

observing that “apes were astute when it came to working out power balances” (8), Freedman suggests forming coalitions is a time-honored and effective strategic approach. Given his focus on the relationship between strategy and power, additional work on the concept of balance of power, and its importance in strategy particularly, would be useful.

For the arm-chair traveler (or arm-chair strategist, as the case may be) Sir Lawrence Freedman’s voyage of discovery through the world of strategy is enriching and thought-provoking. One hopes he remains intrepid and continues to help fill the “blank spots” on our mental maps. One such important spot that receives increased attention is the province of “grand strategy.” Should Freedman embark to explore this domain one would be tempted to sign on as a deckhand.

The Direction of War: Contemporary Strategy in Historical Perspective

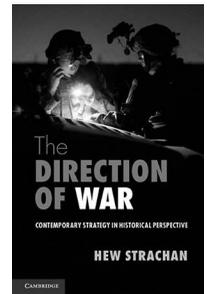
By Hew Strachan

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This book, a collection of papers composed over a ten-year period, is subject to multiple legitimate readings. Some British reviewers have seen it simply as a critique of contemporary British and American military policy. However, the theme announced by the author, the Chichele Professor of the History of War at Oxford, is an exploration of “strategy, what we understand by it, and how that understanding has changed” (4). That seems to be the proper basis for evaluation.

Strachan indicts Huntington’s *Soldier and the State* with corrupting professional-political dialog in both the United States, where he acknowledges it may reflect Constitutional norms, and in the United Kingdom, where he argues it does not (76-77). Indeed, much of the book is engaged with criticism of institutional arrangements for strategy formulation in the United Kingdom and United States. Not surprisingly, the author is better informed about the complexities of the former than the latter; he probably overstates the influence of the Weinberger and Powell doctrines, while understating the role of the National Security Council system and the effects of the Goldwater-Nichols Act. He undergirds his arguments with what he sees as a corrective to an overly Anglophone reading of Clausewitz (5) and Thucydides (257).

The most prominent idea in the *Direction of War* is the argument that the understandings of policy and strategy have become so confused the distinction between them has been lost, largely to the detriment of strategic practice. In part, this confusion has been the result of the intensification of wars in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, critically in the First World War, when the higher direction of war in the form of *grand* strategy came to comprehend the mobilization of all national (and allied) means in pursuit of military victory. This result was compounded after the Second World War by the speculative theoretical flights of deterrence theorists, mostly American academics.



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The greatest insight in Strachan's argument lies precisely in his separation of policy and strategy as distinct and diverging influences with often conflicting logics, both of which must be accommodated by the policy maker *and* strategist. He does this first by pointing to the need to set strategy in the context of the adversarial nature of war; doing so corrects for what he indicts as overemphasis on the instrumental function of war derived from Clausewitz's statement that "war is nothing but the continuation of policy with other means" which first appears in a Note of 10 July 1827 and later in Book I, "On the Nature of War." This is not, he reminds us, "a statement about the nature of war." It is a statement about the use of war, something made clearer, he feels, in Book VIII, "War Plans." He then expands on this point with the Policy-Politics distinction, more or less glossed by Clausewitz's use of the German term *Politik* for both. "Politics," he reminds us, "are inherently adversarial... Policy has a more unilateral thrust... a policy... remains a statement of one government's intent... War," he concludes, "is therefore no longer the unilateral application of policy but the product of reciprocal exchanges between diverging policies" (13).

In short, Strachan restores competitive reciprocity to the practice of national strategy, which, in turn, accounts for the unpredictability of strategic outcomes that reflect not the logical extension of one's own efforts but the *sum* of conflicting efforts of all actors to achieve diverging goals. Later, looking back at Winston Churchill and Alan Brooke in World War II, he observes that the policy maker and strategist must be concerned with "what to do each day in the light of that day's events, of the situation on the ground and of real-time intelligence" (242-243). Evolving strategic possibilities can require changes in policy even as they conform with it. The effect of this on policy makers should be increased modesty about the predictability of strategic effects; and on strategists, increased attention to the need for continuous reassessment and adjustment, notably something Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Admiral Mike Mullen addressed in his March 3, 2010 Landon Lecture at Kansas State University⁶ (229).

A collection of related essays does not a treatise make and it is probably a mistake to read this one as though it does. Written over time, for diverse purposes, the essays may address common themes, but even reworking does not remove discontinuities in thought that result from new insights or limitations imposed by the essay form. Strachan is surely right to point out that the instrumental use of war suggested in Clausewitz's note of 1827, and Book I of *On War*, has sometimes been misunderstood as a statement of some organic condition rather than a requirement for war's rational use. In a more comprehensive treatment, the author might be free to begin with deeper reflection on the implicit distinction between strategy as a noun, defined more or less as a program or pattern of actions intended to achieve some purpose, associated *as it must be* with a predictive theory of success; and strategy (-making) as an *activity* or verb, sensitive to the fluid and unpredictable outcome of the clash of opposing wills and actions by multiple actors.

6 Admiral Mike Mullen, "Landon Lecture Series Remarks; As Delivered by Adm. Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Kansas State University, Manhattan, Kansas, Wednesday, March 3, 2010." Available at: <http://www.jcs.mil/speech.aspx?id=1336>. Henry Mintzberg addressed this phenomenon in his book *The Rise and Fall of Strategic Planning: Reconciling Roles for Planning, Plans, Planners* (New York: Free Press, 1994), 23-29.

This is the distinction, after all, which creates the contrast the author highlights between *On War's* Book I and the discussion of war-making in Book VIII, both of which include the “instrumental” insight of the 1827 note.

American readers should take seriously Strachan’s critique of Huntington’s half-century old thesis on civil military relations, in light of the quarter-century experience with the results of the Goldwater-Nichols Act within the NSC System. Finally, a great deal of thought must be given about whether the notion of strategy can still be limited to the use of military forces, on which Strachan insists, or whether, as a practical matter, the concept has been more expansive for over a century and is likely to remain so because of the requirements of contemporary and future conflicts. It is notable the Lawrence Freedman’s recent book *Strategy, A History* (Oxford, 2013) considers the applicability of the idea in business writing, perhaps clarifying the concept by generalizing its use.

This collection is in many ways a journal of the author’s own journey of learning over a ten-year period in which he moved from the writing of traditional military history to the role of policy advisor. It is a valuable book that succeeds in reframing the idea of strategy and offers numerous insights into its practice in the direction of war.