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Strategic Theories

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conviction that only by moving with “the way” can human success, including military success, be secured. More narrowly, they look at his emphasis on intelligence, assessments, and deception (*gui 詭*), based on psychological insight.

But many people (military specialists not least) are reluctant to accept the idea that war is really all that different from culture to culture. They would argue that force is force and violence is violence, whether one is in Sun Tzu’s China or Napoleon’s Europe. Huang manifests some sympathy for this line of interpretation in his rendition of *shi* as “combat power.” He is, furthermore, on solid ground philologically: usages contained in the ancient etymological treatise the *Shuowen* and other classics show the word meaning something like force or power as understood in the West, whether latent (as in a set crossbow) or unleashed (as in a flood so powerful as to sweep boulders along).

Nonspecialists in Chinese will probably be impatient with this sort of close linguistic analysis, but it has a real point. The choice of translation for *shi* is only one of a number of possible examples that mark Huang’s Sun Tzu as, in modern terms, a rather “realist” reading. Whether, as such, it can capture all the implications and resonances of the text is a matter for scholars to debate. For the general reader, however, it has one great advantage: the realist approach to Sun Tzu helps to dispel the air of exoticism that sometimes envelops Oriental military classics. It is probably not coincidental that Huang is the son of a Republic of China air force colonel and presumably did military service himself.

Huang presents his text in double columns, in modern English; on the right are the translated words of Sun Tzu, and on the left is Huang’s analysis. An introduction and extensive notes further clarify the text. However, Huang’s publishers have done him a real disservice by omitting Chinese characters in his work—Ames’s publishers saw fit to include them. A desk-top computer can now handle Chinese graphics, so there is no excuse for a leading publisher not to provide them in a book of this quality.

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Castex, Raoul. *Strategic Theories*.
Eugenia C. Kiesling, editor and
translator. Annapolis, Md.: Naval
Institute Press, 1994. 438pp. (No
price given)

In the history of strategic thought, few
theorists have demonstrated the sweeping

command of broad concepts that char-
acterizes the work of Raoul Castex.
Nevertheless, while Clausewitz,
Jomini, and Mahan retain prominent
positions in the strategic pantheon, Cas-
tex remains obscure, though he is every
bit their equal, and more contemporary.

He wrote largely of sea power, but from the perspective of a naval officer in the service of a declining continental power. Writing during the turbulent period between the world wars, he urged retrenchment upon a heedless France that would soon suffer defeat, first at the hands of Nazis, then in two humiliating colonial wars. That he could not steer his countrymen off these shoals may have contributed to the discounting of his efforts; but, in the main, it is simply inaccessibility that has kept him so little known. Heretofore published only in French, Castex's masterwork ran some 2,500 pages in length.

Eugenia Kiesling, with her lucid translation and skillful editing, which present the distilled essence of Castex in well under five hundred pages, has made the obscure accessible. Her selections illuminate his many insights and remarkable grasp of both strategy and the deep currents that guide international politics. Kiesling presents writings in which Castex addresses a number of issues that are timely once again, such as joint warfare, information dominance, and civil-military relations. Finally, her trenchant introductory essay and the explanatory footnotes throughout the text strongly support her assertion that "no author has wrestled more earnestly than Castex with the methodological questions that ought to underpin the study of strategy."

In the realm of strategy, Castex does provide what historian Theodore Ropp referred to as a "synthesis" of the competing theories of the *jeune école* and Alfred T. Mahan. Taking their guidance from French Admiral Aube,

the reformers of the *jeune école* sought what has been called "sea denial"—in effect, "negative sea control"—the ability to deny via commerce raiding and the use of advanced technology (the torpedo, in that era) an opponent the benefits of naval mastery. Mahan attacked them vigorously in his "influence" books, arguing that the only form of mastery that mattered was positive sea control. Castex stood astride both positions. He agreed with Mahan about the need for positive control, but he also argued that in order to achieve naval mastery, a challenger would need to blend skillfully a mix of negative and positive maritime initiatives.

This insight led Castex to his concept of *manoeuvre*, the combination of efforts to create an opportunity to confront the leading naval power under favorable circumstances. Seen in this light, commerce and other forms of naval raiding would serve to disperse and wear down the opponent, creating the necessary conditions for a more direct challenge. In a brilliant critique of German naval strategy during World War I, Castex pointed out the manner in which both submarine and cruiser operations had dispersed and weakened the Royal Navy to a point at which the High Seas Fleet could have engaged the British Grand Fleet on virtually equal terms in the fall of 1914. That it did not, but was relegated instead to await interminably the fulfillment of a half-completed *manoeuvre*, led to Castex's explanation that though "the disparity in force should not have been paralyzing, the Germans were from the beginning convinced of their impotence against the British navy."

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Sensitive to the role of fear in weakening German operational strategy against the Royal Navy, Castex also showed a keen awareness of the effect of pride in keeping France's grand strategic colonial commitments very much out of line with its capabilities. His prescient call for retrenchment, in particular a withdrawal from Southeast Asia, could, had it been heeded, have saved France much humiliation. Indeed, Castex's thoughts on overseas involvements, the enduring importance of geographic factors, and the need to keep a balance between capabilities, costs, and commitments all seem particularly applicable to the American strategic position in the wake of the Cold War.

With his grand strategist's eye for spotting the key elements that characterize international rivalries, Castex also introduced the notion of the *perturbateur*, the state that seeks to overturn the politico-military status quo. He noted that this challenger is usually a continental power, driven toward conflict with the dominant maritime power, but whose strivings always end in defeat. Castex's ideas about land-sea rivalry are neatly juxtaposed with the geopolitical theories of the British geographer (and champion of land power) Halford Mackinder. He also clearly anticipates German historian Ludwig Dehio's sea-oriented theory about why continental challengers consistently lose their wars against maritime powers.

Indeed, Castex's interest in the land-sea nexus of conflict led him to a series of compelling hypotheses about the effects of maritime power upon land

operations and vice versa. Where Mahan explored this theme somewhat obliquely, using primarily the Second Punic War for his theoretical framework, Castex tackled the problem quite systematically. He devoted considerable attention to combined operations as well, generating a number of insights that still seem applicable in what is fast becoming an era of joint and littoral warfare. For Mahan, combined operations often seemed a dangerous distraction from the overarching objective of attaining, and maintaining, command of the sea. Castex, on the other hand, recognized the crucially important role that the exercise of naval mastery often has in strategically positioning land forces against even the most redoubtable continental opponent. In this regard, much of Castex's thinking resonates well with ". . . From the Sea."

In addition to commenting sagaciously on land-sea operations, Castex introduced the key theme of interservice coordination to achieve dominance of the information spectrum. He envisioned a sea-air-land communication network that would keep naval combatants apprised of the whereabouts of their opposite numbers. Needless to say, an advantage in this area would be a substantial force multiplier, particularly when employed in conjunction with tactical surprise. Castex's chapters on naval operations during World War I include a wealth of examples of German aerial and electronic reconnaissance in pursuit of a decisive information advantage over the Royal Navy. That the High Seas Fleet failed to use the results

to its ultimate benefit arose partly from its organizational inferiority complex, and partly from Britain's own highly effective information-warfare campaign of cryptanalysis.

In terms of understanding organizational influences, Castex was well ahead of his time. His work shows a remarkable sensitivity to the ways in which military institutional interests may distort political policy at the highest levels. For example, he pointed out that German naval leaders in 1914 devoted considerable effort to rationalizations for avoiding direct confrontations with the Royal Navy. Citing primary sources, he noted the general agreement among the naval hierarchy that the High Seas Fleet must remain "in being," which really meant "in port," so that it would have sufficient bargaining power in the inevitable peace negotiations.

For all his merits, however, Castex does suffer from a few flaws, one of them what Kiesling describes as "exaggeratedly scientific" claims. For example, in describing the ability of regionally hegemonic powers to absorb their smaller neighbors, Castex holds in pseudo-Newtonian fashion that "the attractive force is, as in physics, proportional to the mass of the larger power and the reciprocal of the square of the distance."

Other problems arise from Castex's apparent inability to think about tactical matters or their interaction with strategy. Thus, he seems askew in labeling commerce raiding as essentially a defensive doctrine rather than as tactically offensive, even in strategically defensive circumstances. His self-limitation to a strategic level

of analysis also seems responsible for his too-gloomy predictions about the future of amphibious warfare. His conclusions might have been more accurate had he undertaken a tactics-oriented appraisal, sensitive to the need for fire support and appropriate landing craft, as the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps did during the interwar period.

Despite such limitations, Castex presents a broad, intellectually engaging and persuasive perspective on strategy, both general and naval. Notwithstanding Ropp's notion that he merely synthesized the competing views of his time, there is a wealth here of genuinely original insights that will likely have implications for policy in areas as diverse as joint warfare, civil-military relations, strategy, and information dominance. Eugenia Kiesling, for her part, has presented Castex's work in a fashion truly worthy of inclusion among the *Classics of Sea Power*, rendering it with clarity, verve, and more than a modicum of literary elegance.

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Odom, William E. *America's Military Revolution: Strategy and Structure after the Cold War*. Washington, D.C.: The American Univ. Press, 1993. 186pp. \$22.95

In this work, Lieutenant General William E. Odom has set out to explore military strategy in the larger context of grand strategy and to examine the impact of the Cold War's end. He begins by saying that he wants to broaden the