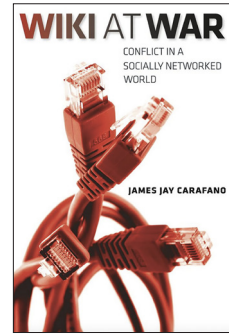


## Book Reviews

# Wiki at War: Conflict in a Socially Networked World



By James Jay Carafano

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Reviewed by Squadron Leader Paul Withers

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**Biography:** Squadron Leader Paul Withers is an Engineer Officer, currently employed as an Officer Career Manager at Headquarters Air Command. He has professional experience and expertise in cyberspace operations, having served at Joint Cyber Unit (Cheltenham), and was embedded with US Cyber Command in Afghanistan. A CAS' Fellow, with an MA from King's College London, he is currently undertaking a MSc in Cyberspace Operations with Cranfield University.

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### Introduction

The ever-expanding breadth of cyberspace literature has opened an important and vibrant debate among theorists and practitioners regarding the implications of operating within this man-made environment. Much of the focus has been on the technology of cyberspace and, in particular, the threats and opportunities that arise from rapid technological development. This becomes an increasingly relevant debate, as the imminent delivery of the first 5th Generation air platforms necessitates a shift in the integration of Air and Cyberspace. However, cyberspace is not just a technological challenge, but one that requires us to make sense of how people and processes interact with technology. In *Wiki at War* Carafano aims to help us understand what a socially networked world means for future conflict.

James Jay Carafano specialises in national security and foreign policy at the US think-tank, The Heritage Foundation. He is a former US Army Officer and has a PhD from Georgetown University. He highlights that in war through the ages, there has always been an advantage for the side that can seize the physical high ground. In writing this book, Carafano's objective is to

“understand how dynamic the relationship between social networks and war is likely to become – and what a difficult task seizing and holding the electronic high ground is likely to be” (p.11). The title suggests an emphasis on ‘wikis’, from the Hawaiian word meaning ‘very quick’. Wiki software underpins a quick and easy means of posting interlinked web content; the most well known example is the now ubiquitous *Wikipedia*. However, the catchy title masks a far broader examination of social networks that cuts across many technologies and social groups.

The scope of the book is particularly wide-ranging. In a prologue labelled ‘Mad Scientists and Fighter Pilot’, the author starts by drawing unlikely parallels between the work of Colonel John Boyd and the controversial ‘obedience experiments’ conducted by psychologist Stanley Milgram. He moves onto an examination of the history of social networking, with a focus on the importance of language and social gatherings, the revolutionary effect of print, the telegraph and broadcast media. This sets the scene for a discussion of the impact of the digital revolution that has enabled street journalism, activism and information warfare. He cites the interesting case study of social media empowering democracy protesters during the 2009 Iranian elections, and the corresponding Iranian regime efforts to subvert the protesters’ online activity. A recurring theme in the book is the observation that social networking behaviours conform to a ‘power law’ curve, rather than a ‘normal’ or Gaussian distribution, i.e. “in big groups online, a handful of people make all the noise” (p.9).

Whilst Carafano does refer to some existing social media platforms, it is patently not a ‘how-to guide’ for particular social media applications. Indeed, he argues that the rapid evolution of technology means that it would be a mistake to pin our understanding of social networks on a particular existing technology. He does, however, provide simple explanations of some of the underpinning technological developments from the first programmable computers, to the creation of the World Wide Web and the advent of social networking and ‘Web 2.0’<sup>1</sup>. He then goes on to discuss the darker side of Web 2.0, in a chapter titled ‘Dragons, Bears, Cutthroats, and Criminals’, exploring the role of organised crime, state-sponsored hacking, and terrorist groups.

The author also highlights the potential for social networks in developing the way in which we think about war, and in particular, conceptual innovation. Carafano offers insight into the role of social media as an effective means of sharing the operational experience and innovative ideas of military personnel, complementing the lessons of doctrine and formal professional military education. In discussing the importance of conceptual innovation, Carafano reflects on a US Army social media community *CompanyCommand.com*, whose members posed the question “how do you institutionalise innovation?” (p.131). The founders of this social network aimed to facilitate peer-to-peer conversations and attract high quality content, ensuring that the community upheld the values and standards of the US Army, but was not viewed merely as a corporate ‘mouthpiece’.

In later chapters, he goes on to explore the power of social media, including blogging, in mobilising support for a cause, and for a broad range of National Security issues, underpinned

by a 'war of ideas'. The author argues that in order to be able to take the cyber high ground, we need to develop leaders with appropriate interdisciplinary skills and knowledge "not just so they [understand] how computers and social networks work but so they understand how the world works" (p.209). He echoes wider concerns regarding a lack of focus on Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) subjects. In calling for a greater emphasis on STEM, he does so not just for economic reasons, but because of the increasing reliance on foreign countries to design, develop and produce technologies which underpin US National Security. However, he argues that in order to enable good decision making, "history, law and the social sciences have just as important [a] place at the desk of the educated cyber leader as STEM" (p.214). The final chapter is devoted to horizon scanning for scientific, technological and societal trends that will impact upon National Security.

Carafano summarises the book arguing that winning in cyberspace "will not happen by happenstance" (p.268). He proposes three laws of 'Wiki Warfare': *Know, Be and Do*. He argues we should *know* the competitors in cyberspace, the 'good, the bad and the ugly'; *be* smart, educated, visionary leaders in cyberspace; and *do*, turn vision into action, provide strategy for cyberspace that is underpinned by resilience.

Published in 2012, *Wiki at War*, risks becoming dated in the fast-moving world of online technology. Some of Carafano's discussion covers areas that have become so commonplace they require no explanation. However, this does not detract from what is a highly readable and particularly relevant discussion. Carafano's argument is well researched, based on sound scholarship and deep analysis. This book offers a different perspective on cyberspace with its greater emphasis on the social implications of technology. Fundamentally, this is a book about people and societal interaction. It is highly recommended as an excellent book for military leaders at all levels to enable a greater understanding of human interaction with the cyberspace environment.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The term Web 2.0 is used to describe the development of the World Wide Web from its early use as a large collection of static web pages (often referred to as Web 1.0), to more interactive user-generated and dynamic content, including social media.



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