

2007

Finding the Target: The Transformation of American Military Policy

F. J. "Bing" West

Frederick Kagan

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

Recommended Citation

West, F. J. "Bing" and Kagan, Frederick (2007) "Finding the Target: The Transformation of American Military Policy," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 60 : No. 2 , Article 12.

Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol60/iss2/12>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu.

American foreign policy, as well as a cautionary tale on the dangers of trying to achieve preeminence overseas at the cost of undermining security at home. *The American Way of Strategy* could also inform today's emerging maritime strategy, for which its characterization of the benefits of various grand strategies has value.

F. G. HOFFMAN
Center for Emerging Threats and Opportunities
Quantico, Virginia



Kagan, Frederick. *Finding the Target: The Transformation of American Military Policy*. New York: Encounter Books, 2006. 432pp. \$29.95

How has American military strategic thought evolved since the fall of Saigon? How did each service reinvent itself, shake off old ghosts, and restore morale and purpose? How did each decide upon a different doctrine to guide its training, procurement, and deployment? How much influence do civilian defense officials wield over strategy and doctrine? Is the country well served by the process that produces strategy and doctrine inside the services? Military historian Fred Kagan provides here a tremendous primer on these issues. He has written a clear, definitive, and opinionated history of the development of strategy and doctrine in the American military since 1975. His clarity of prose and the evenhandedness of his presentation enable the reader to separate the history from Kagan's interpretation. That is the mark of a fine scholar.

Kagan is well known among military historians. A serious researcher and author of a major work on the Napoleonic wars, his greatest strength is his down-

to-earth, friendly, inquisitive style. As the resident military scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, Kagan has the venue and cachet to draw ambassadors and four-star generals routinely to his conferences, where they join captains and majors fresh from the battlefield. Building upon his years as a professor at West Point, Kagan has developed a broad network of military contacts that makes this book a blend of scholarship and insider knowledge. Though he is plugged into the daily skirmishes of Washington's political arena, as a historian Kagan's chief interest lies not in the immediate issues but in focusing upon the underlying trends.

The author blends brief synopses of such past campaigns as Bosnia, DESERT STORM, and IRAQI FREEDOM with portraits of strategic iconoclasts like John Boyd, John Warden, Douglas MacGregor, and Arthur Cebrowski, emphasizing how doctrine changed and with what results related to budgets and force structure. Kagan does not believe that force structure evolves slowly over the decades. Instead, he illustrates how the few influence the many, and how strategic leadership affects the direction of each service for good or ill.

On the positive side, Kagan recounts how in 1978 the Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Thomas Hayward, came to believe that the downward spiral in the naval budget was the result of an intuitive strategy held by Secretary of Defense Harold Brown and his senior staff. These civilian defense leaders were concerned that the Soviet Union was increasing its geopolitical pressure across Europe, gaining both economic and political advantage in the shadow of its presumed superiority in land forces. Accordingly, the Office of the

Secretary of Defense was focused on building up Army and Air Force strength in Western Europe, while naval forces languished because they were seen as of lesser utility. Hayward set out to challenge this strategic vision by commissioning and then championing a naval force-planning study called "Sea Plan 2000." The essence of this plan was the assertion that any assault across the inner-German border would result in a global war. Naval forces provided strike capabilities that could be marshaled anywhere, while protecting the sea-lanes. The redoubtable head of the Soviet navy, Admiral Sergei Gorshkov, had enunciated a strategy of protecting his ballistic missile submarines in their northern bastions. Sea Plan 2000 advocated naval-based offensive strikes against the Kola Peninsula and against Soviet attack and missile submarines worldwide.

When President Ronald Reagan took office in 1981, John Lehman became secretary of the Navy and aggressively supported such an offensive maritime strategy. The U.S. Navy budget increased, and the Soviets worried. Their self-confidence was dented, as they later freely admitted. No one could predict what would occur in an actual war, but according to Kagan, "Hayward's realization that the Navy's greatest weakness was its strategic thinking made possible a transformation of the Navy's capabilities with few new technologies. As a result, the Navy regained a considerable degree of balance against a waning Soviet threat."

Conversely, Kagan cites the efforts of former secretary of defense Donald Rumsfeld to "transform" the services as flawed in both concept and process. He criticizes the recent focus on information

technologies, with the attendant assumption that fewer forces will be needed as a consequence. Further, he questions whether the process of transformation is really advanced by grafting an "Office of Force Transformation" (since abolished) onto the Department of Defense, arguing that the services were in fact taking full advantage of information technologies for a decade before a "revolution in military affairs" was decreed.

On balance, Kagan gives the services good marks for their stewardship over the past twenty-five years as the nation's guardians. The current war in Iraq, however, worries him, because the military did not adapt swiftly enough. He is too good a scholar to make sweeping assertions about American martial superiority. Instead, he argues that the process of adapting in order to win is the nation's greatest strength.

Finding the Target will make an excellent textbook for those whose operational jobs have not left sufficient time to keep abreast of the changing strategic perspective in the services.

F. J. "BING" WEST
Newport, Rhode Island



Goldstein, Lyle J. *Preventive Attack and Weapons of Mass Destruction: A Comparative Analysis*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford Univ. Press, 2006. 268pp. \$50

Do nuclear weapons represent a source of stability in world politics, or does the acquisition of these weapons create incentives for established nuclear states or longtime rivals to destroy nascent nuclear weapons programs before they actually coalesce into significant strategic