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Book Reviews

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Dealing with the Russians

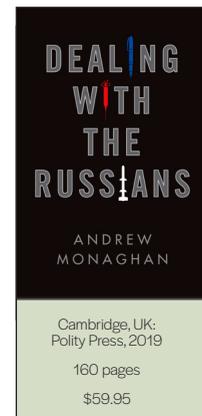
By Andrew Monaghan

Reviewed by Dr. Bettina Renz, professor of international security,
School of Politics and International Relations, University of Nottingham

Andrew Monaghan's book, *Dealing with the Russians*, begins with an unambiguous warning: "so let us be clear from the start: Russia poses a major challenge to the Euro-Atlantic community. This challenge is serious and there should be little doubt about it" (10). Moscow's aggression against Ukraine, ongoing since spring 2014, demonstrates Vladimir Putin's willingness to violate the most fundamental tenets of international law. The string of hostile actions that followed set Russia on a collision course with the United States and its allies. Russian military operations in Syria breached international humanitarian laws and risked the escalation of tensions. Active measures, most prominently interference in the 2016 US presidential elections, targeted democratic processes in western states. In response to these aggressions, the Euro-Atlantic community adopted a series of measures for dealing with the Russian threat, such as reinforcing NATO's posture (especially in Eastern Europe), imposing economic sanctions, and securing itself against various hybrid threats.

In his cogently written and argued book, Monaghan diagnoses why the Euro-Atlantic community's efforts to date have failed to constrain Moscow's aggressive behavior. He argues although the community clearly agrees about the severity of the challenges faced, the exact nature of the threat remains inadequately understood. The United States and its allies lack a coherent strategy, which is essential for dealing with Russia in the long term. To devise a successful strategy, the United States and its allies will need a detailed understanding of Moscow's foreign policy.

In the chapter "(Mis)Interpreting the Russian Threat," Monaghan discusses how the uncritical use of historical analogies like the "New Cold War," the fixation on questionable abstractions like hybrid warfare or A2/AD, and especially essentialist assumptions about Russian expansionism have become a "trap for thinking" in the West (40). The resultant view of Russia lacks nuance and does not accurately reflect the country's foreign policy motivations, which are far more



complex than the current focus on potential challenges to Euro-Atlantic security suggests. The chapter “From Dialogue to Deterrence” demonstrates how a crude understanding of contemporary Russia has hindered the identification of policies suitable for handling the complex problem. Responses like economic sanctions or NATO reinforcements in Eastern Europe are reactions to individual events rather than elements of a coherent strategy.

Monaghan argues the perceived dichotomy in Western discourse of either deterrence of, or dialogue with Russia, is particularly unhelpful. Can deterrence work if it is based, at best, on a partial understanding of the Kremlin’s motivations and capabilities? Can dialogue work without a nuanced understanding of the nature of current tensions, including an appreciation of how the Kremlin’s views of the United States and its allies have influenced its actions over the past few decades? Neither deterrence nor dialogue are a panacea or an end in itself. As Monaghan states, “success in both will be the consequence of a coherent broader strategy” (85).

Dealing with the Russians provides food for thought for readers seeking a better understanding of the current crisis in relations between the West and Russia and possible ways forward to prevent tensions from spiraling. Above all, the book is explicitly relevant for Western policymakers and decisionmakers developing future policies vis-à-vis Moscow. Monaghan’s work, based on extensive personal experience collaborating with policymakers and military practitioners, is a plea to take the Russian challenge seriously. Doing so, however, means more than hawkish political statements or the adoption of measures in reaction to individual events.

In the concluding chapter, Monaghan outlines systematic efforts required, in his view, to create a coherent future strategy. There is no quick-fix solution. Instead, a serious investment in reinvigorating the Russian studies community is required to regain the linguistic skills and country expertise lost since the end of the Cold War. This focus should not be too narrow. A holistic understanding of contemporary Russian foreign policy needs to draw on interdisciplinary insights from history, politics, sociology, and economics. Institutional partnerships able to coordinate knowledge exchanges between researchers—academics, think tanks, and independents—and relevant state structures also need to be strengthened. Most importantly, concerted effort is required to confront and challenge groupthink in policy- and decision-making circles, such as the ongoing fixation on hybrid warfare, which has been comprehensively debunked by Russian military experts.

The United States and its allies have failed to devise a coherent Russia strategy not only because of persisting “narrow, abstract and clichéd” views of Russia, but also because these views have been “impervious to ‘reasonable

challenge’” (92). Policymakers and decisionmakers in the West willing to have their views challenged in the name of devising a future grand strategy for Russia should read Monaghan’s book.

STRATEGY

The Art of War in an Age of Peace: U.S. Grand Strategy and Resolute Restraint

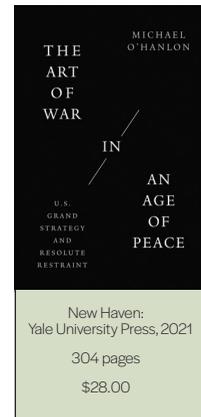
By Michael O’Hanlon

Reviewed by Dr. Frank Hoffman, US Marine Corps (retired), research fellow,
Institute for National Strategic Studies, National Defense University

How should the United States adapt to today’s challenging strategic context? It faces a rising China, a reckless Vladimir Putin in Moscow, diminished credibility among allies large and small, and a host of underfunded domestic needs—especially infrastructure and technology—that will impact future prosperity and security for generations. In this dangerous world, how can the Biden-Harris administration coherently balance its aspirational policy aims while constrained by a federal budget that bleeds red ink?

In *The Art of War in an Age of Peace: U.S. Grand Strategy and Resolute Restraint*, Michael O’Hanlon, director of research at the Brookings Institution, offers a trenchant analysis of the challenges and a strategic outline that avoids the pitfalls of retrenchment and the dangers of imperial overstretch. His grand strategy, “resolute restraint,” carefully positions the United States for the long run, without wild alterations that may undermine global stability or endanger vital US interests (xii).

O’Hanlon carefully distinguishes resolute restraint from “offshore balancing” and the “restraint” strategy promoted by Barry Posen, which focuses on US overspending and a reposturing of the US military (37). O’Hanlon’s resolute restraint seeks more discipline in American interventions but argues, appropriately, for continuing US alliance commitments. He sees our friends and partners as a unique strategic advantage that should be sustained, not undercut—a perspective echoed in Mira Rapp-Hooper’s superlative *Shields of the Republic* (2020). O’Hanlon’s version is resolute about the defense of those allies, the rules-based order, and freedom of maneuver in the global commons. He is restrained about the use of force in every minor crisis, resistant to growing additional allies or partners, and opposed to the heavy promotion of values, human rights, and democracy.



Our current and future allies and partners will not find O'Hanlon's ideas on restraint reassuring and, perhaps influenced by the growing narrative about the erosion of US power and credibility, may hedge against it. The recent fiasco in Afghanistan will be seen as an example of excessive restraint and, on Washington's part, a shortfall in resolute leadership. While deep engagement may be unaffordable, persistent leadership and true partnership with current and future allies will be necessary if order is to be sustained.

The chapter on China is extensive, well-balanced, and noteworthy in its analysis and prescriptions. O'Hanlon acknowledges the Communist Party's foreign activities over the past decade "suggest hegemonic temptations of a much more sweeping character" and a level of ambition that is "a dagger right at the heart of the rules-based global order" (85). He calls for a smart strategy that recognizes the inevitability of China's growing influence and seeks to redirect Beijing's progress in nonthreatening directions. O'Hanlon details the relative structural advantages the United States enjoys in terms of economic potential and offers several well-founded recommendations to enhance American competitiveness.

O'Hanlon's unique threat framework is a distinctive element of the book. While the first section follows the Pentagon's most recent threat construct, which covers China, Iran, North Korea, Russia, and transnational terrorism (sometimes referred to as "4+1"), O'Hanlon generates a more functional framework he calls "the other 4+1" (173). This construct lists the threats from nuclear, biological, digital, climatic, and domestic support and focuses on the need to buttress domestic support for a renewed grand strategy, as well as manage our burgeoning debt. We tend to overlook these challenges, which is a mistake. As O'Hanlon notes:

None of the above are scheming enemies in the traditional sense. But they pose serious challenges nonetheless. When they interact with the classic list of threats, they can make every problem more serious. They can exacerbate, intensify, or accelerate the dangers posed by more classic, human adversaries; they raise the stakes enormously (161).

This chapter presents a compelling argument for ensuring these issues are captured within the national security strategy. O'Hanlon offers examples of actions America can take to remedy our limited preparedness and mitigate these threats. The one shortfall about the alternative "other 4+1" is it overlooks domestic terrorism (173). While controversial, the inclusion of the left and far-right elements of domestic terrorism more accurately reflects contemporary security challenges in the aftermath of the 2020 election and the pandemic.

After the book's tour d'horizon of threat actors and functional challenges, readers will find it difficult to call today an age of peace. Moreover, while O'Hanlon does offer prescriptions useful as grand strategy, they hardly constitute

an “art of war.” While this is a quibble, “The Double Threat Matrix” would have been a more appropriate title, given the double set of threats presented. O’Hanlon also properly derides Steven Pinker’s thesis about the end of war, calling the idea of an inexorable path toward global peace “Pollyannaish” (161).

All in all, O’Hanlon’s *The Art of War* is a sound overview of today’s accelerating and converging challenges, offering a reasonable strategic approach that conserves and focuses America’s power on its core interests. This realistic book merits serious consideration for professional military education reading lists and is strongly recommended for classroom use in strategic studies programs due to its balanced and prudent approach.

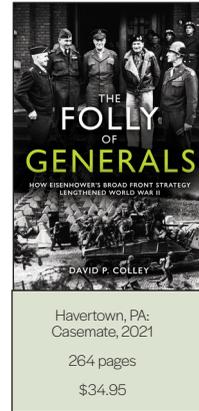
MILITARY HISTORY

The Folly of Generals: How Eisenhower's Broad Front Strategy Lengthened World War II

By David P. Colley

Reviewed by Dr. Gregory L. Cantwell, colonel, US Army (retired)

David P. Colley's 2021 book, *The Folly of Generals: How Eisenhower's Broad Front Strategy Lengthened World War II*, examines Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF) military actions and missed opportunities during the war. An award-winning author, journalist, and former US Army ordnance branch officer, Colley believes the SHAEF could have achieved victory seven or eight months ahead of May 1945. He contends the "broad front" strategy planned and executed in Europe denied the Allies the ability to concentrate forces in a decisive point and exploit success over the course of World War II (xi).



Much of the historical review on World War II describes the Allied forces as heroic figures who defeated the forces of evil in Germany. With the discovery of the concentration camps and systemic genocide of millions of people in Germany and Poland, it is hard to argue World War II was a war the Allies had to win. *The Folly of Generals* does not erase that image, but does shine a light on the tactical opportunities that could have been exploited if senior Allied commanders were more aggressive and willing to take additional risk.

Colley cites interviews with several German generals after the war who admitted to weaknesses in the German Siegfried Line of defenses the Allies could have exploited. He specifically examines operations at Arnhem in the Netherlands, Falaise in France, and Valmontone in Italy, as well as Operation Husky and campaigns to cross the Rhine and liberate Paris. According to Colley, these operations are examples of tactical opportunities that—had the Allies been willing to abandon their rigid commitment to a broad front strategy moving from west to east into Germany—could have led them to greater success against the Germans. Much of his criticism is placed upon both the SHAEF and General Dwight D. Eisenhower the SHAEF commander. Colley refers to the refusal to change strategies “as the US Army’s (or Eisenhower’s) tactical ignorance” which prevented them from

reinforcing success or “concentrate[ing] forces on a single objective” (x). He also notes political considerations, rather than tactical strategy, played a part in the decision making at SHAEF which rippled down through the organization.

Much has been written about the impact Winston Churchill, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Joseph Stalin had on the strategic conduct of the war. *The Folly of Generals* instead focuses on tactical opportunities. For example, Army group commander Jacob Devers and his forces reached Strasbourg, France, in November 1944 and had the opportunity to cross the Rhine. He intended to drive north on the east side of the river to relieve pressure from other Allied forces in the north. Eisenhower, however, wanted a breakthrough to occur in the north after he consolidated all forces on the west side of the Rhine and refused to let Devers cross the river. Colley argues Eisenhower was too cautious. He cites an intelligence debrief report from the German chief of staff to SS General Vatterodt, the commander in Strasbourg, which confirmed a penetration across the Rhine at Strasbourg would have seriously upset the German forces lightly guarding this sector. Colley contends if Eisenhower had authorized Devers to cross the Rhine in November 1944, then the Battle of the Bulge would not have occurred in December.

While Colley’s claim that Eisenhower was too cautious may have some merit, the SHAEF commander had many challenges to balance beyond tactical advances and opportunities. Coalition maintenance, wartime production limits, mobilization and training timelines, sustainment challenges, displaced personnel, humanitarian support, and political considerations may override the tactical opportunities division and Army commanders encounter. Eisenhower had to win the war *with the army he had*. The broad front strategy might have been designed to win by attrition rather than by annihilation. Opportunities for tactical victories and exploitation did exist, but they appear to have conflicted with the Allied strategy based on attrition on two fronts. Tactics must be nested into higher level strategy or they are considered a waste of resources.

The Folly of Generals raises, but does not answer, many of the timeless challenges for a commander in large-scale combat operations at echelons well above the brigade combat team level. When is a strategy of annihilation better than one of attrition? Can a theater strategy change between the two? Command decisions require a commander to make decisions with imperfect information. Personalities and relationships between commanders may be more important than command relationships at the senior levels, and sustainment still determines the feasibility of strategic options. If we are contested in all domains in the projected future, an expeditionary army can expect sustainment challenges with long lines of communications.

Colley's book provides historical examples, and he supports his argument at the tactical level. It is difficult, however, to prove a conclusion to the war would have been achieved sooner at the strategic level based on a tactical victory. The actions of a committed adversary fighting an existential threat should not be underestimated. Bold tactical actions could have ended the war; they also could have deteriorated Allied cooperation and, in one extreme, made postwar conditions in Europe worse at the start of the Cold War. Historians can talk past each other when considering the strategic, operational, or tactical level operations and decisions, and both can be correct. In any war, mistakes that could have saved lives become clear only in hindsight. As war is a human endeavor, perhaps we should not judge too harshly the sacrifices of the few who bore the burden of supreme command and succeeded in winning the war.

I recommend *The Folly of Generals* for readers interested in the European campaign who will enjoy the division-level tactical opportunities explored in the book. It clearly highlights the major challenges of coalition warfare in large-scale combat operations and demonstrates the differences of perspectives between tactical, operational, and strategic levels of war and associated priorities and risk at each level.

