

Review of the book by  
David J. Lonsdale and Thomas M. Kane (2020)  
Understanding Contemporary Strategy,  
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Strategy is a category of growing importance in contemporary scientific debate. “Strategy” as a concept is derived from military thought, but it has become popular in many areas of expertise in recent decades. This term can be found in professional literature in the field of military science, political studies, psychology, economics and management. It is therefore worth taking a look at a book that explains the classical understanding of this concept. The book reviewed here is positioned in the area of strategic studies and war and conflict studies. The review will look at the structure and content of this publication, as well as assess its usefulness in scholarly and didactic practice.

This book has three parts. The first part consists of six chapters and outlines the context for contemporary strategic thought, and the second part five chapters that describe the areas where strategy has been implemented in theory and practice. These include geographical domains such as land, air, sea, space and cyberspace. The third part consists of three chapters explaining the challenges to strategic studies, namely nuclear weapons, terrorism, and insurgency. Compared to the previous edition (published in 2011), the book contains additional material that includes issues related to the rise and fall of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), developments in robotics, secret intelligence, artificial intelligence, and cyberspace.

In the first part of the book, the authors define strategy traditionally as “the process that converts military power into policy effect.” To contextualise the emergence of con-

temporary strategies, the authors include the development of the discourse on strategic thinking and strategic culture. They point out that the armed forces today are a very flexible tool of the state, unlike in the past. For this reason, in this section of the book, the authors explain the importance of the revolution in military affairs, which has allowed the use of tools such as artificial intelligence and new media technologies. The next chapter deals with the relevance of intelligence to contemporary strategic planning. The last chapter of the first part of the book shows the importance of the concept of the so-called grand strategy for the conduct of state policy. The authors point out that today, strategy is no longer just the art of winning wars. States today need agile organisational information, and decision-making systems. Many theorists erroneously ignore the domestic politics of the state and focus only on military policy or foreign policy. Meanwhile, the modern art of statecraft requires both the integration of state capabilities and forces the observation of other states' policies. In keeping with the accepted definition of strategy, the authors emphasise that strategy makes military capabilities a tool for building influence in the world.

The second part of the book explores the main areas of state rivalry. They are land, sea, air, space and cyberspace. Based on each of these areas, states have developed different types of armed forces throughout history, such as land forces, navies, and air forces. Today, special units are being created for cyber warfare and for competition in space. The authors discuss the genesis and specifics of the different types of armed forces in an accessible form. They also explain basic terminology and show numerous examples of the use of different types of military units in conflicts and wars. Of particular interest is the chapter on cyber security which explains the problems of cyber espionage, information manipulation, cyber attacks, and cyber-deterrence. It also briefly outlines the risks and challenges associated with states' cybersecurity strategies development. This part of the book is its distinguishing feature on an international scale. It will be of interest especially to those associated with the military and with geopolitical intelligence.

Building on theoretical claims outlined in the preceding chapters, *Understanding contemporary strategy* discusses challenges to international security. The authors offer three topics to reflect upon here. The first (and oldest) issue is the nuclear threat, the second is terrorism, and the third is the COIN (counterinsurgency) problem, i.e. the risk of states collapsing as a result of insurgencies and rebellions. All three areas generate serious threats to the international order. Every major state must therefore take a stand on the aspects of proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, combating terrorism, and participation in humanitarian aid and peace-keeping operations.

As a comprehensive monograph on various aspects of strategies studies, this is a useful resource book for students. Each chapter of the book contains a useful box with a short introduction (the so-called "Reader's guide") in which the authors briefly outline the flow of the disquisition and the main issues. In a similar style, each chapter ends with a summary of selected theses (called "Key points") and questions for class discussion. Finally, each chapter ends with suggestions for further reading. I must add that the book contains numerous footnotes, so in addition to its didactic function it has the value of a scientific work. Many other textbooks lack the above didactic sections. These sections are an asset to the book and greatly facilitate such a complex area of knowledge as contemporary security policy strategies. This will make the book useful not only to students but also to a wider audience of intellectuals, politicians, journalists, analysts, historians, or economists.

The key problem when reviewing a book is assessing the scholarly value of the text. I am taking several issues into account here. Firstly, does the book actually deal with the problems the authors suggest? Is the topic niche chosen by the authors valid? Secondly, does the

book have an apt structure for describing the selected problems? Thirdly, does the book explain these problems? Is the authors' language accessible? Fourthly, how does the book compare to similar publications? Let us discuss these issues one at a time.

The authors make little use of contemporary theoretical research results. The narrative refers mainly to examples from history. This is reminiscent of classic works from the English School in the theories of international relations. The main theme of the book is contemporary understanding of strategy, with an emphasis on military issues. However, the authors address the book to the civilian rather than the military community (the tactical and operational aspects of conflicts and wars are not widely analysed). It is worth noting that they have managed to avoid diving head first into the huge debate over "security" issues, which has many more references than "strategy." So, the book has its own subject matter niche.

The chapter structure is fairly even. Each chapter is approximately 20-30 pages long. Out of this, a dozen or so chapters are filled with the content for an entire didactic course in contemporary strategy. The selection of chapter topics is original and basically right. However, there is a lack of broader development of issues such as strategy theory, strategic resources, civil protection, arms trade, peace operations, or energy and climate. These topics appear only occasionally, which is unsatisfying, especially with the book's title defined in such a way. Instead, the book's undisputed strength is its accessible language with considerable exploratory qualities. The reader almost constantly follows the authors' train of thought while reading. Long and "static" descriptions are minimised in favour of explanation, which promotes the flow of the disquisition. This is typical of experienced British lecturers.

The book *Understanding Contemporary Strategy* is an example of the growing importance of strategy issues in the modern world. In addition to this, numerous books have been published in recent years that aim to clarify the basic categories in the discipline of security studies, such as strategy, war, security, army, and peace. Examples include the works of Mike Bourne (2014), Colin S. Gray (2015), Lawrence Freedman (2013; 2018) and others. Lonsdale and Kane's publication is a valuable development of issues addressed in more general textbooks such as the work of Alan Collins' (Collins, 2019), John Baylis' (Baylis, Wirtz and Gray, 2018), and Paul Williams' (Williams and McDonald, 2017) teams. It also marks a certain autonomy of strategic studies within the broader security studies.

In conclusion, the book under review provides a valuable overview of contemporary strategic studies issues. The main strengths of the book include a coherent strategy concept, choice of topics, chapter structure, language, consideration of new problems that strategy faces nowadays, and useful didactic sections. Weaknesses include the insufficient theoretical grounding of the text, omission of non-military issues and related categories, and a focus that is primarily on examples from the past. There is also a lack of references to useful databases, datasets, indicators, and indexes, which would enable readers to evaluate the explained phenomena more precisely. Such knowledge is essential for today's strategy analysts. However, experienced lecturers will know how to develop the potential inherent in this original textbook.

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