Review

Reviewed Work(s): Strategy for Chaos: Revolutions in Military Affairs and the Evidence of History by Colin S. Gray

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Source: *The International History Review*, Dec., 2003, Vol. 25, No. 4 (Dec., 2003), pp. 995-996

.Published by: Taylor & Francis, Ltd

Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/40110430

'Grey Owl syndrome' in which the European settler adopts the persona of a 'primitive native' to critique modern society and imperial power structures strikes Piper as an act of bad faith.

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COLIN S. GRAY. *Strategy for Chaos: Revolutions in Military Affairs and the Evidence of History.* London and Portland: Frank Cass, 2002. Pp. xvi, 310. $52.50 (US).

POLITICAL SCIENTISTS AND historians study war and peace in very different ways. Historians prefer to be close to the ground whereas political scientists and strategists prefer the aerial view. Historians tend to be wary of generalizations about war, unless they inherit them and thereby use them almost unconsciously. Strategists, however, have no alternative but to develop statements of probability to guide them, for they sometimes have to advise about wars that are not yet fought.

Colin S. Gray is an Anglo-American 'strategic theorist', and highly regarded. He realizes that strategists need to employ history but regrets that they too often obtain it through quick raids on historians' strong rooms or data banks. His new book on the so-called Revolution in Military Affairs (labelled RMA in the book), is written primarily for strategy experts, but it will reward historians who persevere with his tight and slightly abstract prose.

The most recent Revolution in Military Affairs was first diagnosed by Soviet theorists in the 1980s, and became a global gospel after the United States's extraordinary use of information technology in the air during the Gulf War of 1991. It was proclaimed for a few years that war, thanks to high technology, would not be the same again. Gray, however, challenges many facets of this argument. He tends to see continuity where many others see an unprecedented leap. He believes that Thucydides and Clausewitz – I think I paraphrase him correctly – would quickly be at home in modern military debates if they were brought to life again. While he marvels at the way new weapons have occasionally transformed war, he does not see the latest technology as all-important. To clarify his own thoughts, he takes three case studies of earlier military revolutions – Napoleon's wars, the First World War, and the cold war. The discussion of these three events occupies half of the book and scores of the long footnotes which he employs as much for enlightenment as for documentation. His reading of recent work on these three military 'revolutions' is impressive. While the specialists might not always agree him – after all, they don't usually agree with one other – they would probably applaud the thoughtful way he uses history.

Gray's approach is multicausal. Unlike the enthusiasts for RMA, he refuses to enthrone the possession of a revolutionary technology as the secret to winning wars; he thinks the political aims are as influential as the military means at a leader's disposal. He sees the importance of the subjective: a state's nuclear arsenal will not deter the opponent's leader unless his mind is willing to be

deterred. He argues that his book is not primarily interested in the causes of war and peace – 'it does not require me to trek into the wild terrain of war causation' (p. 131) – but perhaps he treks more often than he realizes. Thus, he offers an explanation of why the peace after 1918 was short-lived.

The book is highly stimulating: it stimulates disagreement, too. Some readers will wonder at its argument that the cold war, which ran for more than four decades, was actually a war, and as 'real' as the two world wars. And yet the cold war, now that it is over, seems a less accurate title than the hot peace. Similarly, other readers may well wonder whether Gray is wise to generalize on the basis of only three conflicts or military revolutions: moreover, his three choices are based primarily on 'reasons of personal interest and expertise' (p. 12). Likewise, not all will agree with his argument that Napoleonic France and the Kaiser's Germany and the recent Soviet Union all lost because their enemy held the high moral ground and therefore fought with more effort. Today, Washington, Paris, Delhi, Cairo, and Beijing would each differ in defining Moral Ground. In any case, numerous states, believing that God or 'Historical Inevitability or Manifest Destiny' was on their side, somehow managed to lose wars.

A dozen other points could equally be debated, largely because this is a refreshing, wide-ranging, and provoking book that tries to tackle tantalizing questions which historians as a species tend to neglect.

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FIONA TERRY. *Condemned to Repeat? The Paradox of Humanitarian Action.* Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2002. Pp. xiv, 282. $19.95 (US), paper.

THERE IS AN old (and cynical) aphorism to the effect that no good deed ever goes unpunished, which might stand as a fit introduction to this study of the international humanitarian aid community and its activities. What Fiona Terry calls the 'aid industry' has certainly emerged as a prominent feature of post-cold war international politics. An ever-growing array of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) has expanded the idea of 'humanitarian' action into an increasingly wide range of activities. As of the mid-1990s, humanitarian aid budgets had come to total around $6 billion dollars (p. 236). At first glance, such a development might be considered a consummation devoutly to be wished, a reflection of a more sensitive international community focused not just on the vagaries of great power politics but increasingly on basic human needs as well.

Alas, the law of unintended consequences seems to have affected humanitarian aid activities with just as much force as other areas of human endeavour. As Terry writes, the 'paradox' in her title refers to the fact that humanitarian action can 'contradict its fundamental purpose by prolonging the suffering it intends to alleviate' (p. 2). Among several case studies that she presents in support of her proposition, that of the Rwandan refugees stands out. Following