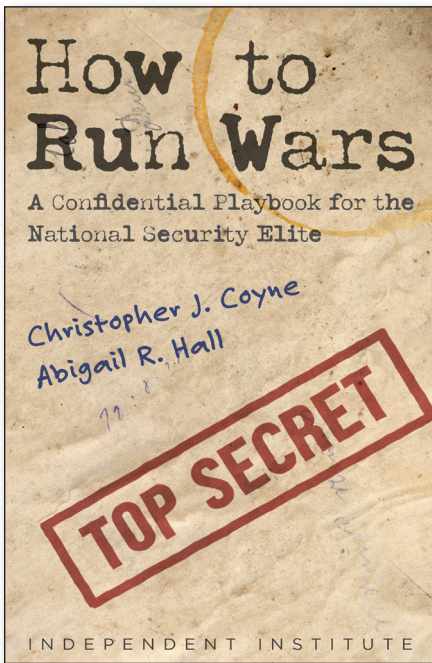


How to Run Wars

A Confidential Playbook for the National Security Elite

BY CHRISTOPHER J. COYNE AND ABIGAIL R. HALL



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Independent Institute

100 Swan Way

Oakland, CA 94621-1428

Phone: 510-632-1366

Fax: 510-568-6040

Toll-Free: 800-927-8733

Online: www.independent.org

Book Highlights

- **The national security community believes it knows how to govern better than ordinary citizens.** Christopher J. Coyne and Abigail R. Hall address their satirical work *How to Run Wars* to the national security elites, whom they refer to as the “world’s savior,” the “source of order,” the “fountainhead of freedom and liberty,” and even “the god of the state machinery responsible for solving the world’s ills.” Though the book is written in a satirical style, these designations reveal real information about the way the national security elites view their positions in society. Because of their self-perceptions of superiority, they believe that they alone are not merely *qualified* but *called* to run the world’s wars ... and all that that entails.
- **As Coyne and Hall demonstrate, the elites’ unchecked arrogance and ignorance make them vulnerable—not only to delusion, but also to catastrophic errors of judgment in the policy domains where they operate.** If national security elites want to protect their power and identity, Coyne and Hall contend, they must never allow the public to pull back the curtain on their operations. Of course, this entails a great deal of secrecy, lying, and elaborate coverups. Coyne and Hall warn that if elites fail to protect their reputations, the public will come to know them as they truly are: “not some all-powerful harbinger of peace, but a hubristic fraud, bumbling behind a curtain while desperately attempting to maintain an outward façade of control over the world that is, in reality, beyond the grasp of your control.” The stakes are high.
- **For the current arrangement of power—national security elites on top, ordinary citizens on bottom—sacrifices must be made.** You have to break a few eggs to make an omelet. Violence, torture, and death—for Americans and foreigners alike—are the necessary costs of this arrangement. In the minds of the national security elites, these sacrifices are justified and necessary “to preserve and expand freedom.” Others—not the elites themselves, of course—simply “*must* be willing to sacrifice” for the greater good. Throughout the book, however, Coyne and Hall show that these sacrifices not only *fail* to preserve and expand freedom but destroy it entirely.
- **The nature of these sacrifices—what they are, and how and why they are made—must never be revealed to the public.** Of course Americans and foreigners alike will be tortured, traumatized, and killed in the wars waged by the national security elite. But there will be other costs to these wars as well. Liberty—both at home and abroad—can, will, and must be sacrificed to the plans of the national security elite. Of course, the elites believe that once their free and prosperous global society is established, this liberty will “return” in abundance. But until then (“then” being such a nebulous, far-off term that it is essentially meaningless), public messaging must be aggressively controlled. “Constant messaging about ubiquitous and general threats, as well as the importance of [the national security elite’s] policies for safety, are key,” Coyne and Hall explain. The degree or even existence of these threats is irrelevant. The public must believe that everything is happening for good reason.

- **The wars plotted and carried through by the national security elite will only breed more war ... and that's a feature, not a bug, of this whole affair.** Running an empire, as the national security elites do (despite whatever claims they make to the contrary), *requires* “covert and overt manipulation of the public, neutering the media as an effective check on power, and embracing the creation and dissemination of government propaganda ... the displacement of millions of people ... the seeds of future violent conflict ... [violations] of international law,” and the elimination of human rights abroad and at home. All these things are prices that must be paid to keep the national security elite on top. And they must *continue* to be paid. Which means that wars must continue to be run. And on and on it goes ...

Synopsis

In this satirical and devastatingly incisive masterpiece, **Christopher J. Coyne** and **Abigail R. Hall** update the instruction manual originally written by Bruce Winton Knight in 1936. In his book, titled *How to Run a War*, Knight directly addresses his target audience: the elite class who control the war-making apparatus. Each subsequent chapter reveals the ugly reality of war, including the physical, monetary, and ethical costs paid by everyone *but* the elite class he addresses. Today's *How to Run Wars* is an updated playbook addressed to America's current national security elite. With biting

wit, rock-solid research, and a darkly grim logic, Coyne and Hall also explain how America's wars are *really* run today.

Drawing back the curtain on perhaps the most deceitful and unethical Leviathan arm of our time, Coyne and Hall explain how the national security elites manage to control the public narrative, quash dissent, secure lavish funds, and pay the breathtakingly high cost of war—in treasure and blood.

By reading this book, the public will come to know the truth about what goes on behind the scenes in America's war-making factory. They will realize that the national security elites are not “elite” at all; they are not all-powerful harbingers of peace but hubristic, bumbling frauds desperately trying to control a world that lies far beyond their power.

Controlling the Narrative

Coyne and Hall open this satirical work with a description of what's at stake in American life. The choice, they claim, is clear: either the national security elites rule America with a firm hand, or tyranny will reign. Ideally, the public would simply accept what the elites told them as a matter of “patriotic duty,” no explanations or clarifications necessary. But the world we live in, Coyne and Hall explain, is not ideal. Thus, any explanation of any military activity—be it true, false, logical, or nonsensical—is justified, as long as it wins the public trust.

Coyne and Hall explain, in tones drenched with sarcasm, how the American public is like a child who believes its parents' explanations wholeheartedly and without

suspicion. They explain how major sports franchises like the National Football League (NFL), Major League Baseball (MLB), and even Professional Bull Riders (PBR), as well as others, make paid arrangements with the Department of Defense (DOD) to participate in patriotic displays to foster support for the U.S. military—and, by extension, the interventions in which those military members are involved. Even Hollywood makes similar arrangements with the DOD. Indeed, that particular relationship has a long and disturbing history; during World War II, the Office of War Information (OWI) created the *Government Information Manual for the Motion Picture Industry* to “assist the motion picture industry in its endeavor to inform the American people, via the screen, of the many problems attendant on the war program.” Though the OWI no longer exists, the spirit of this relationship has lived on—a recent example being when Bush senior advisor Karl Rove met with CBS, HBO, and MGM about how to portray the war on terror.

Coyne and Hall use a helpful euphemism for this kind of deception: they call it “setting the narrative and controlling the flow of information.” They are careful to clarify that these activities are entirely at odds with a free society; after all, an independent media is necessary for a free people. But soon after saying so, Coyne and Hall dip quickly back into their satirical mode and reveal the sorry excuse our military-industrial complex makes for censorship: “A free society is not guaranteed without a proactive national security state, so logically the security elites must proactively influence

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and control media for the greater good.” In other words, deception and censorship are fine—as long as the people in power do it.

Sacrifices Must Be Made

You’ve got to break some eggs to make an omelet. This adage has been famously used to explain away many of the greatest injustices and evils of history. It was Stalin’s right-hand man who said, “Why wail over broken eggs when we are trying to make an omelette,” in an attempt to justify the 1.6 million deaths in the gulags of the Soviet Union. Knowing the history of this maxim full well, Coyne and Hall use it in this book to show how elites rationalize the countless deaths—not only of American soldiers, but of civilians, both American and foreign—that make the national security elite’s power possible.

Of course, no number of deaths is technically “countless.” But Coyne and Hall explain how “a bit of creative definitions for the purposes of accounting” can drastically lower upsetting body counts. For example, during the Vietnam War, civilian casualties could easily be defined away with the use of the “military-age male” category. (Any male of “military age” was no longer a civilian, but a “military-age male.” Once this term was introduced, the number of civilian deaths looked a lot lower.) The strategy was also used under the Bush administration in Iraq and Afghanistan, in the broader war on terror, and during the drone strikes of the Obama administration.

This is just one example of how sacrifices are not only made but explained away to avoid public outcry and upset. “The goal,” explain Coyne and Hall, “is to sanitize war by minimizing the brutality and dehumanization seen by the public, lest they lose their appetite for foreign adventures abroad.” When it comes to the deaths of American citizens, however, it is essential to emphasize that these Americans died for high and noble causes. Does it matter if that’s true? Absolutely not, Coyne and Hall write (with very grim sarcasm).

Everyone knows that lives are sacrificed in war. But not everyone understands that *liberty itself* also must be sacrificed *for liberty’s survival*. Does this sound nonsensical? Coyne and Hall don’t say but show that it is, in fact, utter nonsense. But they also explain how, under ordinary circumstances, no self-respecting people would tolerate the state controlling speech, association, and movements. However, if you tell them that these freedoms allow potential radicals to “speak, network, recruit, and generate funding for their activities”—*well*. That’s a different story. The key is to exploit the fear of the ordinary citizen, harnessing and hijacking it in such a way that it overrides their common sense. In such a state of mind, the “freedoms sacrificed in the name of freedom” argument becomes palatable.

The State ≠ The People

Most Americans believe we have a capitalist economy. It’s therefore wise, write Coyne and Hall, to play into this belief. But when it comes to the military-industrial complex, capitalism is a complete delusion. The national security elites don’t have to play by the same economic rules as everyone else. After all, other people “are self-interested capitalists; [the national security elites] are other-regarding public servants.” If corporations “don’t want to do their part willingly,” the national security elites can simply “force them. It’s really that simple,” Coyne and Hall explain. And it happens all the time.

Coined by President Dwight D. Eisenhower in his farewell address, the term “military-industrial complex” refers to “the entanglement between private actors (contractors, defense firms) and the government’s national security sector.” Eisenhower explained that Americans must “create a permanent armaments industry of vast proportions. . . . [Its] total influence—economic, political, even spiritual—is felt in every city, every state house, every office

of the federal government. We recognize the imperative need for this development.” Why was this entanglement and influence so “imperative,” in Eisenhower’s view? Because, Coyne and Hall explain, “markets are too unpredictable. Private people are too fickle and greedy.” The total state is the only apparatus capable of funding America’s endless, sweeping wars. More important, it is the only apparatus *willing* to do so. If they knew the real price of the military’s foreign adventures, most Americans would never agree to pay.

But most Americans don’t know that foreigners help foot the bill for their own countries’ invasions, too. Coyne and Hall supply the hubristic logic that justifies this arrangement: “Foreigners may not know it, but they are privileged to have you intervening upon them to bring order to the world. It is only fair that they pay for the privilege, whether willingly or unwillingly.” For example, Japan, Germany, South Korea, and other countries compensate the U.S. government in a variety of ways for the “privilege” of hosting American troops in their country. They do this via direct cash transfers, investments in infrastructure, tax waivers, etc.

Eventually, the time will come when America must pay the piper. But the national security elite, in its current form, will never live to see that day. Coyne and Hall assure the elites that they will be “dead and buried” before any bill comes due. “You will not have to answer questions about the debt—leave that to future policymakers to deal with.” It’s true. By kicking the bill down the road, the national security elites give themselves a get-out-of-jail-free card. But they must contend with younger Americans growing more and more wary of America’s foreign ventures. Coyne and Hall craft the perfect response to the youths’ skepticism: “[The national security elite is] doing the hard work today. The *least* the future generations (born and unborn) can do is to help pick up the tab.”

Flouting International Law

No one would deny that the national security elite runs the most powerful military of the most powerful nation on earth. But few would admit the practical consequences of this—especially in the realm of international law. The nations of the earth, including the United States, have agreed to a set of rules governing acceptable conduct with each other, particularly during wartime. But America’s military, Coyne and Hall point out, “can feel free to ignore these rules when it is in the service of achieving [their] goals. Who is going to enforce [international law]? What are they going to do to you, the elites, in the most powerful nation on earth?” The answer: *Nothing*.

Coyne and Hall address, for instance, the issue of torture, expressly prohibited by the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human

Rights and the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and deemed a war crime under the 1949 Geneva Conventions. In the 1980s, the United States itself adopted the United Nations Convention Against Torture (UNCAT), making the policy federal law under the Supremacy Clause of the Constitution. But does any of this legal red tape stop the military-industrial complex from using torture to achieve its ends? Of course not. That said, flagrantly flouting international law is a bad look, so “clean” torture methods—that is, torture that leaves no lasting marks (scars, wounds, etc.)—are the military’s preferred modus operandi.

Sometimes, of course, American citizens catch wind even of “clean” torture methods and balk. In those cases, Coyne and Hall provide practical and time-tested advice: “Have others violate [international law] for you.” They give the example of the Western

Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHINSEC), located in Fort Benning, Georgia. The school trained tens of thousands of Latin American military members, allegedly to defend democracy and human rights. However, training manuals on terrorism and urban guerrilla warfare suggested the use of “executions, beatings, extortion, and blackmail to fight insurgencies.” When the scandal broke, the DOD’s excuse was fitting. They claimed they thought that U.S. laws against torture applied only to U.S. citizens, not foreign military officers. A convenient misunderstanding, indeed.

Coyne and Hall spare no gory details in this brilliant and satirical takedown of today’s national security elite. Dark, hilarious, incisive, and absolutely merciless, this is the authoritative portrait of America’s military-industrial complex. America will never look at war the same way again.

About the Authors



CHRISTOPHER J. COYNE is a senior fellow with the Independent Institute and coeditor of *The Independent Review*, professor of economics at George Mason University, associate director of the F. A. Hayek Program for Advanced Study in Philosophy, Politics, and Economics at the Mercatus Center, and coeditor of the *Review of Austrian Economics*. Dr. Coyne received his PhD in economics from George Mason University. He is also the author of *In Search of Monsters to Destroy: The Folly of American Empire and the Paths to Peace* (Independent Institute, 2022).



ABIGAIL R. HALL is a senior fellow with the Independent Institute and associate professor of economics at the University of Tampa. Dr. Hall received her PhD in economics from George Mason University. She and Christopher Coyne also coauthored *Manufacturing Militarism: US Government Propaganda and the War on Terror* (Stanford University Press, 2021); *Tyranny Comes Home: The Domestic Fate of US Militarism* (Stanford University Press, 2018); and, also with Anne R. Bradley, *The Political Economy of Terrorism, Counterterrorism, and the War on Terror* (Cambridge University Press, 2023).



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