

BOOK REVIEWS

NODES, NETWORKS, PLATFORMS, AND PICTURES

Friedman, Norman. *Network-centric Warfare: How Navies Learned to Fight Smarter through Three Wars*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 2009. 424pp. \$32.95

Norman Friedman's latest book, *Network-centric Warfare*, should find a place on the shelves of all students of naval warfare. It provides a wealth of insights into contemporary and future wars, by focusing on networks—the connection between weapons and systems, the front line and the rear echelon, decision makers and analysts, and domains of warfare from land to sea to air to space to cyberspace. Friedman's central thesis is that network-centric warfare (NWCW) as articulated by advocates like the late vice admiral and former Naval War College president Arthur Cebrowski is really “picture-centric warfare”—that is, as he explains, warfare is “based on using a more or less real time picture of what is happening.” Friedman then demonstrates the evolution of picture-centric/network-centric warfare by examining naval programs from British admiral Sir John Fisher's Mediterranean surveillance program at the beginning of the twentieth century to the sound surveillance system (SOSUS) in the latter half of that century.

Whether one agrees with Friedman or not, his account challenges many past and current conceptions of warfare and represents a frontal challenge to theorists of network-centric warfare. As such, this work deserves to be read and responded to by scholars and analysts alike.

Network-centric warfare and its precepts, for better or worse, acknowledged or not, are now embedded in much of current thinking about military operations in both the United States and countries as diverse as the United Kingdom, Sweden, Singapore, and China. At the most basic level, proponents of NWCW urge strategists, planners, operators, and even members of the acquisition community to think about war fighting in terms of nodes and networks rather than of weapons platforms. At its most simple, this means that developing, sustaining, and protecting connectivity (i.e., networks, ranging from radios to fiber optics) is at least as important as ships, tanks, aircraft, satellites, and sensors. Everything from combat power and combat effectiveness to logistical efficiency is

improved by taking full advantage of the computer and telecommunications advances made over the last half-century. Friedman challenges NWCW proponents by redefining their central arguments about the relationship between nodes and networks. In effect, he argues that the “picture” is more important than the network itself for conducting military operations. The network serves the development of ever more complex and, presumably, accurate “pictures” available to operators and analysts.

If I have a problem with Friedman, it is with his definition and explanation of network-centric warfare, at least the variant espoused by Vice Admiral Cebrowski. (Full disclosure: Vice Admiral Cebrowski was the president of the Naval War College when I was hired there, and I enjoyed more than a few hours hashing out the intricacies of network-centric warfare in his presence.) I do not agree that picture-centric warfare is equivalent to network-centric warfare: the “pictures” highlighted by Friedman constitute only one dimension (albeit an important one) of the theory and practice of network-centric warfare. Another relatively minor quibble is that although the book’s title refers to three world wars, and indeed the narrative contains analysis and examples from all three—World War I, World War II, and the Cold War—this is somewhat misleading. As the table of contents suggests, the real structure underlying the work is instead three *technological eras*, those associated with radios, radar, and computers.

Network-centric Warfare is not an easy read. It is filled with jargon and focuses

largely on relatively obscure developments. It is not a popular history or an anecdote-filled volume designed to thrill devotees of warfare. It lists nearly fourteen pages of acronyms!

These complaints aside, this book is worth buying, reading, and studying. It is a most useful corrective to histories focusing on specific wars, campaigns, battles, personalities, or weapons systems.

PETER DOMBROWSKI
Naval War College



Finkelstein, Sydney, Jo Whitehead, and Andrew Campbell. *Think Again: Why Good Leaders Make Bad Decisions and How to Keep It from Happening to You*. Boston: Harvard Business School, 2008. 204pp. \$27.95

Bad decisions are common, but bad decisions by good leaders are perplexing. This book delves into the root causes of faulty decisions made by leaders who should have known better. The reader will be intrigued by the cognitive dynamics underlying defective decisions. Neuroscience is making aspects of traditional wisdom about decision making obsolete. It turns out that rational decision making is not really all that rational.

The book’s lead author, Sydney Finkelstein, teaches at Tuck School of Business, Dartmouth, and has written extensively on leadership. His coauthors both earned their MBAs at Harvard and teach at the Strategic Management Center at Ashridge Business School, outside London. Finkelstein also authored *Why Smart Executives Fail*.

The authors identify two common components in the flawed decisions they studied: judgment error and the absence of a corrective process. One example given is the case of Matthew Broderick, a retired Marine Corps general who was a seasoned decision maker in the Federal Emergency Management Agency's Operations Center during Hurricane Katrina. His experience had taught him that initial reports from a crisis area are often exaggerated and inaccurate. Twelve hours after the hurricane hit New Orleans, Broderick received conflicting information about breached levees and extensive flooding. His rational analysis was that the situation was not dire, and he went home. By the following morning, the magnitude of the catastrophe was unequivocal.

Broderick was a competent leader with proven crisis experience, so why did he assign great validity to one source of information while dismissing data from other credible sources? The authors contend that his misjudgment resulted from two cognitive errors: he incorrectly assumed that the Katrina situation "pattern-matched" his prior crisis experiences; and he exacerbated the error by "emotionally tagging" the information from his preferred source, the Army Corps of Engineers. Pattern recognition and emotional tagging are powerful subconscious influences on decision making.

Based on the authors' research, four "red flag conditions" are evident in defective decisions: misleading experiences, misleading prejudices, inappropriate self-interest, and inappropriate attachments. A red-flag condition forecasts vulnerability to cognitive bias. Notable examples of

flawed decisions made by exceptional military, business, and government leaders richly illustrate the latent peril in red-flag conditions.

The elements at play are subtle and subconscious. For example, the persistent tug of personal self-interest is hard to detect, because a self-serving bias is implicitly acceptable in our culture. Self-interest becomes inappropriate when it is unacknowledged and there is no self-awareness. It corrosively distorts the decision process. The authors' research found that inappropriate self-interest contributed to flawed strategic decisions in more than two-thirds of their research cases.

The book is repetitive at times, but that minor distraction is more than offset by its insightful advice and practical decision-process safeguards. The authors refer extensively to academic cognitive research and challenge the invincibility of "rational and analytic" decision making, especially for leaders in complex situations where information is ambiguous.

HENRY KNISKERN
Naval War College



Horner, Charles. *Rising China and Its Postmodern Fate: Memories of Empire in a New Global Context*. Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 2009. 224pp. \$34.95

This book connects China's past, present, and future and places them in a larger, evolving context. Horner's work is nothing short of a tour de force of world intellectual history as projected and contested on the canvas that is China. Eloquent and engaging, it is pointed without being overly

judgmental, incorporating an absorbing literature review that is surprisingly cogent, considering the sheer amount of information conveyed.

Horner takes a bold and transparent approach: his “hypothetical history of the future” analyzes the past in the context of contemporary politics and debates, as post-1978 market reforms have opened up intellectual discourse. He explores the international dimensions and domestic discourses of sinology: “China’s intellectual scene is now among the most vibrant in the world, bringing together . . . competing ideas both foreign and domestic.” The author likewise reveals his own intellectual journey. This self-conscious approach is valuable, since perhaps nowhere other than in China has history been so mined, misused, analyzed, exploited—and remained a subject of such fascination and debate.

Horner explores longtime Chinese bureaucratic practices of devising norms and lessons from history, offering examples from the Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties. Although all are invoked as positive or negative models today, “What they stand for now is very different from what they were once thought to be.” More broadly, “China once interpreted its own past in light of yesterday’s failures, but now it is coming to a new appreciation of its past in light of today’s successes.” China’s usable past includes long if uneven “maritime and naval traditions” that generated national prestige and support for the ruling regime, supported vigorous shipbuilding and trade, and incorporated Taiwan. It is hard to overlook the relevance, and resonance, of such issues today. In a useful comparative example

of the influence of history, Horner likens Zheng He’s voyages to the Apollo moon landings in the long-term transformations they brought in domestic opinion regarding national capabilities, despite their abrupt terminations.

Strategic debate in the Qing dynasty regarding the value of China’s western territories reveals enduring tensions in its strategic orientation between continental and maritime frontiers and between factions advocating their respective emphases. Horner quotes one official, whose vividly expressed viewpoint carried the day (perhaps to Beijing’s detriment, in retrospect): “The maritime nations are like a sickness of the limbs, far away and light, but Russia is like a sickness of the heart and stomach, nearby and dangerous.”

Horner tackles the enduring puzzle of why China’s leaders failed to anticipate maritime threats from Western powers and finds that the Qing government devoted insufficient attention to diplomacy and intelligence abroad and failed to consult knowledgeable overseas Chinese. Nevertheless, by the dawn of the twentieth century, China’s intelligentsia had achieved a deep understanding of the sources of Western power and “self-understanding.” Significant bureaucratic-curricular reforms proved insufficient, however: a “painful consensus” emerged that “a new intellectual regime . . . would have to consolidate its power before the country’s recovery of national power could begin in earnest.”

Then, as now, there is widespread determination to make China a prosperous great power but uncertainty regarding how to do so. Questions abound: How should China relate to the international system? How should it

work with the existing hegemonic power of the day? Also, to what extent can, and should, Beijing further its interests militarily? Horner sees this as part of a more fundamental question and cites a Chinese intellectual: “Do we Chinese have the possibility or necessity to form our own discourse of modernity, or do we open a ‘branch office’ of the Western discourse of modernity in China”?

I commend this book to general readers in search of intellectually stimulating but accessible material, to teachers of survey courses at the advanced undergraduate or graduate level, and to specialists seeking insights into their own studies of Chinese history.

ANDREW ERICKSON
Naval War College



Alterman, Jon B., and John W. Garver. *The Vital Triangle: China, the United States and the Middle East*. Washington, D.C.: CSIS, 2008. 144pp. \$16.95

In *The Vital Triangle* Jon Alterman and John Garver present a compact analysis of relations among China, the United States, and the countries of the Mideast. Alterman directs the Middle East Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, and Garver is a professor of international affairs at Georgia Tech. They deliver a focused, 133-page narrative, peppered with charts illustrating statistical trends in the energy and arms trades. Based on interviews and conferences with scholars in China and the Mideast, a review of English- and Chinese-language secondary literature, and news reporting, this study is the first attempt at a

comprehensive, “three-dimensional” study of Sino-U.S. relations in regard to the vital Middle East.

Most important, the authors explain how Beijing’s keen awareness of its limited power and its recognition of the importance of Sino-U.S. trade significantly restrain Chinese opposition to U.S. Mideast strategy. Despite China’s growing economic stake in the region and declaratory opposition to U.S. “hegemony,” Beijing gives avoiding direct clashes with Washington higher priority than it does its relations with regional states. A key example is China’s decision in 1997 to scale back significantly cooperation with Iran on nuclear and missile technologies in response to pressure from the Clinton administration. The authors demonstrate how Beijing paradoxically combines a practical policy of risk avoidance with the rhetoric of antihegemonic solidarity, allowing China to reap economic and political profits from Western protection of the flow of Mideast energy and, simultaneously, from regional resentments of that same Western intervention. Beijing’s observations of rough Soviet and American experiences in Mideast geopolitics reinforce its belief in the cost-effectiveness of a low regional security profile.

The book concludes with some reasonable, if not exactly groundbreaking, recommendations for managing frictions in the China–United States–Mideast triangle. Of particular interest to the naval community are those focused on securing the maritime domain within the Persian Gulf. Alterman and Garver advocate collaboration among China and Western and Persian Gulf littoral states on ship identification protocols, cargo security initiatives, and multilateral

search-and-rescue operations. The authors argue that because these steps are limited, practical, and focus on the interests of all sides, China may be willing to engage here, and that further, because of Tehran's desire to stay on good terms with Beijing, Chinese participation might induce some restraint on Iran's part.

The Vital Triangle is well worth reading. It provides a useful contextual framework for placing in perspective overhyped news reports on Sino-U.S. disputes over Chinese arms deals with countries in the region, Beijing's growing concerns about ensuring the security of its oil imports, threats from Egypt and Saudi Arabia that they may seek Beijing's political-military support as an alternative to Washington, and attempts by Iran to appeal to China as a counterweight to Western pressures. Because the book cogently illustrates Beijing's reluctance to take risks or choose sides and thereby diminishes the credibility of China as a counterweight, Americans working diplomatically in the Mideast could even find it useful to provide copies to their host-country interlocutors the next time they try to play "the China card."

ROBERT A. HARRIS
Defense Intelligence Agency, Burke, Va.

(The views and opinions expressed in this review are the author's alone and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Defense Intelligence Agency, Department of Defense, or U.S. government.)



Jones, Seth G. *In the Graveyard of Empires: America's War in Afghanistan*. New York: Norton, 2009. 414pp. \$27.95

In an August 2009 *Wall Street Journal* article, Seth Jones described meeting villagers in Afghanistan who had never heard of President Hamid Karzai and even thought the U.S. military forces he was traveling with were Soviets, "not realizing that the Soviet army withdrew in 1989." This lack of knowledge may seem implausible in an era of cell phone and Internet communication, but Jones offers a detailed narrative of the historical and modern-day challenges in Afghanistan that makes this ignorance believable. He describes a country populated by diverse ethnic tribes with strong aversions to central governance. As the title implies, he recalls the failure of foreign forces time and again to tame and govern this disparate Afghan populace. From Alexander the Great in 330 BC to the British Empire in the nineteenth century, to the Soviet invasion of the 1970s, Afghanistan has been seemingly unconquerable. Against this background Jones demonstrates the monumental challenge that the United States faces as it attempts to do what other "empires" could not—"create a new order" in Afghanistan. He clearly demonstrates that "the lessons from the past empires provide a stark lesson."

A well-respected political scientist at RAND, Seth Jones clearly has the credibility to take on the task of breaking down and explaining the complicated Afghan environment. Jones is an adjunct professor at Georgetown University, has taught at the Naval Postgraduate School, and has visited Afghanistan numerous times since 11 September 2001. *In the Graveyard of Empires* is painstakingly researched, with over a thousand notes citing interviews, documents, books, news articles, video clips, and written statements

from numerous U.S. and international figures who have played prominent roles in Afghanistan since before and after 9/11. In fact, Jones's many citations and his approach of listing diverse players with one-line, anecdotal physical descriptions or personality traits can be overwhelming and even detract from the narrative.

Nonetheless, this book does a superb job of filling in the details of Afghanistan's complex politics for scholars who are interested in gaining a better understanding of the history, the state and nonstate actors involved, and the many civil and military leaders who have attempted to calm the political upheaval in Afghanistan. Jones ably explains how, after the United States and its allies quickly knocked the Taliban from power, routed al-Qa'ida, and set up a popularly elected central government, the country nonetheless failed to establish an adequate justice system and security for its populace—instead allowing a robust insurgency to develop. With the experience of someone who has walked the ground and talked to the leaders on all sides, Jones effectively argues that the drug trade, high-level government corruption, and the lack of resources could, if not resolved, lead to one more headstone in Afghanistan's graveyard.

DOUGLAS J. WADSWORTH
Colonel, U.S. Marine Corps
Naval War College



Zatarain, Lee Allen. *Tanker War: America's First Conflict with Iran, 1987–1988*. Philadelphia: Casemate, 2008. 388pp. \$32.95

Lee Zatarain, an attorney, has crafted a compelling and immensely readable account of one of the least-known chapters of the U.S. Navy's maritime combat operations, the tanker war of 1987–88. The tanker war was fought by three now very familiar foes—Iran and Iraq (who had been at war with each other since 1980), and the United States, which became embroiled in the conflict when an Iraqi aircraft attacked and nearly sank one of its frontline warships in 1987. Using new information gained from the U.S. Navy and other U.S. government sources, as well as extensive interviews with the officers and crew who served in the Persian Gulf during the fifteen-month war, Zatarain examines and explains with lawyerly precision the events that constituted the U.S. Navy's combat operations against Iranian naval forces.

Tanker War begins with a detailed account of the Iraqi attack on the guided-missile frigate USS *Stark* in May 1987; the first successful antiship-missile attack on a U.S. Navy warship, it resulted in thirty-seven deaths. That attack, however, precipitated no military response against Iraq by the United States, largely because it was considered to have been an unfortunate accident, and Iraq was more of a friend than Iran. Iran's subsequent actions—laying mines in the heavily trafficked channels of the Gulf to interrupt the flow of Iraqi oil and attacking civilian oil tankers—forced the United States to side with Iraq. As Zatarain explains in straightforward fashion, the conflict that ensued nearly cost the U.S. Navy another warship, USS *Samuel B. Roberts*, and subjected the Navy to several antiship-missile attacks by the Iranian military. In retaliation, the U.S. Navy destroyed a good part of the Iranian navy and

effectively established the American maritime dominance in the Persian Gulf that exists to this day.

Among the key issues that Zatarain raises in his gripping account of the various battles fought between the United States and Iran is the controversial claim by many U.S. Navy commanding officers that Iran used Chinese-made Silkworm antiship missiles against American ships. Their claims were discounted by senior military commanders, who refused to acknowledge that any such attacks had occurred, despite extensive evidence to the contrary—such attacks would have required a military response that the United States and the U.S. military were neither willing nor able to undertake.

As political tensions have continued to rise in recent years between the United States and Iran, *Tanker War* is a must-read for those who have a desire or a duty to understand how recent history may shape perceptions of these protagonists in the future.

RON RATCLIFF
Naval War College



Graham, Bradley. *By His Own Rules: The Ambitions, Successes, and Ultimate Failures of Donald Rumsfeld*. New York: PublicAffairs, 2009. 803pp. \$35

In a speech given to Pentagon employees on 10 September 2001, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld stated that the “adversary that poses a threat, a serious threat, to the security of the United States” is not “decrepit dictators” but rather “the Pentagon bureaucracy.” The blunt message of this speech was very

soon to be bound together in a tension-filled relationship with the ensuing wars initiated by the terrorist attacks of the next day. This tension gives dramatic shape to the career of Donald Rumsfeld as portrayed by Bradley Graham in his well researched book *By His Own Rules*. A veteran *Washington Post* correspondent, Graham intends that the title be regarded literally, as his detailed story focuses on Rumsfeld as a master bureaucratic infighter who did indeed work by his own rules. (The rules encapsulated Rumsfeld’s views on serving and surviving in government and were eventually printed in the *Wall Street Journal*.)

Rumsfeld applied the rules in his intense commitment to the type of U.S. military President George W. Bush had called for during his campaign, an “agile, lethal, readily deployable” armed force. To build this force required a significant transformation of the outsized and ponderous military developed during and immediately after the Cold War. Graham portrays Rumsfeld as a reformer who “had never met an organization he didn’t want to change” and who had come well prepared to transform the Defense Department, but for two untimely wars.

Rumsfeld’s personal goal of transforming the military seemed to overshadow his responsibilities for prosecuting the wars. Graham describes at length how Rumsfeld’s missteps in managing the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan caused him to become the “personification of the arrogance and misjudgments of the Bush Administration,” from damaging interagency power struggles to intolerance of differing viewpoints, to a lack of ability to acknowledge mistakes or change strategies.

Yet Graham also well portrays Rumsfeld as a complex man who got things accomplished. A tenacious collegiate wrestler at Princeton and a Navy pilot, Rumsfeld was elected to Congress at age thirty. He served four terms before President Richard Nixon appointed him as head of the Office of Economic Opportunity and then as ambassador to NATO. Under President Gerald Ford, Rumsfeld would serve as White House chief of staff and as the youngest-ever secretary of defense. In Rumsfeld's business career, he was a CEO responsible for the successful turnaround of several major corporations. With his appointment in 2001, he would also become the oldest to serve as secretary of defense. In all of his many appointments and responsibilities, Rumsfeld comes across as an intense, capable, and ambitious operator with a "deep moral streak."

Graham's well written and comprehensive narrative implies an answer to the question of why an administrator known for his diligent and rational approach to resolving complex issues ultimately presided over a deeply dysfunctional policy-making process. In Rumsfeld, overconfidence eventually converted a healthy skepticism about thorough organizational procedures into near contempt for them. Transforming the military, like countering an insurgency, proved to be more about changing minds than about building new weapons or using old ones. Graham concludes that Rumsfeld's "biggest failings were personal—the result of the man himself, not simply of the circumstances he confronted."

WILLIAM CALHOUN
Naval War College



Barlow, Jeffrey G. *From Hot War to Cold: The U.S. Navy and National Security Affairs, 1945–1955*. Palo Alto, Calif.: Stanford Univ. Press, 2009. 710pp. \$65

The U.S. Navy that patrolled the world's oceans with such unquestioned dominance in the 1990s did not spring into existence full-blown, nor was its creation a smooth evolution based on dispassionate analysis and national consensus. The early years of that postwar Navy, particularly its first, crucial decade, were marked by storms, impassioned debate, and bitter political battles. This turmoil had started before the end of the Second World War and would continue into the mid-1950s. Unfortunately, there has been far too little written about this period in the U.S. Navy's history.

Jeffrey Barlow, a noted naval historian and author, has done much to close that gap and in the process has produced a stunning book. Meticulously researched and scrupulously documented, *From Hot War to Cold* is a gripping account of how the modern Navy was formed in the crucible of the first ten years after the war. As a history, this volume is first-rate. As a study of decision making, it is superb.

Barlow consistently reminds the reader just how important this decade was. As he relates, military and government leaders wrestled with critical emerging technologies, tectonic political shifts, and ferocious internal battles. He examines every aspect of these times, tracing how military organizations were shaped and affected by a series of defense reorganization acts, and how the Air Force and Navy battled for a role in the nation's nuclear strategy. Over time,

deployment patterns were established that would last for half a century.

This book not only speaks knowledgeably about technical, organizational, and doctrinal shifts over a tumultuous decade but gives full attention to the personalities of the day. From the president on down, Barlow examines the debates, discourse, plots, and planning, as well as the passion and emotion that went into these decisions. There are giants in these pages, including Ernest J. King, Forrest Sherman, James Forrestal, Harry Truman, and Dwight D. Eisenhower. There is also a myriad of other officers and leaders whose names should be more familiar, such as Admirals Richard Conolly and Edward C. Ewen.

Barlow has captured the flavor of political infighting at its best and worst.

Among the more dramatic accounts is the tale of how Secretary of the Navy Charles Thomas fired Admiral Robert B. Carney, who, as Chief of Naval Operations, had tangled with the secretary of state, infuriated President Eisenhower, and refused to exchange message traffic with Thomas.

If there is a flaw with Barlow's book, it is the flaw to which every writer aspires—to instill in the reader a feeling of regret when the last page is turned and the book is finished. It is profoundly to be hoped that this volume will be followed by a second and a third.

RICHARD NORTON
Naval War College