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REVIEW

OF THE BOOK: NEW STRATEGIES IN A CHANGING WORLD

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This is a summary of a manual of strategic studies and security, Plaza y Valdés Editores, Madrid, 2013

In this recently-published volume, a panoramic view is given of the history of strategic studies in modern history from its origins, which the authors locate in the 18th Century.

Since then, things have changed somewhat in the build-up and reality of conflicts, in the so-called art of war. Since those rudimentary weapons, since those epic and interminable sieges against towns which attempted to resist in the face of famine, we have reached a time in which small devices, controlled from a distance and with no crew on board, travel through the skies in search of an objective selected thousands of miles away. We have reached a time of cyber-threats, in which anonymous computer geniuses are capable - spending their time and perhaps wasting their health on the transparent fibre of a led display - of blocking pages with apparently impassable security

filters within the web sites of governments and international organisations. Years in which the leaders of opinion are capable of getting together a sufficiently wide critical mass to, at a given moment, launch a call by means of picturesque electronic gadgets which becomes the fulcrum and fundamental weapon of popular revolts, uprisings and revolutions.

The rise in piracy on both sides of Africa, or in the waters of Ecuador, in South America; the more than likely connivance between transnational terrorist organisations and the networks which traffic on a large scale with any object or substance from which a substantial profit can be made; the tendency to close many open or latent conflicts prematurely are some of the situations which occupy a pre-eminent place in the range of threats to international security in these first few decades of the 21st Century. In large part, they are linked to the significance that the so-called non-state actors have acquired, thanks precisely to the process of globalisation over the last few decades.

It is therefore indispensable that experts in the matter express an opinion and attempt to clarify the panorama and propose solutions. That is the task that has been undertaken, with substantial success, by a group of Spanish teachers with accredited experience in strategic studies, security and defence. As is very well expressed in the manual itself: "Strategic studies need theories which give meaning to the unconnected fragments of information which reality often gives us (...) Information, by itself, is insufficient when extracting the deeper meaning from complex realities".

Among other reasons, it is necessary to go more deeply into these studies so as to contribute to the process of redefinition that is taking place in the concept of security both at the national level and also from a multi-lateral perspective.

The manual that we are reviewing on these pages is therefore responding to that need to systematise and synthesise the study and analysis of security and defence strategy.

On the pages of this work, the authors see themselves as continuers of a discipline of analysis and research which was very much strengthened in the second half of the 20th Century. Since then, several academic institutions which are exclusively devoted to this area of knowledge have been opened such as the Institute of War and Peace Studies, founded in 1951 at the University of Columbia, or the Department of War Studies at Ling College in London (1953). In parallel, the think tanks related with strategic studies also underwent a period of expansion at that time. Part of that same trend, the Spanish Institute of Strategic Studies began life in 1970.

Currently, the interest and complexity of the international context, especially as regards security and defence, have multiplied the programmes of study and the organisations and institutions devoted to analysing it.

Within the volume that we present, the first part is devoted to offering a panoramic vision of the main doctrines in the history of international relations: from the realist point of view, in its defensive and offensive aspects, and in contrast to the

liberal approach, which culminates in the trend which has been called neo-liberal institutionalism.

Subsequently, the reader is informed of the relevance of certain aspects such as the use of force and its regulation in International Law, deterrence, soft power, coercive diplomacy or strategic intelligence, one of the most significant areas in the discipline at this moment.

A description is given of the reasons which have led the actors on the international stage to take their decisions, to establish alliances, to search for power or to satisfy their own interests. It is only with an understanding of these aspects that it is possible to comprehend events such as the new geo-political balance which is arising, with the rise of new economic and political powers, of which China is the paradigmatic case.

In short, the manual of strategic studies and international security is a significant effort to compile and systematise research into this discipline in Spain, reinforcing its position in the academic sphere. It is an effort which is without a doubt necessary and gives new tools of analysis and understanding which will help us to cope in an international reality which is more and more complex and thrilling.

