

# CURRENT BOOKS

## FELLOWS' CHOICE

*Recent titles selected and reviewed by Fellows of the Wilson Center*

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**WAR SINCE 1945**  
by Michael Carver  
Putnam's, 1981  
322 pp. \$14.95

Chief of Britain's Defense Staff from 1973 to 1976, Field Marshall Lord Carver is a fine specimen of that fairly rare breed, the soldier-intellectual. The armed conflicts he dissects in this volume of succinct critiques have their roots in the dissolution of the British, French, or Japanese empires; he deliberately excludes perhaps the most significant conflict since 1945—the Chinese Civil War, which brought Mao Zedong and the Communists to power in 1949. For the most part, Carver shuns sweeping generalizations. Still, he labels the British success in Malaya “the perfect exemplar of . . . counter-insurgency warfare”—while avoiding, unlike many military historians, meaningless comparisons with the peculiar U.S. failure in Vietnam. And he condemns Britain's withdrawal from oil-rich Aden (Yemen) in 1967 as a loss of nerve costly to Western prosperity. France's two military disasters—Indochina and Algeria—each took more lives, Carver notes, than did Britain's six post-colonial campaigns. (But, then, France was more reluctant to yield to the winds of change and abandon its possessions.) In a curiously titled chapter, “American Adventures,” Carver provides one of the best concise appraisals of the Vietnam War's escalation, showing a fellow soldier's sympathy for General William Westmoreland. His summary of the Arab-Israeli wars, “Conventional Clashes,” is equally impressive, but he touts the efficacy of tank warfare too forcefully, particularly in light of the devastating effectiveness of antitank missiles during the 1973 October War. His major conclusion: “All these wars show that a quick reaction with sufficient force at the start may save a lot of trouble later.”

—Alistair Horne ('81)