

## BOOK REVIEWS

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### THE FACES OF LEADERSHIP

Williams, Dean. *Real Leadership: Helping People and Organizations Face Their Toughest Challenges*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2005. 296pp. \$29.95

There seems to be no shortage of disappointing leaders these days. Tony Hayward of the BP oil well disaster, General Stanley McChrystal in Afghanistan, and our Wall Street CEOs are recent examples. The thoughtful book *Real Leadership* offers insight into why these accomplished leaders stumbled: their leadership mind-sets and behaviors were poignantly inadequate given the situational context and complexity.

Dean Williams, of Harvard's Kennedy School and member of Harvard's Center for Public Leadership, draws from a wide range of academic experience and research. Many of the author's perspectives are notably influenced by Harvard colleague Ronald Heifetz, who has written and lectured extensively about adaptive leadership.

Early in the book Williams introduces the concept of "counterfeit leadership." Counterfeit leaders offer superficial, quick-fix solutions for complex problems. They are prolific launchers of "false tasks" that do little to improve the situation, distract the organization from facing reality, and diffuse the leaders' moral obligations. These leaders

habitually stay within their comfort zones by relying on positional power and factional loyalty. They sidestep the essential work of executing meaningful change. Counterfeit leaders are not intentionally deceitful, but rather, as in theater, they act out popular scripts to accommodating audiences.

In contrast, "real leaders" provide wisdom and energy. They take responsibility for mobilizing people to confront reality, which requires that they engage in the tough task of provoking people to modify their values, preferences, traditions, and priorities.

The process of *Real Leadership* is quite pragmatic and demands three commitments: deep understanding of reality ("diagnostic competence"), self-knowledge ("personal case"), and constant reassessment (metaphorically called "mirrors"). Williams places a great deal of emphasis on thorough, reality-centered diagnostics.

The book explains six types of specific leadership challenges. These six categories are not meant to imply definitive boundaries but rather to differentiate

unique leadership situations. Each leadership challenge presents a diagnostic profile and recommends intervention strategies. For example, one category is called the “activist challenge.” This is a situation where the organization refuses to acknowledge or respond to changes in reality though its performance or survival depends on it.

This is an informed, well structured, and immensely readable book about adaptive leadership. It is pragmatic, while providing keen perspectives and insights. A deeper discussion of power and authority and their influence on adaptive leadership would have been beneficial, but the book’s refreshing diversity of illustrative leadership examples is a rich contribution.

Although this work was published five years ago, its content is still relevant and applicable, perhaps even more than ever, because of increasing disillusionment with contemporary leadership. It prompts us to consider critically whether some closely held values and assumptions are paradoxically detrimental. (An excellent and recent book about adaptive leadership is *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, by Ronald Heifetz, Alexander Grashow, and Marty Linsky, Harvard Business Press, 2009.)

HANK KNISKERN  
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Schmitt, Gary J., ed. *The Rise of China: Essays on the Future Competition*. New York: Encounter Books, 2009. 191pp. \$21.95

Gary J. Schmitt is a resident scholar at the conservative Washington think tank the American Enterprise Institute

(AEI), where he is also the director of the Program on Advanced Strategic Studies. Prior to coming to AEI he was a member of the professional staff of the U.S. Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, serving as the committee’s minority staff director.

As its title indicates, this edited volume examines various facets of China’s rise to Asian and global eminence and the implications of that rise for established powers, led by the United States. This work not only performs a service by exploring the contours of Chinese power but furnishes a barometer suggesting how right-leaning China scholars think about U.S. strategy toward a newly assertive Beijing. This book constitutes an excellent primer on East Asia’s future and America’s place in the region.

Among the contributing authors are well-known China hands like Ashley J. Tellis (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace) and Dan Blumenthal (AEI’s U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission). Despite the authors’ hawkish reputations, however, the book takes a determinedly measured tone, which constitutes one of its most appealing traits.

Schmitt leads off by observing that it is not the rise of *China* but of the *People’s Republic of China* that inspires forebodings in Asia and the West. The swift rise of any power disturbs the existing equilibrium, making for uncertainty and friction. The ascent of the United States to world power over a century ago gave rise to testy Anglo-American relations for a time, before British leaders concluded that the Royal Navy could not maintain a squadron in the Western Hemisphere strong enough to overpower the armored,

steam-driven fleet being built in American shipyards.

The result was a grudging British retreat from the New World. Then as now, historical, political, and cultural affinities lubricated the gears of Anglo-American diplomacy. If London and Washington found it hard to manage their relations, how much harder must the challenge be that lies before liberal America and autocratic China—how to sort out their differences without undue rancor. The type of regime matters. How Sino-American relations will unfold in the coming years is far from clear.

For me the most forward-looking and thus most interesting chapters are concentrated toward the book's end. Schmitt, for example, examines the prospects for multilateralism in Asia, a region long typified by a hub-and-spoke alliance system centered on the United States. Schmitt downplays the potential for an Asian NATO but maintains that the region is halfway to an Asian variant of the Helsinki Accords, which set the rules for the late Cold War. If this is so, Asian multilateralism could possibly enfold Beijing, fostering regional concord. AEI demographics expert Nicholas Eberstadt observes that the Chinese nation is graying and that Beijing's one-child policy is taking its toll on the most productive age groups. Taken together, the essays gathered here suggest that straight-line projections of China's rise are apt to mislead. This book is strongly recommended for newcomers to China studies, as well as to old hands who want a refresher on recent developments.

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Koplow, David A. *Death by Moderation: The U.S. Military's Quest for Useable Weapons*. New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2010. 263pp. \$28.99

*Death by Moderation* is a focused, academic work that starts with the premise that conditions in today's world have shown the limitations of increasingly powerful weapons in achieving U.S. national goals. In response to that problem, the U.S. military is attempting to develop weapons that are less powerful and more accurate—and therefore more “useable,” in the author's words.

After several chapters that set the stage—issues involving revolutions in military affairs, deterrence, and the law of armed conflict—a series of chapters deal with particular types of usable weapons. The author has chosen five such weapons: precision-guided munitions, low-yield nuclear weapons, smart antipersonnel land mines, antisatellite weapons, and nonlethal weapons. There is also a discussion on cyber war, although not in a separate chapter. The book ends with the chapter “What to Do about Useability,” in which Koplow provides answers to his many questions.

The chapters begin with a scenario, either historical or hypothetical, as a framework for the following discussion. Given the constraints of space, Koplow does an excellent job of describing the technical details of the weapons under review. When applicable, he reviews their actual uses in combat. He places particular emphasis on whether or not more usable weapons will reduce what he calls “self-deterrence” and result in the increased likelihood of conflict

using such weapons. Each chapter is a self-contained unit that ends with a separate bibliography and a list of applicable treaties. This approach is particularly valuable for a reader who wants to review quickly only one of the subjects covered.

The author does a good job presenting both sides of the issues surrounding these weapons. He clearly views these issues from a legal, arms-control perspective, as opposed to that of someone who might have actually to employ the weapons in combat. This is hardly surprising, given the author's background. Koplow is a professor of law at Georgetown University Law Center and director of the Center for Applied Legal Studies. He has the added credentials of service in both the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency and the Department of Defense.

A quick look at chapter 6, on smart antipersonnel mines, illustrates the book's strengths (which are major) and its weaknesses (which are minor). The scenario is hypothetical and involves a country called "Kafiristan." In my view, such cases are less powerful than his historical ones, such as the use of precision-guided bombs against heavily defended bridges in North Vietnam. This chapter provides a useful primer on land-mine warfare, including important definitions explaining self-destructing, self-neutralizing, and self-deactivating mines. It also discusses the two current, but competing, treaties on the subject: the 1980 United Nations Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, which was signed by the United States, and the more restrictive 1997 Ottawa Treaty, which the United States did not sign.

Whether one agrees or not with Koplow's conclusions, *Death by Moderation* is a valuable addition to the literature because it forces the reader to think about a number of important issues that will be around for the predictable future.

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Thies, Wallace J. *Why NATO Endures*. New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2009. 321pp. \$90

The study of alliances is central to our understanding of international relations. Wallace Thies, a reputable NATO scholar, argues that the "iron law of coalitions"—that alliances are formed to resist enemies and do not outlast them—must be rethought because of NATO's record-breaking performance over the past six decades. The title, *Why NATO Endures*, therefore understates the sweeping conclusion of this concise and readable essay.

Thies's rhetorical technique is to document how contemporaneous observers have characterized six tumultuous incidents in NATO's existence as life-threatening crises, then to evaluate with the clarity of hindsight the alliance's self-healing tendencies. In each case, NATO emerges as a stronger alliance with improved vitality.

The analysis draws from both historical sources and political-science research to contrast traditional alliances with NATO. Thies's principal points are both simple and profound. The European alliances of past centuries were cut from different cloth than was the North

Atlantic alliance. Early alliances seemed designed to be transitory. There was no need for cooperation, integration, preparation, or even friendship among Bismarckian-era allies in a multipolar world. Offensive wars were fought for territory and treasure. However, this situation was turned on its head when two superpowers developed alliance systems in an ideological struggle where contesting armies had thermonuclear weapons and needed to be ready to fight for national survival on a moment's notice. Further, NATO's members were liberal democracies empowered to take positions independent of the United States on any number of issues and were willing to air these differences in public.

The author's well-informed encapsulation of the six "fatal" crises that NATO has weathered over the years provides scholars and interested general readers insight, perspective, and juicy anecdotes. The author's technique of laying out the problem in each case and following with "what actually happened" makes for a series of intriguing and illuminating vignettes in diplomatic history. Watching them unfold in real time, without the benefit of opened archives and clear hindsight, was not nearly as satisfying or rewarding.

A second cavil with the book's title (and the more important one) is that it is conclusive only in the past tense. The book is certainly a persuasive explanation as to why NATO *endured*. It offers a plausible countertheory for the creation of successful and enduring alliances. However, only one of the crises addresses the post-Cold War world in which we find ourselves today. Indeed, many of the circumstances that

attended NATO's creation and sustenance have either vanished or are eroding. Its *bête noire* (Russia) has ceased to be NATO's enemy for two decades, and the anxieties created by imminent destruction have been replaced by lesser threats, such as transnational terrorism and crime. It remains to be seen if the "self-healing tendencies" of democracies are sufficient to enable NATO to endure in an entirely different kind of world. The reader will benefit from Thies's well argued discussion of this point.

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Wheeler, Winslow T., and Lawrence J. Korb. *Military Reform: An Uneven History and an Uncertain Future*. Palo Alto, Calif.: Stanford Univ. Press, 2009. 256pp. \$24.95

In *Military Reform*, two national security experts reflect on initiatives intended to reform defense planning across the entire enterprise. For decades Winslow Wheeler and Lawrence Korb have observed, studied, and participated in defense reform, gaining a weathered perspective on the ideas, events, and actions taken by national security organizations within government. This work describes the conditions necessary or common in the national security environment in cases where individuals or institutions have exhibited interest in reform.

Wheeler and Korb review the issues that underpinned defense reform initiatives over several decades. They describe the actions of key individuals who championed reform ideas and the issues and stakes of those who opposed or resisted.

Each reform movement that the authors study is recounted in a style like that of a novel. Wheeler and Korb take the time to develop reformers like characters in stories. The value of this approach is that the reader gains added insight into the people involved in these ideas and decisions and into the impact that their experiences, knowledge, and personalities had on the period of reform.

*Military Reform* conveys the complexity of interests and institutions that compete in national defense. Defense planning is a collaborative process that includes the armed services and agencies of the Department of Defense and Congress. Through the use of case studies of past reform initiatives, the authors capture the impact of the actions of these organizations from the perspectives of organizational behavior, process, and competing interests.

For example, chapters 2 and 3 assess the actions and influence of key members in Congress and the Congressional Military Reform Caucus, as well as of the senior leadership within the Department of Defense in the early 1980s. The authors' assessment details the actions taken to control rising acquisition costs in several defense programs. This case study illustrates the impact that politics has on defense reform, the need for a reform leader or champion, and the impact that the news media can have in amplifying reform issues.

Ultimately, the authors conclude that the realities of the political environment can trump the actions of reformers, because members of Congress are politicians and so tend to view reform issues as political challenges or opportunities for compromise or political gain. Members of Congress and

congressional committees have legislative processes and oversight authority that can significantly impact the objectives and mitigate the effects of reform. Further, though the media can amplify issues, their tendency to focus on the "newsworthiness" of reform issues results in a lack of "staying power."

Defense reform is not only impacted by Congress and the media, however. Chapters 4 and 5 discuss the impact of previous defense reviews conducted by the Department of Defense, blue-ribbon panels commissioned by the executive branch, and thematic trends such as "transformation" or the "revolution in military affairs."

The organizations within the Pentagon possess a remarkable ability to resist change. Senior Pentagon officials are bureaucrats, tending to view issues and problems either as threats to established programs and funding sources or as opportunities for increases in funding. The bureaucratic management necessities of the Department of Defense and competition for budget and mission lead to perceptions that reform is a threat to the organization.

The book concludes with a description of what defense reform is and is not, in terms of budget, technology, and organizational behavior. This work takes a pragmatic approach in the study of defense reform, assessing the complex and competitive nature of the reform endeavor within government. It is also timely: the 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review report, released by the Defense Department in February, and the current national security environment both reflect several of the qualities analyzed in the book.

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Holwitt, Joel Ira. *Execute Against Japan: The U.S. Decision to Conduct Unrestricted Submarine Warfare*. College Station: Texas A&M Univ. Press, 2009. 262pp. \$37.50

Joel Ira Holwitt is a lieutenant who has just completed the Submarine Officer Advanced Course and will soon report to USS *New Mexico* (SSN 779), in Groton, Connecticut, as navigator. This book was his PhD dissertation at Ohio State University, where he studied under Dr. John Guilmartin. It is a serious work that is researched in the tradition of *The Blue Sword* (1982) by Dr. Mike Vlahos, *War Plan Orange* (1991) by Edward Miller, and the more recent *Agents of Innovation* (2008) by John Kuehn, all of which deal with the interwar period and the roles played by the War Plans Division, the Naval War College, and the General Board.

This book is an in-depth historical look at how the United States and the U.S. Navy's decision-making process worked in the run-up to Pearl Harbor. It is a well documented and fascinating story that brings to life some naval personalities perhaps not well known to today's officers. Most interesting for students at the U.S. Naval War College and naval officers who work in today's inter-agency system, it is another look into how the Navy's leadership has functioned and the constructive role that the Naval War College has played in influencing the thinking of the leadership. Students of history and policy too will find this an interesting story, not only because the German decision to implement unrestricted submarine warfare actually was one of the major causes for the American entry into the First World War but also because there appears to

be no documentation indicating that those leaders whom we would today call the "national command authority" ever actually participated in the decision to implement this policy.

There exists a memorandum dated March 1941 from Admiral Edward Kalbfus (researched by Naval War College faculty and students), recommending a strategy of unrestricted submarine and aerial warfare against Japan, that was clearly rejected by the General Board. The report, however, was retained by the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO), Admiral Harold "Betty" Stark, and it ultimately influenced his decision to deliver the memo to the commander of the Asiatic Fleet, Admiral Thomas C. Hart.

As a serving flag officer, I found it fascinating to see how real life worked in the run-up to the war. For example, for me the most interesting story was how the CNO transmitted his "commander's intent" to Admiral Hart, a most experienced submariner. Stark knew that the State Department would never consent to unrestricted submarine warfare and so decided against raising the issue directly before the United States entered the war. Instead, he sent a letter to Admiral Hart; Stark's war planner, Rear Admiral Kelly Turner, also discussed it with Captain James Fife, another highly respected submariner, who delivered the information to Admiral Hart and his staff personally in the Philippines. There was no way that Admiral Hart could mistake Stark's intent. This put Hart in a position to anticipate his orders, in a way the best commanders will. Hart sent U.S. submarines to sea, ready for war patrol, immediately after the initial Japanese attack.

The other interesting aspect of this work deals with the difference between prewar training of our submariners and what they actually did in combat. In a section called “The Accidental Commerce Raiders,” Holwitt points out that commanders had been conditioned by article 22 of the London Naval Treaty—which many thought meant that if they torpedoed merchants without warning, they would actually be held liable, “hunted down and captured or sunk as pirates.” So, according to this account, commanders were taught to be cautious and were essentially trained for naval combat against high-speed, heavily armored combatants and not against commercial shipping. The result was that very few of the tactics eventually used were developed before the war.

*Execute Against Japan* should be required reading for naval officers (especially in submarine wardrooms), as well as for anyone interested in history, policy, or international law. Lieutenant Holwitt has already briefed some of our Naval War College students. His research shows how and why our experience in the First World War did not prepare us for the next one, and this is its essential lesson. It is a lesson worth some reflection.

REAR ADMIRAL JAMES P. WISECUP, U.S. NAVY  
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Mueller, Michael. *Canaris: The Life and Death of Hitler's Spymaster*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 2007. 320pp. \$34.95

Who was Wilhelm Canaris? The naval cadet from the Ruhr who rose to vice admiral and directed the Abwehr,

German military intelligence, for nine years remains one of the most intriguing figures in twentieth-century military history. German journalist and documentarian Michael Mueller unravels several of the mysteries that surround Canaris's life, though many remain.

Mueller acknowledges the shortfall. Despite solid research and fresh archival material, his account “neither answers all the questions, nor resolves all the contradictions.” The paucity of primary sources and the tendency of intelligence operators habitually to brush their tracks owe much to the circumstances of Canaris's arrest and execution. Only remnants survive of Canaris's service diaries, discovered by investigators in the aftermath of the 20 July 1944 plot to assassinate Hitler.

Mueller's narrative informs, illuminates, and entertains. Canaris's early career at sea was marked by escapades of derring-do in South America and Spain. An officer of his time, Canaris absorbed the credo of the sea service, and it served him well. He had a clear talent for languages and social rapport, and his superiors noted the vitality of his wide-ranging networks. Before long, he became “too valuable to send to sea.”

An astute and calculating observer, Canaris navigated multiple career-threatening crises that began as the defeated German fleet returned to Kiel in 1918. In the closing years of the Weimar Republic, Canaris again leveraged his luck, evading a series of potentially devastating political scandals. He did not emerge unscathed, however; his growing reputation made both naval officials and politicians nervous.

If rivals watched with gimlet eyes, Canaris's political patrons had reason to look the other way. He was soon enmeshed in the government's efforts to circumvent the naval-armament provisions of the Versailles treaty that had ended World War I. With his international networks delivered, Canaris won only muted applause in Berlin.

Grand Admiral Erich Raeder was leery of Canaris, who he feared was compromised politically. Mueller acknowledges the awkwardness between the two officers but emphasizes Raeder's professionalism. Raeder's own memoir supports that judgment. Setting his personal feelings aside, Raeder intervened to elevate Canaris to the head of the Abwehr.

At first Canaris walked the razor's edge between collaboration with the Nazi regime and open resistance. The spring of 1938 was the turning point. The cumulative effect of the Blomberg and Fritsch scandals, destroying the careers of the war minister and the commanding general of the Wehrmacht, respectively, was too much for an old-school naval officer. Still in uniform, Canaris became the heart of the opposition circle in Abwehr headquarters.

Canaris's career-long wrangling with his political and diplomatic counterparts will resonate with military intelligence officers today. His death in the bloodletting unleashed by Claus von Stauffenberg's failed attempt on Hitler's life is startling only for its accidental nature. The real surprise is that he was untouched until the Abwehr was dissolved in mid-1944.

Who was Wilhelm Canaris? A loyal servant of "the other Germany" or a right-wing Nazi sympathizer? What

accounts for Himmler's indulgent, even protective, attitude toward Canaris and his circle? The wily yet principled admiral is an incomplete puzzle. However, Mueller puts new pieces on the table, while nudging others into place.

Readers will appreciate Muller's abundant reference notes, exhaustive bibliography, and index. Sadly, the work is marred by the absence of rigorous copyediting and fact-checking; names in particular suffer. But these are minor quibbles. Mueller's work is an important contribution to the literature, and the Naval Institute deserves a laurel for bringing it to these shores.

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Harari, Yuval Noah. *Special Operations in the Age of Chivalry: 1100–1550*. Suffolk, U.K.: Boydell, 2007. 224pp. \$90

Yuval Noah Harari published this book in the midst of the ongoing struggles among the Hezbollah militia from Lebanon, the Palestinian Hamas militias, and the Israeli army. These contemporary events, especially the special operations undertaken by all sides, provide the backdrop to this work. With regard to medieval special operations, not much has been written, and Harari endeavors to fill this void by focusing his work on a general readership rather than a strictly scholarly audience.

The title of this book is eye-catching but immediately raises questions: What does the author mean by "special operations," and what is meant by "the Age of Chivalry"? The author's use of the phrase, which dates back to the high and late Middle Ages, is really nothing

more than a literary choice. It is easy for the reader to get distracted in the discussion regarding the term and the notions of chivalry and chivalric virtues. Harari does not imply that the employment of deception, guile, kidnapping, and assassination as means of political and military operations was contrary to the code of conduct. Rather, he says that they were not the normal methods of operation but were in that sense unconventional and therefore special. He notes specifically that the code of chivalry never stood in the way of success or victory and that medieval special operations almost always necessitated foul play. This brings us to the second and more substantial issue—Harari’s definition of special operations.

The author defines special operations as combat operations that are limited in area, size, and duration and that, relative to the resources expended, have disproportionate strategic and political results. Additionally, he notes, they are by their nature covert and unconventional. While covertness is a given, because a small force cannot hope to accomplish its mission if discovered, the concept of unconventionality causes a problem. Not all medieval battles were fought between two opposing forces lined up three battalions abreast, with a melee following a few volleys of arrows and charges of knights. The large, set-piece battle was in fact relatively rare; the small-unit raid was more the norm. This issue is not whether the operations are “special” but rather whether the examples used actually meet a modern definition of special operations. Modern special operations are similar to Harari’s definition in that they are designed to achieve covertly a

political or strategic end, but both the operation and the effect are planned, and the operations are usually carried out, by specially trained forces, not necessarily by small detachments of conventional soldiers. By his less rigorous definition, nearly all small actions could be regarded as “special.”

Harari’s preface and first chapter, which together account for nearly one-third of the book, define medieval special operations and then list a plethora of examples, such as small-unit raids, political intrigues carried out by military forces, assassinations, hostage takings, kidnappings, and associated rescues. He focuses on inland special operations targeting infrastructure or people or national symbols (either people or strategic places). However, his methodology for selecting examples is unclear. As a result, chapter 1 is long on examples but short on the analysis of their impacts—the one true weakness of the book.

Of the other cases specifically explored, the assassination of King Conrad of Jerusalem by the Nizaris (Assassins) in 1192 and the destruction of the imperial flour mill at Auriol by the French in 1536 are more in line with the contemporary definition of special operations. These examples feature specially trained troops executing plans that had strategic and political goals and involved limited resources. It is in these cases that the true value of this work is evident.

Harari successfully shifts the reader’s attention from the glory of the large, set-piece battle to the implications of the actions of small forces of soldiers, no matter whether their operations were special or not. The author’s

writing style is captivating, and the book meets its stated aim of providing a popular history of medieval special operations. Harari, whether intentionally or not, demonstrates the importance of being able to fight hybrid wars.

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Luttwak, Edward N. *The Grand Strategy of the Byzantine Empire*, Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap, 2009. 512pp. \$35

In the Western historical imagination, the Eastern Roman Empire, which ruled from Constantinople (now Istanbul, Turkey) from AD 330 until 1453, has received mostly disdain and neglect. The term “Byzantine” carries some negative connotations. One dictionary defines “byzantine” (lower-case *b*) as “characterized by a devious and usually surreptitious manner of operation.” In the often-quoted judgment of a Victorian historian, “Its vices were the vices of men who had ceased to be brave without learning to be virtuous. . . . The history of the Empire is a monotonous story of the intrigues of priests, eunuchs and women, of poisonings, of conspiracies, of uniform ingratitude, of perpetual fratricides.”

The academic study of Byzantine history, the preserve of a rather inbred community, requires mastery of difficult medieval Greek, the intricacies of Orthodox theology, and other esoteric specialties. But in recent years the work of a new generation of talented Byzantinists has given us English translations of many long-inaccessible primary sources, including an extensive body of military texts.

In 1976, military analyst and historian Edward Luttwak published *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire: From the First Century AD to the Third*, advancing a controversial thesis that the empire developed a conscious and consistent strategy of “defense in depth,” based on lines of frontier forts, backed by regional and central mobile armies.

In this new work, on the Eastern Empire’s grand strategy, Luttwak explains that after the collapse of the Western Empire in the fifth century, Eastern emperors no longer enjoyed this luxury. Faced by endless waves of nomadic horse archers from the steppes, plus Sassanid Persia (the persistent traditional enemy to the east), the empire could not afford to fight decisive battles or wars of attrition, which would only deplete the costly, carefully trained imperial army. Trying to annihilate the present enemy would only smooth the way for the next tribe migrating out of Central Asia. The empire’s most natural ally was whatever tribe was stacked up *behind* the horde currently assailing the Danube frontier.

The empire developed an “operational code” that combined shrewd diplomacy, careful intelligence, defensive siege craft, and well-placed bribery, with military force as a last resort. When battle could not be avoided, Byzantine generals practiced “relational maneuver,” a style of fighting based on insight into the strengths and weaknesses of each enemy.

The rise of Islam in the seventh century represented a deadly new threat, based on an aggressive religious ideology. With strongly disaffected religious minorities in its Syrian and North African provinces, the empire was particularly vulnerable. Luttwak explains how a

succession of warrior-emperors managed this threat for almost seven centuries.

A short but sharply argued chapter, “Leo VI and Naval Warfare,” reviews the very limited surviving texts on Byzantine sea power and provides a lucid account of “Greek fire,” the empire’s much-misunderstood “secret weapon.”

Luttwak’s analysis is particularly sharp on the relation of religion and statecraft. Unlike in the medieval West, where church and state contended bitterly for centuries for dominance, the Orthodox Church was usually an integral part of the imperial order: the patriarch of Constantinople was appointed by the emperor and served at his pleasure. Orthodoxy was a source of “cultural confidence” for Byzantine

soldiers and a practical instrument for taming uncivilized barbarians.

*The Grand Strategy of the Byzantine Empire* is a work of solid scholarship, creative imagination, and practical military analysis. It should be of more than antiquarian interest to those who believe that the present confrontation between Islam and the West may become a multigenerational conflict. The empire endured so long because it took war very seriously, avoided it whenever possible, and realistically analyzed the cultures that surrounded it.

The book’s only weakness is its maps, which are muddy and crudely drawn. The reader will benefit from keeping at hand a good historical atlas, such as the *Penguin Atlas of Medieval History*.

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