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Lawrence Freedman, *Strategy: A History*. New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2013. Pp. xvi, 751. ISBN 978-0-19-932515-3.

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Sir Lawrence Freedman (King's College, London) has produced a book that encapsulates his distinguished career, an insightful tour de force melding his interest in twentieth-century military, nuclear, and grand strategy with a longer historical perspective reaching back to classical and biblical antiquity. His purview extends from military and political subjects to include revolutionary strategies and theoretical and practical approaches to strategy by social scientists and business leaders.<sup>1</sup> Freedman argues that successful strategists are those with the flexibility to roll with the punches because they understand their starting point, the means and resources at their disposal, and the objectives they may reasonably expect to attain. Surprisingly, he chooses to open with words of wisdom from former heavyweight boxer Mike Tyson—"everyone has a plan till they get punched in the mouth"—to underscore that flexibility and realistic vision. The Prussian Field Marshall Helmuth von Moltke, who figures prominently later in the text, said much the same thing as Tyson in his famed assessment of the derailment of best-laid plans. Freedman's unconventional approach to questions of strategy will attract a wider audience than historians or political scientists usually do.

The book stresses that strategy is ubiquitous: people in all walks of life need it to cope with problems and address their root causes. But what exactly is strategy? Freedman holds that it is a dynamic *process* that links capacities and goals. It is not a mere blueprint, for strategy progresses through stages during which plans must be adjusted frequently: "the picture of strategy that should emerge from this book is one that is fluid and flexible, governed by the starting point and not the end point" (xi), that is, working within evolving circumstances to reach an objective rather than setting lofty goals and hoping for the best. But if strategy requires more than a firm plan, a simple action-reaction model does not quite describe the process accurately either. For Freedman, strategy is "the art of creating power [by] getting more out a situation than the starting balance of power would suggest.... [It is the] central political art" (xii) that requires both wit and violence. Although brains and brawn must work in unison, Freedman suggests that the former may trump the latter, as illustrated by his book's cover art, showing the wooden horse that got the Greeks into Troy when force had failed.

The book comprises five parts that proceed both thematically and (more or less) chronologically. Within that structure, Parts I and V serve as extended introduction and conclusion. Freedman invites readers to engage with several discrete themes rather simply to follow a single linear argument from cover to cover. Across such diverse subjects as war, revolution, business ventures, and social theory, the author isolates three essential features of strategy: deception, coalition formation, and the instrumental use of violence. In the conclusion to the brief opening chapter, while discussing chimpanzees (!), Freedman sums up: "the most effective strategies do not depend solely on violence—though this can play an instrumental role, by demonstrating superiority as much as expressing aggression—but benefit instead from the ability to forge coalitions. Little in the rest of this book will suggest that this list should be expanded" (9). What changes over time is not elemental behaviors but the complexity of the contexts in which strategy must be devised and applied.

Part I, "Origins," introduces three basic narratives of the genesis of strategy: evolution (nature), the Bible (faith), and the Greeks (reason); wit and violence conjoined are central to all three. Freedman touches on Sun Tzu and Machiavelli, representing Chinese cunning and European realpolitik derived from Greek and Roman theory and practice. His interpretation highlights the merging of the attributes of "the lion" and "the fox" in both *The Art of War* and *The Prince*. He discerns that same balance of ruler's strength and people's loyalty on the one hand and the ability to deceive on the other in his chapter "Satan's Strategy," on John Milton's *Para-*

1. His best known previous works are *Kennedy's Wars: Berlin, Cuba, Laos, and Vietnam* (NY: Oxford U Pr, 2000), *The Evolution of Nuclear Strategy*, 3rd ed. (NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), and *Deterrence* (Malden, MA: Polity Pr, 2004).

*dise Lost*. But overall, he is less interested in the origins of strategy than in its applications throughout modern history. “[T]he word *strategy* began to be used in Britain, France, and Germany in the late eighteenth century, reflecting an Enlightenment optimism that war—like all other spheres of human affairs—could benefit from the application of reason” (xii).

It is, therefore, with the maelstrom of the French Revolution that Freedman arrives at the point of departure for the book’s main themes in Part II, “Strategies of Force.” In the beginning there was Napoleon.<sup>2</sup> That classic formulation of modern German history also applies to modern strategy; indeed, some scholars have wondered whether strategy existed at all before 1800.<sup>3</sup> Freedman believes it did, but stresses that only in the nineteenth century did the world see the improved transportation networks and cartography that facilitated the speed of intelligence gathering and communication so vital to modern strategic planning. In addition, the French Revolution unleashed the passions and energy that gave Napoleon and his adversaries the resources to pursue more ambitious goals. From the practice of strategy in mass warfare sprang modern strategic theory, expressed in the work of the Prussian General Carl von Clausewitz, an enemy of Napoleon’s France, and the Swiss banker and French staff officer Antoine Henri de Jomini. The fundamental difference between these two interpreters of the Napoleonic Wars was optimism: Jomini believed that rational principles would ensure victory, while Clausewitz “understood that rational policy could impose itself on war, but it was always competing with the blind natural forces of ‘violence, hatred, and enmity,’ as well as probability and chance” (94). To Freedman, that recognition explains Clausewitz’s enduring influence.

The swift pace of his discussion of military history at times makes one wish Freedman had lingered over particular aspects of the evolution of strategy. The suggestive chapter on Leo Tolstoy’s critique of conceptions of war as science and on Moltke’s definition of the operational level of war, for example, which occupies just twelve pages, concerns the core issues of complexity, scale, and stratification of modern wars.<sup>4</sup> So, too, the fifteen-page chapter, “Annihilation or Attrition,” moves from Hans Delbrück’s definition of the two strategic choices back in time to the American Civil War and then forward to the cult of the offensive, the work of sea-power advocates Alfred Thayer Mahan and Sir Julian Corbett, and the emerging concept of geopolitics at the turn of the twentieth century.

Then come four chapters, fifty-five pages all told, on the world wars, the interwar period, and the nuclear and deterrence strategies of the Cold War. Freedman clearly means to present not a history of strategy, but a philosophical treatise on the subject, linking theory and history. He treats guerrilla warfare, ranging over the exploits of Lawrence of Arabia, the revolutionary wars waged by Mao Zedong and Vo Nguyen Giap, Cold War insurgencies, and post-Vietnam developments in the West culminating in the “Revolution in Military Affairs.” This synoptic perspective allows Freedman to show his three axiomatic principles—force, deception, and coalition-formation—operating in very different approaches to politico-military threats and objectives. The overarching argument of Part II is that infallible master strategists have never existed, because no one individual could grasp all the intricacies of political systems and military institutions.

Part III, “Strategy from Below,” turns to sociopolitical questions and the perspective of society’s lower ranks. It may not surprise readers that Freedman sees Karl Marx as the grand theorist of revolution, the analogue of Clausewitz in the realm of war, or that he discusses radicals like the anarchist Mikhail Bakunin or revolutionaries like Rosa Luxemburg and V.I. Lenin. But his combination of Max Weber, Antonio Gramsci, Jane Addams, John Dewey, Gandhi, Martin Luther King, and Lee Atwater (among many others) is unexpected and provocative. This section of the book is, nevertheless, closely linked to what has preceded. In his investigation of underdog strategists who faced much steeper odds than leaders of powerful states, Freedman insists that war has become a contest for the loyalty of the people rather than decisive victory in battle. In so asserting, he adduces the theories and practices of nineteenth- and twentieth-century revolutionaries and reformers as well as advocates of the liberal state and modern-day politicians.

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2. See Thomas Nipperdey, *Germany from Napoleon to Bismarck, 1800–1866*, trans. D. Nolan (Princeton: Princeton U Pr, 1996).

3. E.g., Martin van Creveld, *Command in War* (Cambridge: Harvard U Pr, 1985) 18–27.

4. Cf. Charles Hill, *Grand Strategies: Literature, Statecraft, and World Order* (New Haven: Yale U Pr, 2010).

Freedman proposes that professionalization and the need to devise nuanced theories and practical applications make for a close kinship of military and sociopolitical strategies for winning over the people. Revolutionaries since Marx have found it easier to tap into the alienation of the masses than to convert such discontent into proper insurrection. They have needed to build hierarchical structures and organizations of their own in order to succeed. In crafting their strategies, revolutionaries, social reformers, proponents of the hierarchical state, and modern politicians have all drawn on the theory and language of war. Since the purpose of strategy is to persuade enemies, friends, the people, or consumers, clarity of thought and word is critical. Freedman is right to include Thomas Kuhn (on paradigms) and Michel Foucault (on controlling the masses) in this wide-ranging section.

In Part IV, "Strategy from Above," the discussion turns from the masses and their champions the managers: businessmen, organization theorists, economists, and sociologists. The central figures here are Frederick Winslow Taylor, John D. Rockefeller, Henry Ford, and Robert S. McNamara, though one wonders why Freedman does not look as closely at McNamara the Secretary of Defense as at McNamara the adherent of quantitative analysis. Of course, the more strategic theory came to be defined by professors of, for example, economics and sociology, the more rational choice and specialized solutions took center stage:

Just as the rise of the managers represented the logic of bureaucratization and rationalism, so too was the rise of the social sciences [*sic*]. They developed as reflection on and studies of modern industrial society, with all their upheavals and conflicts, and then came to offer remedies to the troubles they described. Yet the process of professionalization took them into forms of specialist analysis and presentation that left them detached from those who might have been expected to find their work most valuable. Theory and action struggled to relate to each other. (460)

Freedman concludes that the move toward scientific theory in the twentieth century has run its course and managers, like military strategists, have returned to narrative to convey the challenges they face.

The fifth and final section of the book, "Theories of Strategy," assesses recent strategic theory in a deeper critique of the rational-choice model advanced in the social sciences.<sup>5</sup> Strategy requires rationality, but must not discount intuition. Rationality as explanatory framework has its limitations: for one, the modern social sciences concentrate on behavioral patterns in Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic societies (expressed in the wonderful acronym WEIRD) that lack global relevance. Even within western societies, game theory experiments have revealed that consumers opt for cooperation and yield to social pressures even as they pursue egotistical agendas and the odds favor self-interest.

The author realizes that precisely defining strategy and its limits remains difficult. But the semantic slipperiness of the overused word should not lead us to abandon "strategy" as a concept; after all, in the words of Dwight D. Eisenhower, "plans are worthless, but planning is everything" (609–10). Therein lies a practical lesson for policy makers and educators: the art of strategy cannot be learned or taught, but learning and teaching may lead to more fully considered choices. In Freedman's terms, adding flexibility and imagination to historical knowledge and dogmatic theory may give strategists a critical edge.<sup>6</sup> A great obstacle remains: the imprecision of language and human memory and the irrational aspects of decision making tend to undermine our foundational narratives. We must, however, try our best. In war, as in daily life, opting out is only rarely feasible.

Lawrence Freedman elucidates big ideas in a sophisticated, multidisciplinary presentation, yet his narrative remains accessible, his argument clear and compelling. He trades analytic depth for tremendous breadth of perspective, demonstrating that military and political leaders have much to learn from revolutionaries, existentialists, social theorists, and businessmen regarding the intricate logic of strategy. The best planners possess the intellectual agility and psychological preparation to adapt as necessary to changing conditions. *Strategy: A History* is filled with deep and engaging thoughts about the nature of strategy in human affairs. A careful reading of the book will benefit anyone concerned with this pressing issue.

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5. Cf. Hans Joas and Wolfgang Knöbl, *War in Social Thought: Hobbes to the Present* (Princeton: Princeton U Pr, 2012), with my review at *MiWSR* 2013-062.

6. Cf. Jon T. Sumida, *Decoding Clausewitz: A New Approach to On War* (Lawrence: U Pr of Kansas, 2008), and "The Relationship between History and Theory in *On War*: The Clausewitzian Ideal and Its Implications," *Journal of Military History* 65 (2001) 333–54.