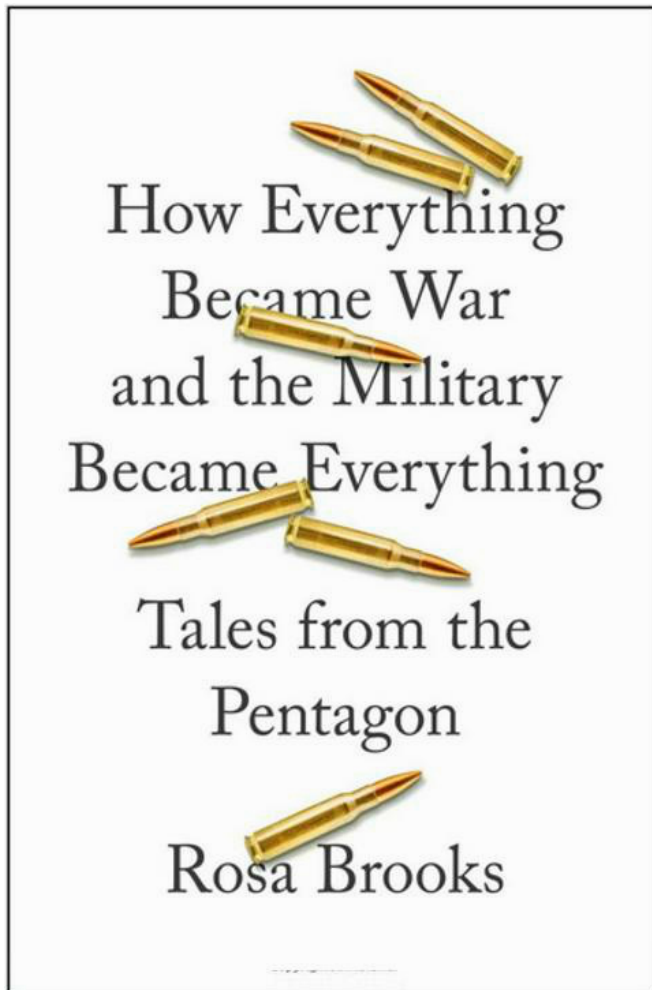


# 'War' a sobering look at military

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*"How Everything Became War and the Military Became Everything: Tales from the Pentagon"* by Rosa Brooks. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2016, 438 pages, \$29.95.



“For most of recorded history, humans have sought to draw sharp lines between war and peace,” Rosa Brooks explains near the beginning of *“How Everything Became War and the Military Became Everything: Tales from the Pentagon,”* her new exposé on how the U.S. military operates around the world. “Until less than a century ago, for instance, most Western societies maintained that wars should be formally ‘declared,’ take place upon clearly delineated battlefields and be fought by elaborately uniformed soldiers operating within specialized, hierarchical military organizations.”

“For most of us, the word ‘war’ still conjures up images of World War II, or at least Hollywood’s version of World War II: We think of tank battles on open plains or the D-Day scenes of ‘Saving Private Ryan,’” she continues a little later. “But the vast majority of modern military personnel today spend most of their time engaged in activities that bear little resemblance to those depicted in Hollywood films. Instead, they analyze lines of computer code in Virginia office buildings, build isolation wards in Ebola-ravaged Liberia, operate health clinics in rural Malaysian

villages, launch agricultural reform programs and small business development projects in Africa, train Afghan judges and parliamentarians, develop television soap operas for Iraqi audiences and conduct anti-piracy patrols off the Somali coast.”

So begins this exhaustive foray into the inner workings of the contemporary American military machine. It does not take long for the reader to get a clear sense of where Brooks is headed on this journey. She draws extensively from her service in the State Department as she weaves this intricate tale of how our dominance in international affairs has evolved over the past few decades – and not always in a positive direction. The military-industrial complex that had President Dwight D. Eisenhower so worried back in 1961 has not gone away; rather it has undergone a slow but steady metamorphosis into a form most Americans would no longer recognize or see as a threat. But as Brooks makes crystal clear, we should all be more cognizant – and concerned – about the role our military is increasingly playing in the affairs of other countries. In short, in our desire to further our

agenda, we are in danger of compromising the ideals and principles we are often quick to claim we are defending.

“I’m convinced that my former colleagues in the military, the Department of Defense and the intelligence community are good people, acting in good faith,” she writes in “Car Bombs and Radioactive Sushi,” the 17th chapter and one I found especially cautionary. “Despite my rule of law concerns, I trust them to act carefully and responsibly, doing their best to avoid mistakes and not abuse their power. But there are a lot of other people in the world I don’t trust at all – and when the United States asserts a unilateral right to use force in secret with little accountability outside the executive branch, we are essentially handing every repressive and unscrupulous regime in the world a playbook for how to violate sovereignty and literally get away with murder.”

The tome – and at 438 pages that is an apt description – is extensively researched, with 47 pages of source notes at the conclusion of the 19 chapters comprising the main text. Structurally, the narrative is arranged in five major sections: “Tremors,” “The New American Way of War,” “How We Got Here,” “Counting the Costs” and “Managing War’s Paradoxes.” Brooks approaches her subject matter from a variety of perspectives: historical, sociological, cultural, political and economic. The portrait she paints of the current way our government seems to exert its influence on the global stage is both enlightening and terrifying.

Brooks is a tenured law professor at Georgetown University Law Center as well as a senior fellow at the New America Foundation. She has a B.A. in history and literature from Harvard University, a master’s degree in social anthropology from Oxford University, where she was also a Marshall scholar, and a law degree from Yale Law School. Her resume includes stints as a columnist for the Los Angeles Times and Foreign Policy, and her articles have appeared in a wide variety of publications, including Harper’s Magazine and The Washington Post. Her previous books include “A Garden of Paper Flowers: An American at Oxford” and “Can Might Make Rights? Building the Rule of Law After Military Interventions,” which she co-wrote with Jane Stromseth and David Wippman.

For better or worse, the United States has taken it upon itself, ostensibly in the name of protecting our interests, defending our borders and reinforcing our security, to take any action we deem necessary to accomplish our self-serving goals and objectives – even though most Americans have had no input into what that mission entails. Indeed, most of my fellow citizens are blissfully unaware of what our military is doing throughout the world on a daily basis. The problem is that what we do “over there” seldom stays “over there.” Brooks makes a convincing case that when the U.S. government violates the right of other countries to determine their own destiny, the public should not be surprised when it discovers that the same tools used to intervene abroad are being employed against citizens on the home front. In fact, we are already seeing this with the implementation of domestic surveillance programs originally developed to help keep an eye on our adversaries.

Without a doubt, this is one of the most provocative and illuminating books I have had occasion to read in recent memory; in fact, several passages reminded me of George Orwell. As I made my way through the twists and turns of this immensely thought-provoking volume, however, it occurred to me that even Orwell would be frightened by much of what Brooks has to say. We urgently need a national dialogue on what should constitute the appropriate role of our armed forces and “How Everything Became War and the Military Became Everything” should be required reading for anyone who wants to be a part of the conversation.

*Reviewed by Aaron W. Hughey, Department of Counseling and Student Affairs, Western Kentucky University.*