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Dangerous Narratives: Warfare, Strategy, Statecraft

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in place, which has translated into “debilitating shortcomings” for German military capabilities, despite having an economy that truly has prospered and will continue to do so (p. 66).

Deni sees France as the closest U.S. ally in terms of strategic outlook; the French hold views nearly identical to Americans’ in these areas, and their perspectives on the role of the military as a foreign policy tool are similar as well. But the author argues that France’s foreign and military visions cannot be sustained, owing to the country’s inadequate economic growth. Moreover, some political-sovereignty issues still stand in the way of more-fruitful interstate dialogue.

Among the allies examined, Italy stands out as the one that has fallen the furthest. Owing to a deeply troubled economy and a backward environment on technology and innovation—along with the inability of political moderates to face these challenges effectively, which has resulted in the rise of populist politicians—the Italian military is only a shadow of what it once was, with the likely prospect of additional languishing ahead. With an aging population and a military that increasingly is used as an internal dual-use security force, Italy’s prospects as a meaningful military ally continue to shrink.

Deni’s last study is devoted to Poland, which, unlike nearly all other European countries, has spent consistently and meaningfully on defense over the entire last decade. Russian military incursions into Georgia, Crimea, and eastern Ukraine, along with Russian military activities in Kaliningrad, build directly on Poland’s historical fears of an aggressive and expansionist Russia. Yet despite Poland’s economic strengths, new military

capabilities, and legislation that requires ongoing defense spending, it suffers a severe limitation: its singular focus on Russia, with its resultant investments in territorial defense. This limits its ability to partner with the United States.

The author concludes with several recommendations for how to address these significant shortcomings. Among his proposals is sharing more American military intelligence with allies, especially Germany, in an effort to increase transparency on existing global threats and challenges. Deni also recommends that the United States fully use international organizations, including the United Nations and NATO, given the high strategic value the allies place on them. And he encourages the United States to support a strong European security identity, which may help translate into greater defense spending, and perhaps the development of specified niche capabilities among the allies.

This book is impressive. Deni has used an extensive body of scholarship and data on each of these countries. He also conducted a multitude of interviews with both American and foreign defense officials. While some of his policy proposals certainly will generate debate, his ideas are welcome, as they provide some optimism that positive change is possible and that policy directions worth pursuing do exist.

RYAN C. HENDRICKSON



Dangerous Narratives: Warfare, Strategy, Statecraft, ed. Ajit K. Maan. Washington, DC: Narrative Strategies Ink, 2020. 188 pages. \$45.

This century’s increased social media and other forms of technological

sophistication has expanded what security practitioners consider to be a domain of conflict. In *Dangerous Narratives*, Ajit Maan and his coauthors argue that the cognitive and narrative domains of conflict, if not always strategic centers of gravity themselves, certainly have produced strategic effects on those centers. Only recently, though, through a combination of information operations against the United States and recent foreign-policy failures, has the national-security community recognized the growing significance of this domain. Professionals, researchers, and students interested in the strategic, policy, and national-security implications of how narratives can create meaning will find *Dangerous Narratives* a thought-provoking exploration of what the future of conflict will look like.

Dangerous Narratives is a contributed volume by Dr. Ajit Maan and nine additional security practitioners and scholars, each of whom contributes a chapter that develops Maan's conceptual foundations of "narrative identity theory" and "narrative warfare"; together they examine these concepts' application to the realms of kinetic warfare, strategy, history, education, and law enforcement. Maan, a narrative scholar and the chief executive officer of Narrative Strategies (NS), a consulting firm, introduces us to the concept of *narrative warfare*: a struggle not over the truth value of information but over the meaning of information. Even though research has shown the importance of the narrative and cognitive spaces in human behavior, Maan argues that this knowledge is not being applied to its fullest in the field of national security.

In section 1, Dr. Howard Gambriell Clark, the president of NS and a counterextremism specialist, and Lieutenant Colonel Brian L. Steed, USA (Ret.), associate

professor of military history at the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, examine the seeming disconnect between various narratives and their associated kinetic conflicts. Drawing on historical conflicts and the relevant strategies of past military leaders, Clark describes ways in which conflicts have been and can be resolved through nonkinetic means via narrative-led subversion—the advantage of such a strategy being that it is limited only by an individual's creativity. Steed artfully translates the concept of the narrative landscape by comparing it to a physical one that can be eroded, controlled, and exploited, in this case by actors and crafty "narrative entrepreneurs" who use social cleavages to gain a narrative advantage.

Section 2 features case studies and analyses of weaponized narratives, both past and present. Brigadier General Tom Drohan, USAF (Ret.), professor emeritus at the U.S. Air Force Academy, provides two in-depth analyses, of China's and of Russia's narrative strategies, including how a well-designed narrative can target opponents using Colonel John Boyd's observe-orient-decide-act (i.e., OODA) loop—to disastrous effect. China's strategic use of information condenses the observe and orient steps into one, enabling faster decision-making and more-predictable actions. Russian narratives distort how a target orients itself and influence its will and capacity to observe, affecting how the target decides and acts within the loop. Paul Cobaugh, a retired Army warrant officer and special-operations expert, imparts three insightful personal learning experiences from his deployments to Afghanistan. He explains how identity, content, structure, and story create a narrative, and how it can be used strategically to advance successful military

operations. Dr. Aleksandra Nestic, a visiting faculty member at both the Army's John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School and the Joint Special Operations University, closes out the section with a fascinating exercise in historical-narrative analysis of the 1389 Battle of Kosovo, including how political elites in Bosnia recontextualize and weaponize it in different ways for strategic purposes.

The final section turns toward the narrative's effect on statecraft and stability. Colonel Christopher Holshek, USA (Ret.), critically assesses U.S. forces' need to institutionalize the effective training and deployment of informational power via a whole-of-nation strategy, citing the success of the Marshall Plan in cultivating a durable narrative in Europe against the Soviet Union. Dr. Frank G. Straub, director of the National Police Foundation's Center for Mass Violence Response Studies, follows with an assessment of how narrative can influence police-citizen relations. Through neighborhood-level efforts at cooperative and community-involved policing, departments can use narrative to build up trust and legitimacy to better protect citizens. The book closes with a cerebral, future-forward piece on the predicted standardization of soft-power theory through the "noosphere," written by retired RAND political scientist Dr. David Ronfeldt and Naval Postgraduate School professor Dr. John Arquilla. They argue that true soft power has been misconceived and therefore does not have the same breadth of theory for application as is found for hard power, resulting in the former's underuse. They hypothesize that the eventual development of education and training in "noopolitik" will be critical for the strategists of the future.

Dangerous Narratives is an eclectic work that covers a surprising range of topics

that one might not consider at first glance to be connected. The book is a testament to the far-reaching interest that the psychological and cognitive realms attract across the field of national-security policy. As I read each chapter, I consistently was captivated by the diversity of thought that such a specific conceptual framework was able to generate. This no doubt was because of the skill with which all the authors took a deceptively complex concept and, in their own terms and in the context of their own experiences, described it clearly. The result is an excellent introductory handbook for the student-practitioner who seeks to understand the impacts of narrative on national-security strategy.

NICK OMICHINSKI



Something of Themselves: Kipling, Kingsley, Conan Doyle and the Anglo-Boer War, by Sarah LeFanu. Oxford, U.K.: Oxford Univ. Press, 2020. 381 pages. \$29.95.

Today, the Boer War—or, more accurately, the Second Anglo-Boer War (1899–1902)—is likely to be viewed as something quaint and obsolete, a sepia-toned daguerreotype from the waning Victorian era. Lacking the gravitas that comes with the antiquity of the Peloponnesians, its issues and lessons seem to have been swept away by the industrialized, mass-produced warfare of the twentieth century and a general distaste for the conflicts of empire.

However, in its time the Boer War riveted the attention of the British Empire and, indeed, the world. Magnet-like, the cockpit of conflict drew three very different, particular Britons: Arthur Conan Doyle, Rudyard Kipling, and Mary Kingsley. All enjoyed some level