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Book Review: Baylis, John, Wirtz James J., & Gray Colin S. (eds.) *Strategy in the Contemporary World. An Introduction to Strategic Studies* (Fourth Edition), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, 454 pp.

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Teaching Strategy after Irak and Afghanistan

Strategy in the Contemporary World is probably one of the reference texts for the subfield of Strategic Studies, as far as textbooks are considered. The book brings together chapters written by important authors, such as Colin S. Gray, John Baylis or Lawrence Freedman. It attempts to offer a clear and convincing account of an academic subfield that has generated over time an impressive output of expertise, but has been only rarely the focus of systematic study, as even some of the authors of the volume argue¹.

The book is divided into three parts. The first part of the book discusses the issues that represent, according to the authors, the enduring part of Strategic Studies. Aply, the part starts with an analysis of the causes of war, which attempts to build a taxonomy of the different explanations for the phenomenon. The second chapter attempts to cover the evolution of modern warfare, starting from Napoleon's historical role and form Clausewitz's contribution and ending with total war, the final expression of the mass industrialization of the phenomenon. Thomas G. Mahnken manages to construct an accessible explanation of strategic theory, in the third chapter, centered also on Clausewitz's contribution. The chapter dedicated to strategic culture is one of the attempts made by the book to move beyond the traditional discourse on strategy, incorporating constructivist perspectives and attempting to show how cultures influence the making or enacting of strategies. Justin Morris' contribution on the influence of international law remains one of the highlights of *Strategy in the Contemporary World*. Morris' explanation of why law matters in one of the fields that seemingly has little to do with norms is elegant and manages to give the textbook the overall balance required of a textbook. The first part of the book also explores the influence of geography and intelligence over strategy, as well as the relationship between the evolution of technology and warfare. The last three chapters avoid a determinist perspective, as well as a 20th century grounded interpretation, offering a convincing and detailed account of the background in which strategy is made and enacted.

¹ See for example Colin S. Gray & Jeannie L. Johnson, "The Practice of Strategy", in John Baylis, James J. Wirtz, & Gray Colin S. (eds.), *Strategy in the Contemporary World. An Introduction to Strategic Studies*, (4th ed.), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, pp. 359-361.

The second part of the book deals with contemporary issues in strategy: asymmetric warfare and its implications on strategy, nuclear proliferation, and the security challenges of the cyberspace. James Kiras discusses terrorism and insurgency, emphasizing that these forms of conflict remain well within the confines of Clausewitz. Dale Walton and John Baylis, respectively, discuss the problems posed by nuclear proliferation and the challenges WMD control has to face after the end of the Cold War. Their chapters show how Strategic Studies has moved beyond this powerful intellectual theoretical framework. John Ferris concludes in the 12th chapter that conventional power remains, at the beginning of the 21st century an important, but limited tool, while Stephen Biddle argues that the Afghanistan and Iraq conflicts have proven largely inconclusive in terms of the speed vs. mass debate. Jacob Shapiro and Rudolph Darken argue that, in spite of the emphasis placed by US political leaders on homeland security, understanding the enemy remains a distant goal and the US is still facing a major strategic option, between containing Islamic terrorism and rolling back Islamic extremism. The recent conflicts are also analyzed from the perspective of the opportunity of humanitarian interventions, Sheena Greitens and Theo Farrell emphasizing that the jury is still out on the capacity of the intervening parties to set-up functional governments or democratic regimes. The last chapter of the second part is the only new topic added to the fourth edition. John B. Sheldon covers the issue of cyber power, arguing its influence over strategy is pervasive, even though the erosion of the role of the state has been overemphasized.

The third part of the book covers the future of strategy. James Wirtz discusses the influence the expansion of the concept of security has had on Strategic Studies. Wirtz remains convinced that the new threats to national security need to be taken into account by strategists, and even though their influence on political and military conflicts are manifest, solving them remains outside a discipline mostly concerned with the threat or use of force. Columba Peoples argues in its debunking of the criticism brought to this field that there is more to Strategic Studies than nuclear war and nuclear strategies, while drawing an insightful division between the different contributions brought by different generations of Strategic Studies scholars. Colin Gray and Jeannie Johnson plead in favor of a more contextual and prudent reassessments of the discipline, capable of taking into account not only the existing context, but also the historical and theoretical experience of this field. Lawrence Freedman calls for a return to the realism tradition, while taking into account the insights of constructivism and the pitfalls of structural realism.

At first glance, several elements stand out in regards to *Strategy in the Contemporary World*. First, it manages to cover a large number of topics, ranging from views on the conventional use of force, to recent debates such as the influence of counter-insurgency operations on the military or the future of Strategic Studies as a field of study.

Secondly, the textbook manages to discuss traditional issues of strategy, while tackling, at the same time, contemporary debates. In fact, the textbook attempts to

explain these debates and to offer insight into their practical, as well as theoretical consequences. Regardless of whether we are talking about terrorism, counter-insurgency, humanitarian intervention, or cyber power, the volume sums up the debates in the field and offers an array of possible alternative explanations. In fact, the volume itself goes to great lengths to show the contemporary relevance of Strategic Studies (Baylis and Wirtz's introduction, as well as the third part of the book, aptly labelled "The Future of Strategy" underline the authors' emphasis on this point).

In fact, it is precisely this "contemporary appeal" that might make the book less appealing to the readers of the first edition: the second part of the 2002 edition, "The Evolution of Joint Warfare", which discussed the evolution of land warfare, respectively of air and sea power has disappeared with the 2007, 2nd edition of the book. It is obvious that the reality of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars undoubtedly influenced the book, but the didactic purpose of the volume warranted maybe a more detailed glimpse over these topics.

Last, but not least, *Strategy in the Contemporary World* faces and manages to overcome an almost insurmountable task. On the one hand, the imperatives the authors try to take into account are those facing a regular textbook – accessibility of information, clear explanations, relevant details, structured narratives. On the other hand, the more personal contributions, such as Colin S. Gray's, Lawrence Freedman's or Jeffrey S. Lantis and Daryl Howlett's, stand out as bolder and more original attempts, that escape the didactic confines of a textbook.

The authors of the book have won their gamble. The fourth edition of *Strategy in the Contemporary World* is first an instructive and at the same time entertaining lecture, appealing to the scholar, the student and the casual reader alike. Moreover, it is important to note that the book remains true to its original educational purpose – even though educating strategists remains a task for the future, as Gray would want us to believe, the numerous faces and conditions of strategy.

