

Heuser, Beatrice: *Den Krieg denken. Die Entwicklung der Strategie seit der Antike*. Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh Verlag 2010. ISBN: 978-3-506-76832-2; 523 S.

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This contribution to the study of 'thinking about war' adds to a growing literature on the question of the theoretical examination of warfare. While the subject of the theory of war has long been dominated by the famous works of Niccolò Machiavelli, Carl von Clausewitz and Antoine-Henri de Jomini, this book aims to provide a broad survey of a number of issues which have as yet not received the historical treatment they deserve. As is explained in the opening paragraph, Heuser is concerned with what 'strategists' (this is how the author defines writers on the theory and conduct of war) thought about the employment of military force in order to achieve political ends.

The opening chapter of the book begins by highlighting some important questions in relation to strategy and war as a continuation of policy by other means, before providing a list of questions which the author intends to address. Among these are: for which readership texts dealing with strategy were written; whether war was seen as an acceptable solution to conflicts; and, and how opponents were viewed. The works which form the focus of the study are grouped into very large and elastic categories – historical works, commentaries on strategy and tactics; handbooks; political philosophy; theology and moral philosophy; ethics; and analyses of war. Yet there is no sense as to what methodology has been adopted for the selection of works; one could also point to the difficulties in discussing 'strategy' in relations to books which never made use of the term.

The second chapter is titled rather misleadingly 'The Search for Eternal Principles [of War] since Vegetius' – misleading because it covers a whole range of issues in theoretical texts on warfare in ancient times and the Middle Ages (although these periods are dealt with in under twelve pages), before moving swiftly on to the early modern period. Some

of the themes covered are limitations on warfare and just war, militias and mercenaries and whether battle should be avoided under certain circumstances. But in the midst of what appears to be a discussion on early modern writers, the reader is then confronted with an excursion into the debate on the principles of war which catapults the narrative into the twentieth century. Moreover, the selection of themes in this chapter is not really explained, nor indeed entirely comprehensible. In the following chapter, entitled 'From Guibert to Ludendorff: From Total Mobilisation to Total War', it is not immediately clear what time period is under discussion. Most of the analysis takes the idea of total war from 1792 up to 1914, although some of the interwar debate in the twentieth century is touched on, all concluded with an extremely short epilogue on total war in relation to the Second World War.

The arguments in the remaining three chapters are, thankfully, easier to follow and the framing of the themes more persuasive. The fourth chapter covers naval theorists in a more or less chronological fashion, beginning with a discussion of the difference between strategy at sea and on land. All the major naval theorists receive a mention – prominent are Mahan, Corbett and Colomb – although there is an absence of German and Russian writers. The major strength of this chapter is, though, the strong emphasis on the French school, which rarely receives the attention it deserves in the generally Anglo-centric writing on naval warfare. This chapter tries to do too much, however, and so simply touches on interesting subjects, whether for instance there were immutable principles of warfare at sea, whether the emphasis of naval forces ought to lie with battle at sea or commerce warfare, command of the sea, blockades, but dealing also with French, British and German lessons from the First World War, and concluding with the impact of nuclear weapons upon warfare at sea. While it provides a good overview, the chapter tends to skate across the surface of the subject.

The attempt to try and provide a complete survey of a very large and complex topic is repeated in the fifth chapter which examines airpower and nuclear strategy. While the opening subject of the appropriation of con-

cepts from land and sea warfare for early airpower theory is an interesting one, it is covered rather superficially and leans heavily on secondary literature in the process. Among the other areas examined are the challenges of inter-service rivalry which faced the first air forces, there is a summary of the four 'schools' of airpower theory, a discussion of the debate over strategic bombing, before the reader is led into the fields of nuclear deterrence, game theory and escalation. Indeed, not only in this chapter but also in the second half of the book, one gets the impression that Heuser is most at home discussing the theory of nuclear war. Nonetheless, like others in the book, this chapter shows signs of being caught between two competing goals: on the one hand there is an attempt to deal with the major works of theory; on the other, there is an apparent tendency to want to cover the 'history of strategy' as revealed by these tomes. The obvious tension between the competing pull in two different directions is never really resolved.

In fact, the final chapter demonstrates – unfortunately – the overall lack of direction. The reader is presented with a series of vignettes related to warfare after 1945, running under 'headlines' such as 'the return of war as a spectator sport', the return of limited wars, defensive defence, Harry Summers' critique of Clausewitz and the return of small wars. But this is after the preamble to the chapter (which amounts to less than two pages) states unequivocally that the main theme of the chapter does not begin with Hiroshima in 1945, even though the rest of the chapter deals with nothing other than warfare after 1945. There is little sense as to how the subjects which are pursued relate to each other, or what criteria have been employed in order to select the texts which form the basis of the argument.

On a more positive note, what this book does offer is a vast sweep of the subject of military theory in relation to strategy since Machiavelli, worthwhile in the German language since little on this subject has been published since Jehudah Wallach's *Kriegstheorien*.¹ For this reason, political scientists and Security Studies specialists will welcome it as an accessible overview of the history of 'strategic thought'. Still, the approach

adopted is likely to irritate historians, not least of all as many of the most interesting questions raised in the first chapter are never really dealt with in a satisfying fashion. The methodological approach adopted is often opaque and, tellingly, there is no mention of any of Julian Lider's path-breaking studies on military theory, especially his seminal *Military Theory*.² There are other gaps as well, among them the absence of many of the major Russian theorists, in particular Aleksandr Svechin. In short, this is a useful survey of the 'history of strategy', but one which does not represent a convincing piece of original scholarship.

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¹ Jehudah L. Wallach, *Kriegstheorien: Ihre Entwicklung im 19. 20. Jahrhundert*, Frankfurt am Main, 1972.

² Julian Lider, *Military Theory: Concept, Structure, Problems*, Aldershot 1983.