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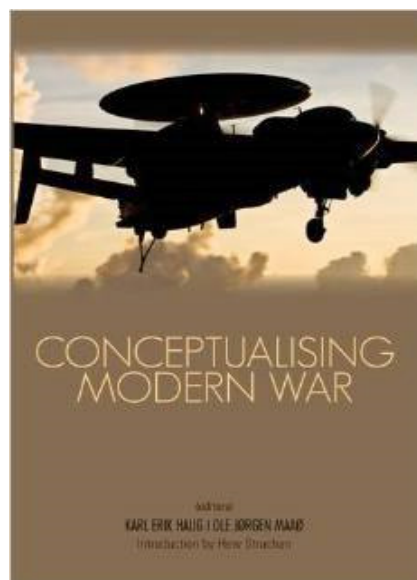
REVIEW

OF THE BOOK: CONCEPTUALISING MODERN WAR.

Authors: Karl Erik Haug, Ole Jørgen Maaø et al

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This book is a welcome addition to the literature addressing the changing nature of war. Comprised of almost 344 pages, it contains fifteen essays by specialists from such prestigious institutions as Uppsala University, the US Army War

College and the University of Oxford. Other contributors to the book include Steven Metz and the well known author David Kilcullen.

The book consists of an introduction by Hew Strachan, the historian and author of the book *The First World War*, and three parts. The introductory essay, entitled *The Changing Nature of War*, masterfully presents the main topics explored in the book and which include the following: a definition of some of the conceptual paradigms of contemporary war, the keys to victory and three essays as afterthoughts.

The quote: “*there are three things against which the human mind struggles in vain: stupidity, bureaucracy, and catchwords*”, is attributed to the German chief of staff during the interwar period, Hans von Seeckt, but this book aims to go beyond the clichés, set phrases and commonplaces that characterise some contemporary military literature to analyse a series of concepts on war and the conducting of war that have emerged in the aftermath of the Gulf War of 1991.

Concepts such as fourth generation wars, asymmetric warfare, new wars, guerrilla war, insurgency, effects-based operations, shock and awe, and a whole range of ideas have been addressed in this book so that anyone interested in these matters will be able to look back and recall the rise and fall of many of these terms and the tendency to rename old concepts with the intention of burying Clausewitz once and for all.

In the first chapter Jan Angstrom talks about different interpretations of the concept of *asymmetric war*. He identifies four different prisms through which asymmetry may be interpreted: power distribution, organisational status of the actor, method of warfare, and norms. These interpretations are commonly found in literature that uses the term to refer to the nature of modern warfare. According to Angstrom, two criteria can be used to assess the usefulness of the interpretations; firstly, the concept must clarify what is meant by modern warfare; and secondly, it must be capable of generating important new lines of research.

The concept *fourth generation war* is analysed by Doctor Antulio J. Echevarría, who highlights the tendency to discover new generations of warfare. Accordingly, his chapter is titled “Breaking the cycle”; according to Echevarría, far from aiding understanding of war, the concept of generations has merely increased the confusion in contemporary military theory.

The Norwegian professor Ole Jorgen Maaø offers a critique of Mary Kaldor’s book, *New Wars*, one of the most acclaimed and influential books of the post-Cold war. The aim of this chapter is to assess whether the concept of new wars is useful for understanding modern conflict and concludes that there is nothing really new about new wars and that the concept is therefore not very useful. This is because none of the three characteristics highlighted by Kaldor hold up to scrutiny. According to Jorgen Maaø, new wars are about identity; the modes of warfare have changed and are now based on a globalised war economy. The conclusion is that new wars are quite similar to the old ones, bearing in mind that Kaldor’s book is based on the Bosnia-Herzegovina conflict.

Part two of the book analyses modern threats in contemporary war and concepts to combat these. The first essay traces the evolution of the concept of irregular warfare from guerrilla war to insurgency, also exploring the themes of revolutionary war, the people's war, etc. This evolution has taken place parallel to the reality experienced on the ground, which is the case of the revolutionary wars in China, Palestine, Algeria and Vietnam and the insurgencies in Iraq, Afghanistan and Lebanon. These chapters address, respectively, insurgency, terrorism, counterinsurgency, effects-based operations (EBO), Network Centric Warfare and Transformation, that is, unconventional warfare. The aforementioned topics have given rise to the great schools of operational thinking which have tried in recent decades to address the strategic issues of conflict; in short, the counterinsurgency, technophile and "airpower *über alles*" schools.

Looking back over the recent past, it is not surprising that responses to strategic issues have focused on targeting, operational doctrines or science fiction, without forgetting what has been coined "the Global War on Terrorism". Another example in this case, but which was not covered in the book for reasons of time, is NATO's current concern about the hybrid warfare used by the Russians in Ukraine, which demonstrates that the organisation continues to search for operational responses to geopolitical and grand strategy issues.

The last part of the book invites readers to reflect on and analyse conflict from other perspectives. From the standpoint of the three final essays, contemporary war is not really modern at all and the author highlights the danger of looking for the Holy Grail in technology. Finally, using the metaphor of the "ladder of tribes", Kilcullen explains the advantage of approaching conflict through an analysis of the nature of the actors. Conventional warfare is less common than what is known as irregular warfare.

In short, the message of this book can be encapsulated in Don Quixote's message to Sancho after the windmill scene: "for matters of war are more subject than any other thing to continual change" and also with the *dictum* of Clausewitz that "Nobody starts a war (...) or, rather, no one in his senses ought to do so, without being clear in his mind what he intends to achieve by that war and how he intends to conduct it".

