

2010

National Security Dilemmas: Challenges and Opportunities

Andrew L. Stigler

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

Recommended Citation

Stigler, Andrew L. (2010) "National Security Dilemmas: Challenges and Opportunities," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 63 : No. 1 , Article 10.

Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol63/iss1/10>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu.

BOOK REVIEWS

“THE LATTER TEND ALSO TO BE THE FORMER”

Gray, Colin S. *National Security Dilemmas: Challenges and Opportunities*. Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, 2009. 334pp. \$29.95

Colin Gray’s highly engaging book addresses a spectrum of national security considerations that are likely to impact the United States in the coming years. Gray, who is a professor at the University of Reading and served for five years in the Ronald Reagan administration, argues that America’s sports-mindedness has culturally prepared Americans to think in terms of winning and losing and of confrontations that have a beginning, middle, and end. In this light, the former expression of art “Global War on Terrorism,” one that President Obama has dispensed with, leads us to overlook the eternal nature of the struggle against individual and small-group violence. Gray convincingly observes that the conflict the United States has embarked upon after September 11 “bears more resemblance to a protracted hunt than it does to what most people understandably call a war.”

Gray warns that although we cannot control surprise, we can control our reaction to it—a particularly important observation for the current geostrategic environment. His call for the United States to develop a “detailed, culturally

empathetic understanding of its new adversaries” is particularly apt. One is left with the task of struggling to choose which arguments should be highlighted.

Even the chapter on understanding revolutionary changes in warfare, a topic that received too much attention after the 1991 Persian Gulf war, is rewarding. Gray points out that though the term is of use, one cannot assess the true nature of a potential revolution in military affairs (RMA) outside the wider political, strategic, and social context. For example, Germany’s successes in May 1940 were due as much to French mistakes as to Nazi military innovation.

In addition, at a number of points throughout the book Gray makes the cogent point that the United States could easily spend too much time looking for, or attempting to create, the next RMA and put too little effort into understanding social and cultural changes in how it views war. I believe Gray coined the term “Revolution in Attitudes toward the Military” to argue that variations in acceptable military practices and the need to understand

the cultural implications of violence will be increasingly important.

I would offer two minor critiques. Gray may have set the bar too high when he argues at length that the United States suffers “a persistent strategy deficit.” Doesn’t history offer more than a handful of examples of powerful states that demonstrated superb long-range strategic planning, in particular during peacetime? I wonder if one can agree with the great majority of Gray’s individual critiques on American strategic practices and yet be skeptical that a broad-gauge indictment is warranted.

Also, when I read the brief section in which he argues that al-Qa’ida could potentially be deterred, I remained unconvinced. The facts that al-Qa’ida protects its key members and that some of the organization’s support system may be deterrable are far from demonstrating that “the organization itself . . . should be eminently deterrable.” However, these are two minor points regarding a commendable work that engages a wide array of security considerations and offers much engaging and original thinking.

As Gray notes regarding his subtitle, “the latter tend also to be the former.” Colin Gray’s work offers many important arguments and observations that will help identify both.

ANDREW L. STIGLER
Naval War College



Stuart, Douglas T. *Creating the National Security State: A History of the Law That Transformed America*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 2008. 342pp. \$38.50

Douglas Stuart holds the J. William Stuart and Helen D. Stuart Chair in International Studies, Business and Management at Dickinson College and is an adjunct professor at the U.S. Army War College. He provides an insightful history of the struggle to reform completely the U.S. national security establishment from 1937 to 1960, an effort that resulted in the creation of the Department of Defense, the National Security Council (NSC), the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), and three separate armed service departments under a secretary of defense.

This extensively researched study of the political and bureaucratic battles to establish control over the national security establishment holds invaluable lessons for those interested in the current efforts to reform the joint, inter-agency system to better develop, resource, and execute a coherent national security policy and strategy.

Prior to World War II, Edward Pendleton Herring of Harvard identified problems with the existing foreign and defense policy-making system. The United States was wedded to isolationism and antimilitarism, with narrow domestic political interests that shaped its foreign and defense policies.

Pendleton Herring introduced the “concept of national security” and was visionary in proposing an alternative national security system. Pearl Harbor quickly changed the way Americans thought about security. The fact that the United States was attacked from such distance firmly “established the concept of national security as an unchallengeable standard against which all future foreign policy decisions were to be made.”