

Zitierhinweis

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Strategy: A History has to be the magnum opus of the academic life of Sir Lawrence Freedman. Rich in detail and deeply contextualising, this book is not only the longest but also the most diverse work in recent years on the evolution of strategy. The book is based on a life of scholarship as well as the most recent overviews on the topic. For example, Beatrice Heuser is a major influence and is cited repeatedly.(1) Freedman organises his book in five parts. It opens with a chapter on the 'prehistory' of strategy and its origins in the ancient world (pp. 1–65), followed by part two, which looks at the evolution of military strategy (pp. 67–244). Parts three (pp. 245–456) and four (pp. 457–572) focus on political and business strategy. The last chapter, 'Theories of strategy' (pp. 573–629), considers the contemporary contribution of the social sciences and explores the strategic concepts and limitations of rational choice. The book thus covers strategic thought from its origins in wildlife to its current psychological and philosophical aspects, and is a highly entertaining read taking the reader on a journey of more than 700 pages. However, it consists mostly of case studies, illustrating how widespread the term 'strategy' has become nowadays.

Freedman defines strategy broadly as 'the art of creating power' (p. xii). However, he asserts that strategy is much more than a plan, emphasizing that a good strategy considers the potential effects of unexpected factors and the role of others who might disrupt one's strategy because of opposing interests. Freedman also observes that the word 'strategy' nowadays has become diluted, and is often inappropriately used. Although the term strategy comes from the Greek word 'strategos' ('the art of the general'), it was not until the late 18th century that the term came into use in military circles. In the context of the Enlightenment, the concept of strategy captured the optimistic idea that the future could become more controllable through the application of reason and science. This was best personified by the figure of Napoleon and his intellectual heirs, Antoine Henry Jomini and Carl von Clausewitz. Still, strategic actions were not linked to the evolution of the term, having been used throughout human history. Therefore Freedman answers Martin van Creveld's question as to whether strategy existed before 1800 with a clear 'yes' (see pp. 69–70).(2)

Unconventionally, Freedman starts by arguing that features of human strategy are so elemental and widespread that traces of them can be found among chimpanzees. Drawing on the findings of biological studies, Freedman argues that deception, coalition formation and the instrumental use of violence are forms of 'strategic intelligence' among chimpanzees. He then compares the primates with ants, suggesting that 'ant warfare is in no sense strategic' (p. 6).

Freedman then proceeds to the Bible and its strategic recommendation of trusting in God and obeying his law. In quoting Steven Brams, Freedman equates the 'superlative strategist' with God in Christian tradition, although there is more than a preordained script for humans in Christianity insofar as God allows choice for human beings. Although this conclusion might be philosophically contested, it is a vital requirement for the concept of strategy applied by Freedman throughout the book. Human strategy only becomes possible on the assumption that humans have options for actions. For example, the young shepherd David put all his eggs in one basket against Goliath of Gath by using his sling and not Saul's armour and sword. By means of surprise and accuracy, however, David's risky strategy succeeded. This hope for success among underdogs by applying superior strategies and tactics or forming favourable coalitions runs through the entire book.

The same idea was previously pursued in the ancient Greek world. Homer introduced two archetypes: On the one hand, Achilles embodied the Greek term of *biē* by virtue of pure physical strength and power. On the other hand, there was Odysseus, who personified *mētis* in using wisdom in a cunning and well-thought-out approach. Outsmarting the opponent has since become a way of strategic thinking, especially for underdogs. Although not always perceived as noble or accepted, the use of cunning and tricks has successfully been applied on different occasions throughout world history.

After Freedman describes this 'most powerful dichotomy in all strategic thought' (p. 42), the author briefly focusses on the strategic basis of Ancient Rome (Frontinus, Vegetus), China (Sun Tzu) and the Carthaginians (Hannibal). A brief overview of Machiavelli's strategic concept and his influence on subsequent political thought is followed by one of the best and most unique chapters of the entire book. 'Satan's strategy' (p. 54–64) is based on the Machiavellian reception of Satan in John Milton's epic poem 'Paradise Lost': 'Milton's portrayal of Satan as a leader matched a Machiavellian prince' (p. 57). This part, however, leaves the reader wondering in what ways this Miltonian concept was later received by mankind.

'Strategies of force' emphasises that 'once warfare moved to mass armies with complex organizations, there would be limits to what could be achieved by means of guile' (p. 65). This change occurred around 1800, which has led some scholars to define this phase as the end of a revolution in military affairs.⁽³⁾ The chapter treats well-known military strategists such as Frederick the Great, Napoleon Bonaparte, Antoine-Henri Jomini, Carl von Clausewitz, Helmut von Moltke, Alfred Thayer Mahan and Julian Corbett. However, figures like Leo Tolstoy, who was sceptical about the concept of strategy, and Mikhail Kutuzov are also represented. Furthermore, the spatial dimension is explored by the doyen of early geopolitics, Halford Mackinder. Other, broader concepts are introduced, for example naval warfare, air power, armoured warfare, guerrilla warfare, counterinsurgency, nuclear strategy and game theory. The latter two were always intertwined, a fact which is highlighted by Freedman in exploring the role of Thomas Schelling and his understanding of warfare through game theory. Although most of these insights are not new *per se* and cover mostly well-charted territory in military history, they are well written (although there is a spelling mistake on p. 232) and add up to a catchy narrative. The concept of strategy during the era of imperialism could have been deepened, especially by contrasting the different ends, ways and means of major colonial powers. Instead the highlight of this part is 'The myth of the master strategist', which is a very thought-provoking chapter, reworked by Freedman in response to the responses a previous version produced.⁽⁴⁾ This part disagrees with the since softened concept of Colin Grey's 'Modern strategy'. Grey, among others, originally suggested that a contemporary strategist would have to be in many ways an exceptional figure and the responsibilities of his post would be 'so far above the pay grade of more than 99.9 per cent of the personnel in any army'.⁽⁵⁾ Although this chapter is very short compared to the rest of the book, it synthesizes most of the previous material. If you only have time to read one excerpt from this book, read this!

'Strategy from below' offers a wide panorama of strategic concepts developed by or for the lower social classes of society. For them, strategy was 'most challenging' because they had a large void to breach between 'desired ends and available means' (p. 248). Here, mainly political strategies of revolutionaries, radicals and civil-rights activists are outlined more or less from a theoretical perspective. Freedman starts with a close look at the ideal type of the 'professional revolutionary'. Influential representatives such as Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Mikhail Bakunin, Alexander Herzen, Rosa Luxemburg and Vladimir Ilyich Lenin are described, followed by their subtle critics Leo Tolstoy and Jane Adams. The emerging social sciences are personified by Max Weber and John Dewey and their critique of Marxism is included as are their own differences.

That this section is included in this body of work might surprise even experts in the field of strategy. Particularly thought-provoking are Freedman's inputs about the electoral politics in the United States and its two-party system, which tends towards a condition of 'permanent campaign' (a phrase coined by the American pollster Pat Caddell). This part of the book analyses the organization and strategic conduct of selected American election campaigns, not only by politicians but also their staff and campaign managers. For example, it became evident to James Carville that the psychological aspects of media campaign management were at least as important as the actual content of a candidate's platform.

The focus on America continues in 'Strategy from above', whereat 'above' stands for the people who already possess power, mainly in the field of business, including in the public sector. This section therefore shifts the reader's attention to what Freedman calls the 'managers', the group of people that 'has been the recipient of more strategic advice than any other group, including generals' (p. 459). Nowadays, strategy has become a crucial and necessary tool in business; you hardly find an executive who would downplay the role of strategy in his business. One could say that modern corporations face subtle pressure to develop a corporate strategy. Much of this phenomenon has to be seen in its historical evolution, which goes back at least to the days of Taylor- and Fordism. Rationalisation and mathematical calculations became subsequently paramount for large companies. But this trend also had its critics.

Important business figures are portrayed, not strictly chronologically. Mary Parker Follet, John D. Rockefeller, Henry Ford, Henry P. Sloan, Alfred D. Chandler, Jr., Peter Drucker and other intellectual influences are depicted as part of an overview of the massive literature on business strategy. The importance of planning and transferring skills 'from the spheres of business to military affairs' (p. 501) is best illustrated by Robert McNamara. As an accountant at Harvard and a statistician at the Army Air Corps, the forerunner of the US Air Force, he and like-minded researchers, the so-called 'Whiz Kids', succeeded in becoming top-notch recruits for the Pentagon. The strengths as well as the weaknesses of their optimistic view soon became apparent, a fact that McNamara himself later had to admit. An institutionalised rationality which McNamara envisioned could not solve all the problems posed by modern warfare. Similarly, in management it became more and more obvious that strategic planning was more than what General Electric's chief executive described as a 'paint-by-numbers-approach' (p. 504). 13 years later, Henry Mintzberg set the tone with his book 'The rise and fall of strategic planning'. Further attempts to apply the strategic insights of Sun Tzu, Alexander the Great, Caesar or Napoleon to business challenges also accomplished less than one could have expected given their monumental reputations. Towards the end of this section the reader is reminded of the dominant position of economics in strategic management. Institutionalised research organizations like the RAND Corporation and the Boston Consulting Group find their respective place within this chapter, and sports, in the form of the negations of the United States Football League is briefly discussed (p. 522–3). The reception of strategy in sports and its application both on and off the field would have enriched Freedman's book even more.

The last part of the book, 'Theories of strategy', considers the impact of rational choice and the enthusiasm of its early representatives. Freedman quotes the economist Gary Becker, who once said that the 'economic approach provides a framework applicable to all human behaviour [...] to all types of decisions and to persons from all walks of life' (p. 576). Here again, Freedman places a great emphasis on the RAND corporation and its representatives Kenneth Arrow and Anthony Downs. Coalition-forming (William Riker) and cooperation (Robert Axelrod) are the central themes on the following pages. Towards the end, two distinct forms of strategic decision-making ('system 1 and system 2') are outlined as a sort of alternative analytical concept to rational choice. Thereby, strategy is considered 'from an existing situation rather than a distant goal' (p. 604). 'System 1 strategies draw on an ability to read situations and see possibilities that less-strategic intelligence would miss' (p. 613). It resembles the concept of *mētis*. System 2 thinking is required in situations that are more complicated. Most strategic decision are therefore in the area of System 2.

This book belongs with the classics in the field of strategic studies. Although not always easy to read and with a focus which shifts towards the United States as the book progresses, it provides a huge fund of information about the concept of strategy. It is first and foremost its historical depth that requires Freedman's work to be included in every library of status. The author of this review will attempt to paraphrase Freedman's main thesis as follows: Strategy is a never-ending holistic approach to anticipated future challenges in the light of our own

ends, ways and means as well as the consideration of frictions and the behaviour of enemies, among others. Strategy has to be fluent, flexible, adaptive and non-linear. That's why strategy is not purely a science but rather an art, and more than a sequence of events leading to a desired outcome.

Lawrence Freedman himself states on the last pages that 'the contract for this book is dated 1994' (p. 631), but these two decades of work represent a massive investment in the study of this field. The essence of them, captured in *Strategy*, will serve anyone working in strategic studies as well as in security policy and business strategy well.

Notes

1. Beatrice Heuser,

The Evolution of Strategy: Thinking War from Antiquity to the Present (Cambridge 2010).

2. Did strategy - and, by implication, strategic command - exist before 1800?' Martin van Creveld, *Command in War* (Cambridge, MA, 1985), p. 18.

3. See, for example Geoffrey Parker, *The Military Revolution: Military Innovation and the Rise of the West* (Cambridge, 1988).

4. See Lawrence Freedman, *The Master Strategist is Still a Myth*, in: *War on the Rocks*, 14 October 2014.

5. Colin S. Grey, *Modern Strategy* (Oxford 1999), p. 45.