

STRATEGIC FLEXIBILITY

Strategic Thinking in 3D: A Guide for National Security, Foreign Policy, and Business Professionals

By Ross Harrison

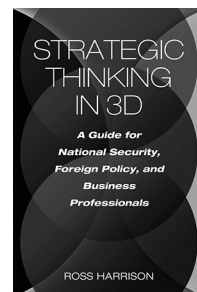
Reviewed by Charles D. Allen, Colonel (USA Retired), Professor of Leadership and Cultural Studies, US Army War College

As a former corporate chief executive officer, current professor of practice of international relations at Georgetown University, and having worked with corporate and nongovernmental agencies, Ross Harrison has an enduring professional interest in developing strategies. Over the past decade, he has had substantial engagement with US Army War College (USAWC) and other senior level college faculty members as a contributor to the Teaching Strategy Group. A quick review of the book's bibliography, endnotes, and in-text references reveals that Harrison is steeped in materials used in the curriculum for the Army War College's Theater of War and Strategy course. Accordingly, the author's approach is familiar to this reviewer as well as reflective of the USAWC curriculum in its Strategic Leadership and Defense Management courses.

While many critics lament the current state of American strategy and offer commentary on the paucity of the strategic thinking among US leaders, Harrison gets to the core question long posed by USAWC colleagues and other scholars, "Why is strategy difficult?" (Jablonsky, 1992). His *Strategic Thinking in 3D* offers a framework for how to think about strategy and how to think strategically. The former is about discernment of individual as well as organizational purpose and goals and the creation of a viable approach to attain each. The latter is about posing questions to gain situational awareness of the factors that influence the development and successful execution of strategy.

The author succinctly presents the many conceptions about the nature of strategy as it is interpreted across traditional domains—government, military, and corporate/business. He adopts an overarching definition from Andrew Krepinevich and Barry Watts, where "Strategy is fundamentally about identifying or creating asymmetric advantages that can be exploited to help achieve one's ultimate objectives despite resource and other constraints, most importantly the opposing efforts of adversaries or competitors and the inherent unpredictability of strategic outcomes" (2-3).

Harrison's presentation of eight underlying assumptions about strategy is very useful and helps to define its nature—subject to human agency, intentional, competitive, and possessing system properties as it interacts with other systems. The assumptions are formed around: interests, opposing wills, choices, limits, passion, integration causality, and leverage. While he offers a base definition of strategy, the author does not provide one for strategic thinking. Our USAWC definition is complementary and would be useful: strategic thinking "is the ability to make a creative and holistic synthesis of key factors affecting an



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organization and its environment in order to obtain sustainable competitive advantage and long-term success.” (Allen and Gerras)

The book is well organized and presented in three parts: the inward face of strategy, the outward face of strategy, and the power of integration. The “3D” in the title is the author’s suggestion that strategy is best thought of and executed in three dimensions: systems, opponents, and groups. Understanding one’s own system is imperative to determining the existing and needed capabilities. Examining current and potential opponents’ systems as sources from which competitors generate their capabilities allows the targeting and disruption of opposing strategies. Leveraging one’s own stakeholder group adds resources to prosecuting a successful strategy. For each discussion of the strategic dimensions, Harrison provides practical examples to illustrate concepts and principles in the application of his framework. Harrison’s concluding section offers a refreshing twist as the framework is applied to a prominent and persistent security threat to the United States today—al Qaeda. Rather than developing a US strategy against its foe, he uses the “3D” framework to examine the al Qaeda strategy and, in doing so, provides interesting insights.

Harrison appropriately establishes disclaimers and caveats in his preface and conclusion. Perhaps the most important is, “the general framework is intended to be used suggestively rather than dogmatically.” So there is a duality with the internal and external focus of strategy that requires balance—adapting the organization/enterprise to its environment as well as designing methods to shape that same environment to attain its goals and objectives.

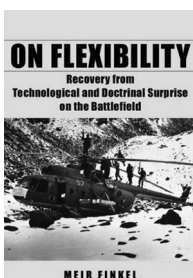
This book is an effective primer on strategy. Harrison holds his own against several more cerebral and complex treatments of strategy and strategic thinking—he does not promise too much. Readers should be wary of any book about strategy and strategic thinking that is so compact, lest they think strategy is merely about determining ends, ways, and means. To paraphrase Clausewitz, “Everything in [strategy] is very simple, but the simplest thing is difficult.” Far from an easy read, *Strategic Thinking in 3D* is accessible, thought provoking, and pragmatic for a wide range of individuals who may wrestle with the challenges of an uncertain and competitive environment. The value in Harrison’s work is not that it provides answers but asks the questions that drive leaders and their organizations to explore factors which may have strategic effect and substantive impact—then enables the crafting of viable strategies.

On Flexibility: Recovery from Technological and Doctrinal Surprise on the Battlefield

by Meir Finkel

Reviewed by Raphael D. Marcus, a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of War Studies, King’s College London.

Adapting to surprise on the battlefield has been a challenge militaries have faced since the beginning of history. In the progressively growing field of scholarly literature pertaining to military innovation and adaptation, there are few works which convey the complexity and



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324 pages
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