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Strategic Assessment in War

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trying to move beyond our Cold War conceptions.

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Gartner, Scott Sigmund. *Strategic Assessment in War*. New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press, 1997. 177pp. \$32.50

One of the most vital yet difficult tasks a wartime commander must perform is strategic assessment. Are his actions working? Is he winning? Scott Sigmund Gartner, a political scientist at the University of California, approaches this problem from an interesting angle. He argues that during peacetime, military organizations devise certain quantitative measures of merit that will be used to assess the effectiveness of a given strategy. Once war breaks out, the strategy will be continuously evaluated against these criteria and adjusted as necessary. This is not a remarkable finding. However, Gartner then hypothesizes that the key measures of merit—what he calls the “dominant indicators”—will be watched most closely for the rate at which they change. In other words, if things are going badly, a commander or an organization will not necessarily change strategy unless the situation seems to be getting worse at an accelerating rate. Until that time, a commander will tend to muddle through. This is an important insight. In addition, organizations generally do not change their dominant indicators, partly because it would appear self-serving. As a result, even if a military organization chooses the wrong criteria for measur-

ing its effectiveness, it is more likely to stick with them rather than change its strategy. Finally, Gartner notes that these dominant indicators may vary between organizations within the same country. This is crucial, because it means that two or more organizations can view the same situation, examine the same data, and arrive at totally different conclusions regarding the success of a war strategy—because they are using different measures of effectiveness. Gartner tests his hypothesis in several case studies: the submarine campaigns of World Wars I and II, the ground campaign in Vietnam, and the failed hostage rescue attempt in Iran in April 1980.

For the first three years of World War I, the Royal Navy eschewed the use of convoys to protect merchant shipping from German submarines. Despite heavy losses, and despite pressure from the British government, the Admiralty refused to change its strategy from one of offensive patrols. Even as shipping losses continued to mount and the government of David Lloyd George called ever more loudly for change, the admirals continued to resist until April 1917, the worst month of the war. At that point, so conventional wisdom goes, the tonnage sunk by German submarines was so great that even the mossbacks of the Admiralty were forced to recognize the need for change and finally ordered the use of convoys. Gartner, however, sees a different story.

The Royal Navy's chief measure of effectiveness was not the tonnage lost to enemy submarines (the criterion used by the government) but the number of German submarines

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destroyed. The admirals believed that aggressive patrols by the surface fleet had the best chance to destroy German submarines—ideally at a faster rate than new ones could be built—and that this in turn would ensure the safety of the merchant fleet. Significantly, while allied merchant shipping was being sunk at a steady and increasing rate throughout late 1916 and early 1917, the number of enemy submarines destroyed was also rising. In short, the Royal Navy did not see a problem, while the government most certainly did. This is an excellent example of two organizations within the same country using different measures of effectiveness. What changed in April 1917? The tonnage of merchant ships being sunk dramatically increased at a record rate—prompting the government finally to *demand* a revised strategy—while at the same time the number of enemy submarines destroyed notably decreased. Thus the dominant indicators for *both* the government and the Admiralty deteriorated at such a rate that both organizations were finally ready for change. Moreover, when the use of convoys began, not only did the tonnage losses drop dramatically but the Navy discovered that convoys were actually more effective in destroying enemy submarines. Everyone was happy. The strategy altered, and the dominant indicators stabilized.

Gartner's other case studies are equally intriguing. Social science methodology can often produce mind-numbing models, statistical quagmires, and impenetrable jargon, but mercifully that is not the case here. This work is readable, clear, and concise. Strategic assessment in war is vital because it can directly affect strategy and policy, which in turn can directly

affect the outcome. This is a fascinating and important book that deserves a close reading by all military strategists.

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Haass, Richard N. *The Reluctant Sheriff: The United States after the Cold War*. New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1997. 148pp. \$24.95

Richard Haass continues with this book to advance clear thinking about and cogent analysis of U.S. foreign policy. His strong and authoritative prose has helped an entire generation to understand the Cold War and the end of the Cold War. In *The Reluctant Sheriff*, Haass first reviews U.S. foreign policy during the Cold War and then discusses the problematic and challenging nature of contemporary world affairs. He then takes the discussion from the problem stage to a suggested solution—a doctrine of “regulation.”

The book's title does not sufficiently reflect the depth of Haass's thinking or the width of his prescriptions. Where *The Reluctant Sheriff* is both creative and provocative, the subtitle does not alert the unsuspecting reader to his proposal for a new theoretical framework, complete with appropriate conceptual development and policy implications.

In the first chapters, the reader's attention is directed to the doctrine of containment, which provides intellectual structure and framework for policy during the period of the Cold