

## Project Europe Summer Reading 2025

### Description

Summer is upon us but are you still searching for a compelling poolside or beach-side read? If you're interested in irregular warfare or European security, the Irregular Warfare Initiative's [Project Europe](#) has got you covered! Presenting the 2025 Summer Reading List, curated by the Project Europe Team:

### [Jon Armstrong's Top Picks](#)

***The Harling Mission 1942 (The Gorgopotamos Operation)* by Themistocles Marinos.** For anyone interested European guerrilla operations during World War Two, this [little-known book](#) is a must read. Written by a Special Operations Executive agent dropped into Greece to [disrupt](#) the Afrika Korps's logistical lines of communication in 1942, it provides comprehensive evidence of resistance network utility when integrated within conventional strategy. Unconventional Warfare professionals will take many lessons from Marinos's account, including the need to cultivate cadres of warrior diplomats capable of influencing partners with polarized politics to draw together in pursuit of common objectives. Those fortunate enough to be holidaying in Greece this summer may wish to try trekking the hills to experience the terrain but, please, leave the bridges alone!

***We Die Alone* by David Howarth.** A harrowing account of a special operation gone wrong, Howarth [tells the story](#) of Norwegian Special Operations Executive commando, [Jan Baalsrud](#), who was the sole survivor of a German ambush that took place in Norway's icy fjords in 1943. After escaping by swimming through freezing waters and hiding in snow caves, a hypothermic and wounded Baalsrud relied on an informal auxiliary network to escape a massive Nazi search. Not only does this gripping tale highlight the importance of fostering resilience amongst the population prior to conflict, but it evidences that inspirational acts of nationalism and defiance are possible in the face of a most sadistic and oppressive regime.

***Churchill's Ministry of Ungentlemanly Warfare* by Giles Milton.** Readers may have seen the film, but now they can read the true account of the Special Operations Executive's most audacious operations. Sun lounger-based operators will be delighted to find that the action-packed film amalgamates many characters and stories from a long list of operations throughout Europe and the Far East and that the truth is almost always far more impressive than fiction. The [book outlines](#) how

this most unconventional organization was conceived, and how it survived despite tragic setbacks in the field and underhand plots coldly executed in the corridors of London's Whitehall. Those who have worked in the Irregular Warfare industry will undoubtedly recognize the organizational and cultural frictions described here!

### Pieter Balcaen's Top Picks

***Rise and Kill First* by Ronan Bergman.** This [book](#) offers a compelling overview of Israel's targeted killing operations, tracing their evolution from the country's founding to the present day. It provides valuable insights into how Israel has systematically weakened the leadership of its adversaries through highly sophisticated operations. Notably, the book also explores whether this strategy is the most effective long-term approach to ensuring national security.

***How to Win an Information War* by Peter Pomerantsev.** [This book](#) recounts the story of Sefton Delmer, the British propagandist who played a pivotal role in leading the information warfare campaign against Germany during World War II. It offers valuable lessons on the principles and tactics of information warfare—lessons that remain highly relevant today. The author also draws compelling parallels with the ongoing conflict between Ukraine and Russia.

***A Line in the Sand: Britain, France and the Struggle that shaped the Middle East* by James Barr.** A highly [relevant book](#) for understanding the roots of today's Middle East conflicts. Drawing on declassified archives, James Barr examines the geostrategic rivalry between France and the UK in the region. He details how both powers supported local groups in efforts to undermine each other and expand their own influence.

### Sue Bryant's Top Picks

***The End of Everything: How Wars Descend into Annihilation* by Victor Davis Hansen.** In [The End of Everything](#), military historian Victor Davis Hanson narrates a series of sieges and sackings that span the age of antiquity to the conquest of the New World to show how societies descend into barbarism and obliteration. In the stories of Thebes, Carthage, Constantinople, and Tenochtitlan, he depicts war's drama, violence, and folly. Highlighting the naivete that plagued the vanquished and the wrath that justified mass slaughter, Hanson delivers a sobering call to contemporary readers to heed the lessons of obliteration lest we blunder into catastrophe once again.

***Women in Intelligence: The Hidden History of Two World Wars* by Helen Fry.** A [groundbreaking history](#) of women in British intelligence, revealing their pivotal role across the first half of the twentieth century. From the twentieth century onward, women took on an extraordinary range of roles in

intelligence, defying the conventions of their time. Across both world wars, far from being a small part of covert operations, women ran spy networks and escape lines, parachuted behind enemy lines, and interrogated prisoners. And, back in Bletchley and Whitehall, women's vital administrative work in MI offices kept the British war engine running.

**Fiction: *A Bell for Adano* by John Hersey.** The winner of the 1945 Pulitzer Prize for fiction, it tells the story of an Italian-American officer in [Sicily](#) during [World War II](#) who wins the respect and admiration of the people of the town of Adano by helping them find a replacement for the town bell that the [Fascists](#) had melted down for rifle barrels. The [story](#) is timeless.

## [Rick Chersicla's Top Picks](#)

***Putin's Wars*, by Mark Galeotti.** Published just months after Russia's 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine, [Putin's Wars: From Chechnya to Ukraine](#) by Russia expert Mark Galeotti chronicles the small wars and incursions that Vladimir Putin has overseen since his ascent to power. Galeotti also provides an illuminating overview of the various Russian security services and special operations organizations, as well as a particularly well-done summary of the 2008 war in Georgia.

***Active Measures: The Secret History of Disinformation and Political Warfare* by Thomas Rid.** An important book for anyone looking to understand the history leading to our current situation in the information environment, Thomas Rid's [Active Measures: The Secret History of Disinformation and Political Warfare](#) covers 100 years of disinformation. Rid explores the reasoning behind disinformation, and why it continues to be a popular tool in the irregular warfare toolbox, as well as the intersection of technology and the practice of "professional organized lying." • Covering examples from the *Cheka* to troll farms, Rid's *Active Measures* is a must-read for anyone interested in Russian disinformation in particular.

***Special Forces Berlin: Clandestine Cold War Operations of the US Army's Elite, 1956-1990* by James Stejskal.** Written by a retired Army Special Forces Warrant Officer and CIA Case Officer, [Special Forces Berlin: Clandestine Cold War Operations of the US Army's Elite, 1956-1990](#) chronicles a little-known Army Special Forces detachment. The unit, operating out of West Berlin, had a highly classified unconventional warfare mission set in the event of a Soviet invasion. Informed by interviews with veterans of the unit, Stejskal (a former member of the unit himself), sheds light on a unit that served in the shadows of one of the Cold War's key locales.

***The Moon is Down* by John Steinbeck.** The last of Rick's top picks features a piece of fiction—a lesser-known work by John Steinbeck titled [The Moon is Down](#). A quick read that focuses on the social dynamics within a population following a foreign occupation, Steinbeck writes a compelling story that

will resonate with anyone interested in civil resilience and resistance movements. There is a reason this pops up again and again on [reading lists](#)—it is a classic.

### **[Mike Fazio](#)'s Top Picks**

***Oppose Any Foe* by Mark Moyer.** In [Oppose Any Foe](#), Moyer offers a sweeping and provocative account of the history of U.S. SOF, detailing their irregular warfare success and misapplication. He argues that SOF, or any force engaged in IW, alone cannot achieve strategic victory without broad integration with conventional forces and diplomacy. It is an especially relevant read given today's European context with hybrid threats from Russia, flurries of information operations from various state and non-state actors, and successful unconventional tactics on the Ukrainian battlefield that challenge traditional warfare paradigms. Europe's alliance and politically sensitive environment make the application of SOF—or anyone who engages in IW—only effective when it aligns with a coherent strategy and acts with cultural fluency. Moyer also reminds us that success in modern irregular warfare, known for its mercurial and complex nature, requires succinct doctrine, civil-military cohesion, and strategic patience.

***Rogue Heroes* by Ben Mcintyre.** McIntyre's [Rogue Heroes](#) meticulously details the history of the British Special Air Service (SAS) and their engagement in irregular warfare since their inception during WWII. McIntyre brings to life mavericks, eccentrics, and warriors who defied conventional military wisdom to pioneer irregular warfare in the modern era. It's a story with great relevance to events in Europe today. With Russia employing gray zone tactics, disinformation, and proxies who destabilize the region, the legacy of the SAS provides inspiration to develop our own corkscrew thinking. The narrative shows how small, agile teams can achieve outsized effects when properly supported, unleashed with political clarity, and allowed to fully-apply their imagination. Academics, policy makers, and practitioners of IW in Europe will receive a reminder that succeeding in irregular warfare requires more than just capability—it requires a new and creative mindset.

### **[Olga R. Chiriac](#)'s Top Picks**

***Not One Inch: America, Russia, and the Making of Post-Cold War Stalemate* by M.E. Sarotte.** In [this book](#), Sarotte explores the complex history of NATO's eastward expansion and its impact on US-Russia relations following the Cold War. The book focuses on the period after the fall of the Berlin Wall, specifically examining the implications of a promise made by US Secretary of State James Baker to Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, that NATO would not expand "one inch" eastward. Sarotte delves into the discussions and decisions made by both sides, highlighting missed opportunities for cooperation and the growing tensions that ultimately led to the current geopolitical landscape.

***The New Rules of War* by Sean McFate.** McFate argues that traditional, state-centric warfare is becoming obsolete, replaced by a more complex and irregular form of conflict. [The book](#) emphasizes the rise of non-state actors, private military companies, and the democratization of technology, all contributing to a “durable disorder” where conventional rules of engagement are less relevant. McFate identifies a shift from interstate conflict to a “gray zone” of warfare, where states use non-military tools to pursue their interests, and non-state actors employ any available means, including terrorism and cyber warfare.

Happy reading and “Keep Warfare Irregular!”

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*Views expressed in this article solely reflect those of the authors and do not reflect the official position of the Irregular Warfare Initiative, Princeton University’s Empirical Studies of Conflict Project, the Modern War Institute at West Point, or the United States Government.*

*Main Image: Image generated by ChatGPT using DALL·E, OpenAI (July 6, 2025).*

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