

THE CAMBRIDGE HISTORY OF
STRATEGY

★
VOLUME I

From Antiquity to the American War of Independence

Volume I of *The Cambridge History of Strategy* offers a history of the practice of strategy from the beginning of recorded history, to the late eighteenth century, from all parts of the world. Drawing on material evidence covering two and a half millennia, an international team of leading scholars in each subject examines how strategy was formulated and applied and with what tools, from ancient Greece and China to the Ottoman and Mughal Empires and the American Revolutionary War. They explore key themes from decision-makers and strategy-making processes, causes of wars and war aims and tools of strategy in war and peace, to configurations of armed forces and distinctive and shared ways of war across civilisations and periods. A comparative conclusion examines how the linking of political goals with military means took place in different parts of the world over the course of history, asking whether strategic practice has universal features.

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STRATEGY

The Cambridge History of Strategy presents a global history exploring how leaders of social groups, civilisations, empires and states have practised strategy over the course of the past three millennia. With contributions from leading experts in each subject, these volumes analyse a series of notable case studies to reflect on the formulation and application of strategy rather than on theory. Transcending the traditional Western focus and modern-state-based framework of strategic studies, this Cambridge History offers the inclusion of a wider range of political actors and cases from parts of the world hitherto largely excluded from the literature. This leads to a discussion of whether central claims in the field of strategic studies that the practice of strategy exhibits universal features which apply always hold up against empirical evidence from different centuries and cases beyond the West.

VOLUME I

From Antiquity to the American War of Independence

EDITED BY ISABELLE DUYVESTEYN AND BEATRICE HEUSER

VOLUME II

From the Napoleonic Wars to the Present

EDITED BY ISABELLE DUYVESTEYN AND BEATRICE HEUSER

THE CAMBRIDGE
HISTORY OF
STRATEGY

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VOLUME I
From Antiquity to the American War
of Independence

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ISABELLE DUYVESTEYN
Leiden University
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[More Information](#)

This book is dedicated to the past and present victims of war

Contents

<i>List of Maps</i>	page xii
<i>List of Contributors to Volume I</i>	xiii
<i>Preface and Acknowledgements</i>	xix

Introduction to Volume I: The Practice of Strategy	1
ISABELLE DUYVESTEYN AND BEATRICE HEUSER	

1 · China to AD 180	21
PETER LORGE	

2 · Teispid and Achaemenid Persia (c. 550–330 BC)	40
JOHN O. HYLAND	

3 · Ancient Greece: Strategy of the City States (500–300 BC)	53
ROEL KONIJNENDIJK	

4 · Philip II, Alexander III and the Macedonian Empire	73
ANDREW FEAR	

5 · Ancient Rome: Monarchy and Republic (753–27 BC)	98
LOUIS RAWLINGS	

6 · China AD 180–1127	124
DAVID A. GRAFF	

7 · Ancient Rome: Principate and Dominate (27 BC–AD 630)	144
MICHAEL WHITBY	

8 · The Gupta Empire (AD 400–500)	171
KAUSHIK ROY	

Contents

- 9 · The Sassanian Empire's Strategies 191
 KATARZYNA MAKSYMIOUK
- 10 · The Rashidun, Umayyad (661–750) and Abbasid (750–1258)
 Caliphates 204
 MEHDI KURGAN KADER
- 11 · Byzantine Strategy (AD 630–1204) 226
 GEORGIOS CHATZELIS
- 12 · Strategies in the Wars of Western Europe, 476–c. 1000 251
 JOHN FRANCE
- 13 · Latin Christendom in the Later Middle Ages 271
 SOPHIE THÉRÈSE AMBLER
- 14 · Chinggis Khan and the Mongol Empire, AD 1206 to 1368 292
 TIMOTHY MAY
- 15 · Hindu and Buddhist Polities of Premodern/Early Modern Mainland
 South-East Asia (1100–1800) 312
 TASSAPA UMAVIJANI
- 16 · Pre-Columbian and Early Historic Native American Warfare 334
 PATRICIA M. LAMBERT
- 17 · Ottoman Expansionism, 1300–1823 346
 MESUT UYAR
- 18 · Strategy in the Wars of Pre-colonial Sub-Saharan Africa 369
 JOHN BURTON KEGEL AND GIACOMO MACOLA
- 19 · Strategies of the Mughal Empire 384
 PRATYAY NATH
- 20 · China, 1368–1911 403
 KENNETH M. SWOPE
- 21 · Early Modern Europe: The Habsburgs and Their Enemies, 1519–1659 424
 DAVID PARROTT

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Frontmatter
[More Information](#)

Contents

22 · Naval Strategies 448

ADRI VAN VLIET

23 · The Strategy of Louis XIV 464

JAMEL OSTWALD

24 · Hohenzollern Strategy under Frederick II 488

ADAM L. STORRING

25 · American Warfare in the Eighteenth Century 508

STEPHEN CONWAY

Summary of Volume I 528

BEATRICE HEUSER AND ISABELLE DUYVESTEYN

Further Reading 566

Index 584

Maps

1.1 Chinese strategies to AD 180	page 22
2.1 Strategies of the Achaemenid Persian Empire (550–330 BC)	46
3.1 Ancient Greece: strategies of the city states (500–400 BC)	62
4.1 Strategies of Philip II and Alexander III and the Macedonian Empire	86
5.1 Strategies of ancient Rome, Monarchy and Republic (753–27 BC)	99
6.1 Tang operations against the Eastern Türks, AD 629–630	125
7.1 Strategies of ancient Rome: principate and dominate (27 BC—AD 630)	145
8.1 Strategies of the Gupta Empire (AD 400–500)	172
9.1 Strategies of the Sassanian Persian Empire (AD 224–651)	196
10.1 Strategies of the Rashidun, Umayyad (661–750) and Abbasid (750–1258) caliphates	206
11.1 Byzantine strategy (AD 630–1204)	228
12.1 Strategies in the wars of western Europe, 476–c. 1000	252
13.1 Strategies in Latin Christendom in the later Middle Ages 1000–1500	280
14.1 Strategies of Chinggis Khan and the Mongol Empire, AD 1206 to 1368	293
15.1 The Burmese marching routes against Ayutthaya in 1765–1767	313
16.1 Pre-Columbian and early historic Native American battles, wars and regional conflict (1000–1860)	335
17.1 Ottoman strategy	358
18.1 Strategy in the wars of pre-colonial sub-Saharan Africa	370
20.1 Strategies of Ming and Qing China	416
21.1 Strategies of the early modern Habsburgs and their enemies, 1519–1659	426
22.1 Dutch naval strategies (1550–1800)	456
23.1 The strategies of Louis XIV	465
24.1 The wars of Frederick II of Prussia	489
25.1 American strategies in the eighteenth century	509

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List of Contributors to Volume I

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List of Contributors to Volume I

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List of Contributors to Volume I

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List of Contributors to Volume I

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Preface and Acknowledgements

Practising strategy is messy, frustrating and often guided by luck rather than anything else. This is the subject of this series. While there are many overviews of the makers and the making of strategy, far fewer focus on practising it. Overviews of great strategic thinkers abound. Appreciations of the drafting of strategy are plentiful. What happens when it is put into action is the subject of these two volumes. More specifically, a comparison of these practices, across time and place, is what the series aims to offer. There is presently no global history of the practice of strategy, with most treatises focusing predominantly on Western experiences or single case studies. Making strategy a focus, even before the invention of the word, brings something new to the field. Moreover, moving the focus beyond the preoccupation with theory and the Western world is not the only ambition. The *longue durée*, as well as the study of other polities than the state and its political instrumentality, is where we hope to offer some food for thought.

The Cambridge Series is a very long-running series with a 100-year history. The current volumes break to some extent with previous traditions of the *Cambridge History of . . .* series. In general, the contributions in the series are not specifically intended to present new research, but rather offer the reader an overview of a particular noteworthy topic or phenomenon. The volumes before you intend to do both. First, they deliberately address a non-specialist readership, as we can assume that none of our readers are familiar with all the Napoleonic Wars, and also with the wars of the Han, Byzantium or the Guptas. This may disappoint some who will find the introduction to their specific period of expertise and interest telling them things they already knew, but even then, while editing the chapters, we had many revelations about periods we ourselves were familiar with, when interrogated systematically from angles previously ‘assumed’ to be known.

Preface and Acknowledgements

Second, by presenting this case material and the state of the art in their respective historiographies, we offer the opportunity of comparison. Only comparisons uncover assumptions that turn out to be very culture-specific, or else surprisingly widespread when they were thought to be specific to a particular culture. For example, the strategic aims of cementing alliances or of peace confirmation were pursued through the strategic tool of dynastic marriages not only by the Habsburg dynasty, but also by the ancient Chinese, the Macedonians, and the Romans under Principate, Dominate, and then the Eastern Roman/Byzantine dynasties, as well as the Guptas, and all the subsequent European dynasties, albeit not always as spectacularly as by the Habsburgs. Third, based on this comparison, we can aspire to present a global overview of strategic practice that pushes the boundaries of the debate in strategic studies. This case will be made in more detail in the introductory chapter.

This work aims to strike a balance between the particular – the specific cases of this history with all their uniqueness and peculiarities – and the generalisable. Without insisting on the former, we lose the reality of the particular mindsets, culture, world views, and material circumstances that determined them. As Carl von Clausewitz, the Prussian general who wrote the core text in the field of strategic studies almost two centuries ago, rightly put it, ‘every age’ – and he might have added, every distinct culture within that period –

had its own kind of war, its own limiting conditions, and its own preconceptions. Each [period], therefore, would have its own theory of war, even if one had been inclined everywhere and at all times to deduce it from philosophical first principles. The events of every age must therefore be judged in the light of its own peculiarities.¹

Without generalisable aspects, however, we lose the relevance of the past for our own times and our future.

We offer a history of the practice of strategy in two volumes. The first volume is devoted to a diversity of case studies from around 2000 BC until 1800. The second volume looks at case studies from 1800 until today. The exact choices we have made will be detailed and justified in the opening chapters to the two volumes. The richness of this overview could not have been achieved without the contributions of the best and brightest scholars in this field. We are indebted to them for the time and energy they have devoted

¹ Von Clausewitz, *Vom Kriege*, VIII.3B, 973f.

Preface and Acknowledgements

to producing the chapters. In a review of Jeremy Black's recent book on a global strategy, it was noted that 'Black's invitation to students of war and strategy to acquaint themselves with non-Western perspectives is timely. The challenge is formidable, and the task may well be impossible.'² We took up this daunting challenge, but we could not have taken it up alone: we have learned a tremendous amount from our wonderfully knowledgeable, ever-suffering contributors, whom we submitted to endless questions and demands for changes and additions.

The first idea for the series emerged during a dinner party at Leiden University Faculty Club in the spring of 2018. The request for Cambridge University Press was brought into the discussion, as was how such a series could be conceptualised. Isabelle was very inspired but rather daunted by the idea of carrying such a project alone. She approached Beatrice to ask if she would be interested in collaborating on this endeavour. Reluctantly, Beatrice came on board as both agreed that it would be crazy to forgo this exceptional occasion to persuade scholars from all periods and all parts of the world to help us better understand a subject of such passionate interest to both of us. They agreed that it would be unusual to have two women, still hugely underrepresented in the field of strategic studies, editing a contribution to this prestigious series. We are tremendously grateful to Cambridge University Press's Michael Watson, who embraced our idea and encouraged us in its development.

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² T. G. Otte, 'Military strategy: a global history', *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 31:3 (2020), 597–9, 598.