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# Military Strategy: A General Theory of Power Control

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annihilated the enemy's fleet. Corbett was aware of most of these facts and considerations, but his treatment of them offered no analytical focus.

In the second instance, he seems to have been ignorant of the facts. Unlike his discussion of invasion, which rested on sound analysis and good historical research, the discussion of defense of shipping rested on dubious assumptions and bad history. These assumptions led him to play down the problem, and bad history led him to "the principle of defended areas." The idea was that during the 18th century convoys were not really necessary in areas of heavy traffic like the English Channel, because these areas were effectively "defended" or "occupied"—by which he meant they were bookended by British battle squadrons and patrolled by cruisers. In reality, such a system was scarcely ever in place or reliable; seldom was it safe to allow anything important to sail even in the English Channel without convoy. Unquestionably, Corbett "made himself party to the most costly miscalculation in British naval thinking ever made." This observation by Professor Brian Ranft (quoted by Grove, p. xxxiv) refers to the year 1917. Ranft also noted that Corbett neglected the inherent "tactical advantages of the convoy system" (as so many British experts did), but his error also stemmed from ignorance of the everyday methods of commerce protection in the past.

Both of these historical lapses were especially unfortunate because if he had gotten them right he would have reinforced his two best strategic points: (1) that the securing of sea communications, and their denial to the enemy, was the primary objective, and (2) that command of the sea, though secured by capital ships, was an ongoing task that had to be exercised continually by smaller vessels. All the same, the book is a landmark, an achievement of unusual interest and stature.

Some very brief comments on this new edition are in order. Grove's introduction is interesting and helpful. The inclusion of the "Green Pamphlet" (in two versions) gives this edition a unique value. The new footnotes which identify people, places and events will be welcomed by nearly all readers (though the usage of the phrase "author's note" is steadily baffling). There is a new index, however, that is much inferior to the old, not only in respect to subject entries but even proper names. Working scholars should use the original index; the page numbers will be close.

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Wylie, J. C. *Military Strategy: A General Theory of Power Control*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1990. Originally published, 1967. 169pp. \$27.95

"You might not be interested in strategy, but strategy is interested in you," said Leon Trotsky. Even if you are not interested in strategy, you should be interested in J. C. Wylie's

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classic little book, *Military Strategy*. It is no exaggeration to call this book a "classic," for it is one of the Naval Institute's *Classics of Sea Power* series, and plaudits are due to the Naval Institute for this selection.

At a time when—among other momentous happenings—there is a reawakening of the need for a fresh appreciation of strategy, we are fortunate to have such works as Admiral Wylie's to provide a solid foundation on which to build. The central theme of *Military Strategy* is that a general theory of strategy has not been developed in the United States, and there is a pressing need to get on with that task. The development of strategy, according to Wylie, can be neither random nor *ad hoc*; it must be premeditated, organized, and thoughtful. Professional military men must draw on the sum of their training and experience, blend in an understanding of history, keep a steady eye on their objectives, and always have a keen "instinct for the jugular" in order to elaborate a strategy that will meet the tests of foe and time. Some in the Western world today who dabble in strategy understand none of those requirements. Those same contemporary strategists who would be quick to instruct the military on strategy would never consider advising the chef on how to prepare an omelet.

This elegant, concise volume succeeds remarkably well in achieving exactly what its author set out to do. Yet, in the postscript to *Military Strategy*, "Twenty Years Later"—included in the Naval Institute's

edition—Wylie laments: "I turned my hand to devising a general theory of strategy, valid anytime, anyplace, and under any circumstances. . . . As far as I know, no one has ever paid any attention to it."

Admiral Wylie's general theory of strategy, so economically rendered, is this: "The primary aim of the strategist in the conduct of war is some selected degree of control of the enemy for the strategist's own purpose; this is achieved by control of the pattern of war; and this control of the pattern of war is had by manipulation of the center of gravity of war to the advantage of the strategist and the disadvantage of the opponent."

To reach this terse statement, the author displayed a series of splendid insights couched in unpretentious prose. It is an enjoyable experience to share his thoughts and compare them to today's situation, especially when he discusses the four then-existing major theories of strategy: the maritime, the air, the continental, and the Mao (or guerrilla). From nearly four decades past (the book was written in 1953), Wylie's regret resounds that the West had become unduly and unreasonably captured by the continental, or soldier's strategy. Wylie's major strategic complaint, and coincidentally that of the Navy's maritime strategy of the 1980's, was that threatening to thwart the adversary's armies on the ground in the center of the European continent was simply insufficient as a deterrent threat. Deterrence of a powerful combined arms invasion

requires more than a one-dimensional "continental commitment." Deterrence and strategy are woven into much richer fabrics. In straightforward style, *Military Strategy* puts it this way: "The soldier cannot function alone. His flanks are bare, his rear is vulnerable, and he looks aloft with a cautious eye. He needs the airman and the sailor for his own security in doing his own job." How quaintly *Joint!*

The Maritime Strategy argued that the Navy and Marine Corps shoulder both the responsibility and the opportunity to work on the opponent's center of gravity and to control the time lines of war. These are multidimensional strategic tasks. Meeting the aggressor with like, superior, or even inferior force at the point of attack might be what's necessary, but it's not strategy. Admiral Wylie demonstrates a strong grasp of that truism as he dismisses *each* of the four theories as insufficient to form the basis of a true general theory of strategy.

General theory should be translated into specific strategy for only two reasons: if the danger is great and explicit plans are required to meet it, and for the "derivation of logistic and material needs." The most difficult problem facing the Pentagon in the near term will be to come to grips with this fundamental piece of wisdom. Wylie points the way, but even if the Pentagon were to accept the enlightenment, one can be skeptical that others who pretend to know about strategy could be converted.

Insights abound in *Military Strategy*. For example, the reader is introduced to two different operational patterns for strategy: sequential and cumulative. The historical illustration Wylie uses to highlight the difference between the two is that of the U.S. Pacific campaign in the Second World War. The dual drives across the Pacific, from the Southwest and through the Central Pacific typify a sequential or "serial" strategic pattern. The submarine blockade of the Japanese home islands stands as an example of a cumulative strategy. In the latter, individual actions do not necessarily bear a relationship to one another, but the accumulation of the separate actions produces the desired strategic effect. In addition to blockade, the author suggests that psychological warfare and economic warfare provide examples of cumulative strategy. Now the powerful insight: "The sequential strategies all of us probably understand; the cumulative strategies possibly we do not. The latter has long been a characteristic of war at sea. But there has been no conscious analytical differentiation of this cumulative warfare from the sequential in any of the major writings on strategy; and there is no major instance in which a cumulative strategy, operating by itself, has been successful. . . . But when these cumulative strategies have been used in conjunction with a sequential strategy, directed at the main object of war, there are many instances in which the strength of the cumulative strategy has meant the difference

between success or failure of the sequential.”

*Military Strategy* runs to only ninety-four pages of text. Even with a twenty page postscript, forty-five pages of the author's reprinted articles, a very useful and informative thirty-five page introduction provided by Professor John B. Hattendorf (senior editor of the Classics of Sea Power series) it is but one long afternoon's read. Well, perhaps two afternoons, because Admiral Wylie will force you to stop and think for a while.

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Wegener, Wolfgang. *The Naval Strategy of the World War*. Translated by Holger H. Herwig. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1989. 231pp. \$29.95

The 1890s saw the rise of the big battleship school in naval war thinking. Its protagonists believed that do-or-die encounters in the home waters, between concentrated fleets rather than cruiser raids on distant shores, would be the warfare of the future. Nowhere was this kind of thinking more dominant than in Wilhelmine Germany, where it was vigorously promoted by Admiral Alfred Tirpitz and his followers.

When in 1897, Tirpitz became the kaiser's naval minister, he immediately began to plan a battle fleet of 60 big ships to be constructed in carefully projected stages over a

period of 20 years. At the end of this period, this fleet was to be capable of defeating the then most powerful navy in the world, the Royal Navy, should the British ever decide to strike. However, if the “decisive battle” in the North Sea was not initiated by England, Tirpitz hoped to use the 60-battleship German fleet as a power-political lever to bully other European nations into providing the kaiser with a large overseas empire. But Tirpitz's grand design failed. He lost the subsequent arms race against Britain well before 1914, and he suffered a strategic defeat when his concept was put to the test at Jutland in 1916.

Opposition to Tirpitz's ambitious plan arose well before the outbreak of the First World War. Among his critics were a number of young naval officers who rejected the Tirpitz school on the grounds of erroneous strategic thinking rather than on political grounds. But Wolfgang Wegener, the author of this volume, was the most precise and hard-hitting among them. Against the tide, he argued that sea power depended on the combination of available hardware and *geography*. He showed that in contrast to all of Tirpitz's expectations, the Royal Navy never sought the much-vaunted “decisive battle,” because there was no reason for Britain to attack the German fleet. By adopting the strategic defensive, Wegener argued, the British gained all the advantages they were looking for. At the same time Tirpitz's fleet was too weak to leave its own defensive