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## **Modern Military Strategy: An Introduction**

**by Elinor C. Sloan**

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**Reviewed by Richard L. Bowes**

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**T**he study of military strategic thought – and, indeed, the debate as to how relevant strategic thinking is today – is a familiar topic to any recent graduate of Command and Staff College, and to any civilian academic or senior military practitioner; especially those with first-hand experience of the past 20 years of upheaval and change in the nature of the international system and how those changes have manifested themselves in the conduct of war. Yet, if one were to attempt to point to a body of writing or scholarship that accurately and succinctly summarizes the current state of military strategic thinking, one would be hard-pressed to find such a body of work...until now.

## BOOK REVIEWS

In this superb analysis of the current state of military strategic thought, Professor Elinor Sloan sets out to answer some key questions. Sparked by a graduate student's curiosity – and, I would imagine, frustration on the student's part at understanding the relevancy of the study of Clausewitz, Jomini, or Mahan to the contemporary era – Sloan seeks to not only determine if there are strategic thinkers today, but moreover, if strategic thought still matters.

To answer these questions, Sloan organizes the book along functional lines. In eight chapters, Sloan walks us through a discussion of strategic thought as it has developed through history to the present era, and across each of the relevant domains or dimensions. The more traditional sea, land, and air dimensions of strategic thought are covered first in the chapters entitled Seapower, Landpower, and Airpower respectively. The remaining five chapters then cover what one could argue to be the emerging domains of strategic thought in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century; namely, Joint Theory and Military Transformation; Irregular War; Insurgency, Counterinsurgency and New War; Cyberwar; Nuclear Power and Deterrence; and Spacepower. Each chapter concludes with a summary of the key tenets of strategic thinking and associated thinkers of note. Admittedly, while one could argue that nuclear deterrence theory has been with us going on seven decades, Sloan has a lengthy discussion on the current state of strategic thinking concerning nuclear proliferation in a post-Cold War period, in which the logic of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) no longer applies.

Of particular interest are her chapters on Landpower and Irregular War. In the Landpower chapter, while Sun Tzu, Liddell-Hart, Clausewitz, and Jomini are appropriately given their due, Sloan devotes the balance of the chapter on a discussion and analysis of strategic thinking with respect to the use of conventional landpower, from the Cold War to the present post-9/11 period. Of real interest here is the tension she describes between those early disciples of the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) such as Andrew Krepinevich, for whom faith in the combat multiplying effects of networked, distributed forces obviates the need for mass; to those counter-revolutionaries such as Robert Scales who, while recognizing the value of networked combat forces, nonetheless remind us of the immutable fact that the nature of land warfare is still one in which 'boots on the ground' are still required.

Similarly, in the Irregular War chapter, Sloan introduces us to the thinking of Mao Tse Tung, T.E. Lawrence, C.E. Caldwell and Robert Thompson among others, but soon focuses the reader toward the main strands of strategic thinking that have emerged primarily as a result of post-9/11 conflicts in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere. As Sloan adeptly points out, considerable thinking has occurred over a very short period; particularly that which is focused upon the theories underpinning the planning and conduct of counterinsurgency operations. Martin van Creveld, William

Lind, Thomas Hammes, and David Kilcullen are among the recognized *cognoscenti* in this field, with developed theories such as 4<sup>th</sup> Generation Warfare (4GW) and non-Trinitarian war. Sloan also provides a very useful synopsis of the US counter-insurgency field manual, FM 3-24, released in 2006. She concludes this chapter with the observation that the challenge for any nation in the conduct of counterinsurgency, "...lies in finding the patience and political will to sustain in practice, over time, the enduring elements of counterinsurgency theory."

In this compact volume, Sloan has very much achieved her main aim of producing a contemporary body of work that not only determines if there are strategic thinkers today, but also if strategic thought still matters in our post 9/11 world. A particular strength of the work is its endemic sense of balance and focus. Balance is attained through her ability to thoroughly research each of the domains of strategic thought, and yet retain a very admirable degree of scholarly objectivity in the way she describes the tenets and principles of each of the theories and thinkers she introduces. Moreover, while it is understandable that most strategic thinking today comes from US sources, it is very obvious that Sloan has made a concerted effort to uncover and bring to the fore relevant sources of strategic thinking that are non-US in origin. In this regard, one can sense Sloan is very much Canadian in her perspective.

With the plethora of material and scholarship at her disposal, Elinor Sloan is able to home in on the very heart of the matter within each of the domains of strategic thinking. Her focus is what gives the book its value as an indispensable resource for use by senior military practitioners and students of military and strategic studies alike. While a read of each chapter provides a concise, objective synopsis of the topic, her endnotes and bibliography provide a very handy comprehensive reference for further serious reading and discussion of the field of study.

Elinor Sloan concludes her work by asserting that the principles and statements she has delineated in her work, "...mark the initial signposts in a twenty-first century understanding of the role of military forces in a nation's security policy, that is, in modern strategy." In this, she recognizes the very dynamic and prescient nature of modern military strategy. Sloan whets our appetite for more. Follow-on editions of *Modern Military Strategy* would be a welcome addition to the scholarship in years to come.

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