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The Grand Design: Strategy and the U.S. Civil War

Richard Norton

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Pilar? Having studied at Princeton with Hemingway biographer Carlos Baker, Mort provides one of the most convincing explanations yet offered for Hemingway's decision to place himself in harm's way.

It would be easy simply to ascribe Hemingway's decision to that of a writer living out the life that he had illustrated in his art. Mort takes a more scholarly approach, however. One of the most interesting elements of this book is its description of the three stages through which each of Hemingway's characters pass in his novels—the stage of innocence, then suffering, and finally an existential stage, in which the hero creates meaning out of nothingness. It is certainly possible to see Hemingway himself following this trajectory. In the imaginative mind of a writer, the U-boat appeared as a multifaceted menace, not only a threat to merchant vessels but a stealthy craft that could deliver spies to the many coves and inlets of Caribbean islands like Cuba. Hunting down and attacking these modern weapons of war would require a dedicated band of ardent antifascists, the likes of whom Hemingway had consorted with in Spain in the late thirties, and whom he would lead into action again, as his small fishing vessel sought valiantly for the elusive U-boats throughout the Caribbean and the Gulf of Mexico. Many elements of Hemingway's complex personality combined to compel him to sail *Pilar* into action, and Mort gives each of these factors due treatment.

A former naval officer himself, Mort is familiar with life at sea. The many accounts of Hemingway leading his crew on these dangerous missions benefit from Mort's having participated in

patrols in some of the same waters. In summing up this work, one phrase stands above the rest as a testament to the sweeping panorama of Mort's ambitious attempt to tie together a great naval campaign and the life of an American literary giant: "It was action and artistry combined. It was also fun, most of the time, especially when there was enough gin." Mort has provided us with a fascinating book, and students of both military and literary history will definitely want to put *The Hemingway Patrols* on their reading list.

JEFF SHAW

Naval War College



Stoker, Donald. *The Grand Design: Strategy and the U.S. Civil War*. New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2010. 498pp. \$27.95

It is difficult to imagine historical ground that has been more thoroughly mined than that of the American Civil War. Biographies, battle studies, sweeping histories, and all manner of specialized analyses dot the literary landscape. However, rather than turning away from a potentially saturated market, our collective interest in this sanguinary conflict has kept publishers and authors delivering a steady stream of material year after year after year.

It is nonetheless a brave author who claims to offer something truly original to our understanding of the war. Although some scholars may quibble over whether or not Stoker has succeeded in this effort, his *Grand Design*, a one-volume history that examines the role of strategy in the Civil War, is something of a *rara avis*. More to the point,

it is both a useful and thought-provoking addition to any library.

Surprisingly, Stoker is at his weakest when discussing just what he means by strategy. The term is admittedly somewhat slippery, and competing definitions abound. In the end, Stoker settles, by his own admission, for examining the linkage of political policy objectives and subsequent military operations.

As a result, the two most important personages in the book are Abraham Lincoln and Jefferson Davis. As political leaders of their respective sides, it was they who were responsible for setting and approving political policy and objectives. Lincoln emerges as a political leader who, having once determined the political objectives of the United States, was forced time and again to intervene in the running of the war because his generals failed to gain those objectives through military operations. In doing so, Lincoln gradually gained a distinct appreciation for the military art and sharpened his ability to see clearly which courses of action would likely produce successful results. Davis, in contrast, saw himself as the Confederacy's general in chief and would persist in that notion to the detriment of the Confederate war effort until 1865.

Stoker naturally examines the military men on the other side of the political-military equation. Perhaps no one should have expected strategically gifted senior officers to be found in the ranks of the U.S. officer corps in 1860, and Stoker confirms that such men were then lacking, with the possible exception of the aged Winfield Scott. The U.S. Army was small, its garrisons were small, and with the exception of the brief war with Mexico, its units had always been small. The only big things

about the Army were its theater of operations and the egos of some of its more famous personalities. Yet individuals with a broader expanse of vision did emerge. The best of these wore Union blue, and Stoker makes a convincing argument that the best of the best was Ulysses S. Grant, a man notable in his ability to complement the president's policies and objectives with effective military operations. Stoker argues that Grant's success was not just a question of superior resources. Grant saw beyond his theater of operations. He understood the tools available to him, and he worked in harness with his political leader. William T. Sherman is also given credit for being a general in strategic alignment with national policy and objectives. In contrast, however, Stoker reasonably judges George B. McClellan as a general with strategic insight and imagination but woefully incompetent when it came to battlefield leadership, without which strategic objectives cannot be realized.

Stoker is far from being an unabashed fan of the Union's strategists; his biggest censure on its generals' performance is that they were slow. He convincingly claims that a Union victory was possible much earlier than the spring of 1865; however, he does not regard that victory as inevitable. In contrast, he faults Confederate counterparts with never getting it right at all. His criticisms of Jefferson Davis's fixation on forward defense and the waste of trying to preserve and protect the Confederacy west of the Mississippi are well argued indeed. Stoker gives credit to Robert E. Lee for his capability to be as good as Grant but notes that he was nearly always confined to theater operations. General P. G. T. Beauregard, a

self-proclaimed Southern strategist, is simply and reasonably dismissed as a fantasist.

Given the number of bad books that have been written about the Civil War, it is a pleasure to find a good one.

Stoker is a solid, competent author who makes his points in clear convincing prose. Written from a refreshing viewpoint, *The Grand Design* is a book worth reading.

RICHARD NORTON
Naval War College



McMeekin, Sean. *The Berlin–Baghdad Express: The Ottoman Empire and Germany’s Bid for World Power, 1898–1918*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 2010. 496pp. \$29.95

If ever there was a story of epic unintended consequences and “might have beens,” Sean McMeekin’s *The Berlin–Baghdad Express* is it. Approaching the First World War in the Middle East from the German and Ottoman perspectives, McMeekin expands our Anglo-centric understanding of the conflict. In doing so, he unveils a breathtaking catalogue of misunderstandings, miscalculations, simple mistakes, and missed opportunities that would be comic if not so horribly tragic.

While the title conjures images of the fabled Orient Express, the book is a first-rate history of the diplomatic jockeying of the German and Ottoman Empires to gain advantage over their respective archrivals, Britain and Russia. The railway would be a tool to enable Germany’s *Drang nach Osten* (drive to the East) while strengthening the Turks (bitter enemies of Germany’s

Russian rivals) by linking the farthest reaches of the Ottoman Empire with the seat of power in Istanbul. The completion of the railway, first to Baghdad and then extended on to Basra, would have profound political, economic, and strategic importance.

To achieve this end Germany designed a strategy to undermine the cohesion of the British Empire through Islamic holy war. That strategy was an outgrowth of Kaiser Wilhelm II’s reckless and amateurish meddling in Oriental affairs. The kaiser believed that his affinity for Sultan Abdulhamid II, Caliph of the Faithful, and for all things Islamic would enable him to engineer a jihad against the hated British, targeting the empire’s large Muslim populations in India, Egypt, and beyond. The kaiser, in league with the sultan and later the Young Turks, embarked on ambitious propaganda and military campaigns designed to rally Muslims to the sultan’s call for jihad, despite the facts that most educated Muslims had long given up the idea of the caliphate; that there was no distinction in Islamic jurisprudence or practice between a bad infidel (British, French) and good one (German, Austrian, American, or maybe Italian); that Sunni and Shia Muslims had vastly different views of jihad; and that the British had for years controlled access to Mecca for the hajj. McMeekin also points out the oddness of German support for jihad juxtaposed with the German-based Zionist movement, which actually anticipated Britain’s Balfour Declaration to establish a Jewish homeland in Palestine.

The cast of characters includes soldiers, statesmen, adventurers, charlatans, humanitarians, and thugs from across Europe, the Caucasus, Africa, and the