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Warfighting and Disruptive Technologies: Disguising Innovation,

Robert C. Rubel

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that intelligence was analyzed and interpreted. He is clearly disturbed by the apparent usurpation of national intelligence activities by the Department of Defense. The reader is left with the nagging suspicion that further such consolidation may not be in the best interests of the country’s leadership, since opposing opinions already appear to have no voice.

Hersh concludes *Chain of Command* by posing a troubling set of questions. “How did eight or nine neo-conservatives who believed that a war in Iraq was the answer to international terrorism get their way? How did they redirect the government and rearrange long-standing American priorities and policies with so much ease?” Discerning readers must look past the author’s bias and answer for themselves. While it is arguable whether this book will earn the stature of *My Lai 4*, Hersh succeeds in confronting us with important questions that force us to look harder at ourselves and our country.

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Beyond that, nothing about this book is clear or straightforward, including the title. The title leads one to think that the book will examine how revolutionary technologies have transformed warfare, but the subtitle, “Disguising Innovation,” should serve as a warning—nothing is as it first seems. This work is a sociological study of how the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps have achieved what the author terms “disruptive innovations” (new ways of combining technologies that create new forms of warfare) and sustaining innovations (those that improve existing forms). Technology plays a distant second fiddle to doctrine. Pierce’s major thesis is that the catalysts for disruptive innovation are senior military officers. How these officers manage the disruptive innovation process is key. He shows that they establish small groups to define the tasks that must be carried out to conduct a new form of warfare, ensure that like-minded officers are promoted, and most intriguingly, disguise the disruptive innovation as merely improvements to existing modes, in order to avert ruinous opposition from entrenched interests. In support of his thesis Pierce offers a number of case studies, including amphibious warfare, Japanese and American carrier warfare in World War II, and Marine maneuver warfare. A nice twist is the inclusion of more recent case studies like surface-land-attack warfare and the Tactical Collaboration Network.

After a promising first chapter in which the author generally defines his terms and surveys the existing literature on disruptive innovation, however, comes a nearly disastrous attempt to establish a theoretical framework to support the
analysis of the following case studies. Chapter 2 is almost unreadable, apparently due to the failure of anyone actually to read or edit it. Apart from turgid and sloppy language, the chapter’s most egregious defect is the author’s nonsensical adaptation of charts from Clay Christensen’s *The Innovator’s Dilemma*, a standard in the innovation literature. Pierce employs his own versions of Christensen’s charts but leaves out certain key elements, with the result that the reader has no hope of making sense of them. This will give the knowledgeable reader serious doubt regarding the validity of the book.

However, things get better as Pierce swings into the case studies. He contrasts successful attempts to institutionalize disruptive innovations, like the Marine Corps shift to offensive amphibious warfare doctrine in the 1930s, with such failed efforts as Admiral Elmo Zumwalt’s Project 60, an attempt to refocus the Navy on sea control. Pierce also compares the management methods used to promote sustaining innovations, such as continuous-aim gunfire, with those successful in promoting disruptive innovations, and he finds significant differences. In the end, a degree of clarity is attained, and by the final chapter the reader can with some effort understand and even agree with the author’s main arguments. In fact, people engaged in military innovation efforts will likely find some practical insights.

If, then, this book, despite its flaws, can be useful for the knowledgeable military officer, academic, or defense industry manager, it is most definitely not for the uninformed or casual reader. Ultimately, it is too hard to follow and contains too many editing errors to be recommended as a worthwhile investment for the general reader. It is too bad that neither Pierce’s advisers nor his publisher extended the effort to review and edit his dissertation properly; it could have had far wider appeal and value.

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Among the many attributes desired in professional military officers is the ability to make extremely rapid decisions under conditions of extreme stress and peril, and for the highest imaginable stakes. Decisions may even have to be made in less time than is available consciously to weigh the alternatives and select a course of action. Although not unique—others, including doctors, law enforcement officials, and firefighters, face similar situations and under equivalent expectations—such demands are not a common part of most people’s work experience.

In *Blink* Gladwell examines rapid, almost instantaneous, decision making—decisions made in the “blink of an eye.” The book advances an intriguing and seductive proposition, that people can be trained to make nearly instantaneous decisions using minimal amounts of data and yet achieve remarkable percentages of successful outcomes. If reading *Blink* could produce such a result, the book would represent one of the most significant advances in the field of decision making in decades. Unfortunately, such is not the case.