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The War Game: A Critique of Military Problem Solving

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Brewer, Garry D., and Shubik, Martin. *The War Game: A Critique of Military Problem Solving*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979. 385pp.

The title of this book and the authors' reputations lead the reader to expect a tightly reasoned, coherent critique of the war gaming process and its application to military analysis. The authors, both on the faculty of Yale University, have built on research conducted over several years for the Rand Corporation to write the modular essays presented here. Unfortunately the sections do not form a coherent whole and the authors' critique does not move forward from their initial questions.

Brewer and Shubik divide their study into six parts, of varying interest depending on the reader's inclination. Part One, which the authors recommend for all readers, provides background for the entire book. A lucid, compact introduction to the entire subject of war gaming, this section provides useful distinctions between war gaming, simulations and models of the original. The authors then build on these definitions to develop a taxonomy of gaming, simulations and models, providing a compendium of techniques and giving a rough cut of the costs of military war gaming.

Part Two sketches the history of war gaming, heavily weighted toward recent experience, ending about the early 1970s. Although labeled history, the authors are really much more interested in getting on with the business of providing a critique of war gaming and hence devote more time and space to criticism of specific games and methods than to description. A reader interested in the history of war gaming would be better served by consulting almost any one of the works referenced in the

Part Three outlines the intellectual foundations of war gaming. One chapter provides a brief, excellent discussion of the Lanchester equations, concluding with comments on John Von Neumann's theory of games. Once again, the authors are much more interested in their critique function and continue a three-chapter discussion of manual, man-machine, and all-machine games. Although interesting as an exposition of the state of the art as of the early 1970s, these chapters provide little insight into the real challenge of creation of a coherent theory of gaming.

Specialists in war gaming and bureaucratic politics will be interested in Parts Four and Five, which are frankly written for them. Reporting results of an extensive survey of games, Part Four gives a detailed snapshot of the early 1970s. Part Five describes the military analysis system as it affects and uses war games. Once again a surfeit of conceptual and analytic detail is available—much more than the general reader will want.

Finally, Part Six details an extensive list of problems, recommendations, and directions that war gamers and their sponsors might take. Divided into minimal, moderate, and maximal levels of difficulty, the recommendations are aimed at transforming an inchoate calling into a profession by tightening professional standards, providing documentation, and establishing professional communications.

This book is ultimately unsatisfying. The argument circles on itself until the final summarizing section, where the authors' major points come as no surprise, since they have been encountered many times before. The flat, jargon-filled prose style does not disguise the tedious nature of the authors' organization.

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Questions of substance are also troubling. The research that forms the foundation of much of this critique is seriously outdated. Although published in 1979, no research prior to 1975 is cited. For example, in the authors' section on war gaming at the Naval War College, the Warfare Analysis and Research System, already outdated and scheduled for replacement in 1981, is described as not yet being operational. If research lags so badly for as major a gaming activity as the War College, the validity of the rest of the work must be questioned.

It is remarkable that a book critiquing the military problem-solving system does not mention any of the gurus of system analysis, like Alain K. Enthoven, E.S. Quade or Wayne Boucher. The professional standards Brewer and Shubik call for look like the standards Quade has advanced for systems analysis. A discussion of the relationship of systems analysis and war gaming would have been useful and valuable.

This book raises important questions: how much should the military and civilian community spend on games, simulations, and models? How do we know a model is a good surrogate for the original? What is the theoretical and intellectual foundation for gaming? These questions and more are the kinds of issues that need to be addressed. The authors have posed the questions, but *The War Game* does not give the answers.

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Bryson, Thomas A. *Tars, Turks, and Tankers: The Role of the United States Navy in the Middle East, 1800-1979*. Metuchen, N.J. and London: Scarecrow Press, 1980. 269pp.

Not long before the election in 1904, President Roosevelt was faced with the following predicament. In Tangier an American citizen named Perdicaris had

been kidnapped for ransom by a Moroccan bandit named Rasuli. T.R.'s reaction to the situation precisely depicts the famous "big stick" in foreign policy. He dispatched the fleet at top speed for the Mediterranean Sea and sent the following ultimatum to the Sultan, "this government wants Perdicaris alive or Rasuli dead." Naturally, by the time the fleet arrived Mr. Perdicaris was free.

This story, related with obvious relish, is just one of Professor Bryson's anecdotes in *Tars, Turks, and Tankers*. The book is satisfying and useful on at least three levels. It is first of all an outline of America's historical and diplomatic involvement in the Middle East. It is also the story of some of our most fascinating historical characters, from the exploits of young Lieutenant Decatur in 1804, to the gallantry of the crew of the U.S.S. *Liberty* in 1967. Finally, it is an attempt to persuade us, via its retelling of our historical presence, of our national interests and therefore our naval commitment in that part of the world.

On the first level, the historical, it is tempting to characterize the book as superficial as it attempts to sum up, in 200 pages, about 200 years of naval and diplomatic history. However, given the breadth and depth of the historical panorama of his undertaking, it is better instead to keep in mind the definition given in the preface: the book is intended "to provide a survey of the use of American naval power in the Middle East as an adjunct of American diplomacy." Accordingly the book may be best described as a primer, or outline of our historical involvement.

As a collection of fascinating anecdotes and episodes, the book is most successful inasmuch as no retelling of these stories can fail to entertain the reader. The United States, no less than the British, has had her historical adventurers and characters in the Middle East; less famous, perhaps, than