

Impact case study (REF3b)

Institution: University of Reading
Unit of Assessment: 21 Politics and International Studies
Title of case study: Defending and exemplifying the importance of classical strategy to military practice
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Professor Colin Gray's research into strategic theory, conducted at the University of Reading, has had a sustained, distinctive, and international impact on policymakers, military educationalists, and other defence professionals. Firstly, it has vindicated the idea of 'strategy' as a coherent intellectual activity, distinct from military history on the one hand and 'military science' on the other, that is and should be at the heart of military practice and officer education. Secondly, and in consequence, it has informed and structured detailed practical debates, not least through advice commissioned from Gray himself.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>In the period from 2000 (when he first came to Reading) to 2013, Gray has conducted research which has not just defended but also exemplified the relevance of classical strategic theory to shaping modern military practice. His theory of strategy defends the distinct and irreplaceable character of strategy as an activity by showing how classical theorists, especially Clausewitz, supply an intellectual foundation on which to develop strategic judgement today. In Gray's view, strategy is distinct from such related practices as military history, military administration, and even academic 'war studies'. It is an implication of his standpoint that strategists who work within a university setting are engaged in an activity at least continuous with those of generals and admirals. Gray's research has created a holistic framework through which armed conflict or the threat of it can be understood, and within which particular topics (such as counterinsurgency theory, airpower, and cyberwar) can be discussed.</p> <p>The research has been presented in two contrasting major works - <i>Another Bloody Century</i> (2005), and <i>The Strategy Bridge: Theory for Practice</i> (the first volume of a trilogy: 2010) – which are widely acknowledged as setting the agenda for specialist discussion among a global readership both of strategic studies academics and of non-academic defence professionals. In the words of leading US. military historian Dennis E. Showalter, Gray 'has sustained and enhanced a reputation as the English-speaking world's leading strategic thinker.' His theory's uniquely comprehensive character is one of the the foundations of its impact; in the judgement of Professor Christopher Coker, 'none has been so consistent in trying to develop a general theory'.</p> <p>The impact of this theory has been much amplified by its vindication by the course of military events: in reviving and adapting classical theory, the research opposed such fashions as the belief that 'new wars' had made traditional thinking obsolete or the short-lived and now discredited view that a technologically-driven 'Revolution in Military Affairs' will give Western forces dominance of any battlespace. In opposition to such rival views, Gray argues that war remains a political act, in which the military instrument must be subordinated to policy goals and where the role of strategy is to function as the 'bridge' between the two. He notes that military establishments are perennially drawn to seductive 'big ideas' appearing to offer a simplified key to their problems. These are bound to disappoint, because war is not a mechanistic, scientifically exact exercise, but rather a violent and chaotic interaction that has to be addressed through a distinctive form of thinking that is as much political as it is technical.</p> <p>Within the academic world, Gray's research is an acknowledged reference point: the criticisms that have been levelled at it (for example by Professor Sir Hew Strachan) have taken for granted its status as the principal expression of a distinctive view of strategy with widespread influence on practitioners. Its arguments have been elaborated and applied through rigorous discussions of a variety of emergent problems, many of them commissioned as contributions to the monograph series of the Strategic Studies Institute of the US Army War College. These writings have examined, <i>inter alia</i>, the new domain of cyber power; the limits of air power; the problems of irregular wars; and the intersection between doctrinal, institutional and technological change.</p>

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Particular attention has been given to the appropriate form of education for the transmission of strategic thinking; in his monograph, *Schools for Strategy* (2009), and elsewhere, Gray has functioned as a theorist of military education, especially education for higher command, defending Clausewitz's view that strategy develops a general form of military judgement. Each of these contributions has drawn policy conclusions from a broad theory of strategy, and in so doing supports the claim that policy professionals in any historical era can draw upon the resources of the classical heritage to analyse contemporary problems. For example, the research shows that classical theory is a better guide to the limits and capabilities of air power than modern visions of the use of bombing. Its uncompromising pursuit of the discipline of strategy as classically conceived has thus been a means of defending the role of strategy in officer training and military planning.

3. References to the research

Publications by Professor Colin Gray:

- *Airpower for Strategic Effect* (Air University Press, 2012) ISBN 1780397852 This was anonymously peer reviewed and has an admiring foreword written by America's leading Air Power scholar, Ben Lambeth.
- *The Strategy Bridge: Theory for Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) ISBN 0199579660. This was anonymously peer reviewed and has an approving foreword by the most senior current US academic scholar of strategy (Prof Eliot A. Cohen).
- *Another Bloody Century: Future Warfare* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2005) ISBN 0297846272. Anonymously peer-reviewed.
- *Strategy for Chaos: Revolutions in Military Affairs and the Evidence of History* (London: Frank Cass, 2002) ISBN 0714651869. Anonymously peer-reviewed.
- *Making Strategic Sense of Cyber Power: Why the Sky Is Not Falling* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, 2013)
- *Schools for Strategy: Teaching Strategy for 21st Century Conflict* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, 2009)
- *Irregular Enemies and the Essence of Strategy: Can the American Way of War Adapt?* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, 2006)
- *Defining and Achieving Decisive Victory* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, 2002)

These outputs have all been reviewed internally and assessed as of at least 2* quality.

4. Details of the impact

Gray's research has been disseminated widely through professional and public policy outlets as well as conventional academic channels, with a view to influencing a transatlantic community of defence professionals. The curricula of staff colleges, military academies, and similar institutions have been shaped by a major textbook, co-edited by Gray with John Baylis and James Wirtz, *Strategy in the Contemporary World* (2002; updated editions in 2007, 2010, 2013). Similar influence has been exerted by a collection co-edited by Gray - *The Practice of Strategy: From Alexander the Great to the President* (2010) - which was praised, for example, by Sir Richard Shirreff, the Deputy Supreme Allied Commander Europe, as 'a clear-thinking analysis which is both timely and relevant and I commend it to decision maker and general reader alike.' Although the consistent intention has been to serve professional needs by informing enriching and framing professional debates, Gray's entertaining and informal style has been accessible to general readers. *Another Bloody Century: Future Warfare* is an important academic statement, but it was deliberately published through a non-academic publisher to make its standpoint available to a much wider public. Similarly, the five monographs commissioned by the Strategic Studies Institute are available free of charge in hard copy and online. Important statements have been placed in the most widely read of the more specialised security journals: the *RUSI* (Royal United Services Institute) *Journal*, *PRISM* (published online by the National Defense University) and *Parameters* (published online by the US Army War College). These statements have also affected a wider audience. For example, Gray's critique of COIN (counterinsurgency) in *PRISM* sparked a debate in June 2012 on the influential blogsite of the Pulitzer Prize winner and defence expert Thomas E. Ricks, *The Best Defense*, in the course of which Ricks incidentally noted that 'Gray also made me

think I should go back and read Thucydides again.'

In the course of the 2008-2013 period, this wide dissemination has had impact in three ways. First, the research has **influenced civilian policymakers**. In the UK, both the Labour Government and the incoming Coalition Government appointed Gray to advisory bodies. To assist the UK's 2010-11 Strategic Defence and Security Review, the government requested him to participate on the Defence Advisory Forum on the Defence Green Paper *Adaptability and Partnership: Issues for the Strategic Defence Review* (2010). Moreover, in an important policy speech delivered at the National Defence University in September 2008, the long-serving US Secretary of Defence Robert M. Gates invoked the research on the inadequacies of artificial categories such as 'irregular warfare', and the need for a holistic strategic vision. In 2012, Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney appointed Gray to his Counter-Proliferation Working Group. In a speech on British maritime security in 2012, Minister for the Armed Forces Sir Nick Harvey cited Gray's arguments about the practical orientation of strategic theory.

Secondly, the research has **informed and structured debates among military leaders** in all three of the UK Armed Services, so much so that the service chiefs routinely refer to Gray's thinking. In his 2011 autobiography, former Chief of the General Staff Sir Richard Dannatt quoted Gray's *Another Bloody Century* in making the case for redesigning British armed forces away from episodic discrete wars and towards a state of continuous campaign readiness. The Royal Air Force has invited Gray to be Director of Air Power Studies, while, the Chief of the Air Staff, Air Chief Marshal Sir Stephen Dalton, quoted Gray in his Lord Trenchard Memorial Lecture in 2009 on the role of the RAF as a mobile force of power projection. Above all, however, the research is central to the self-understanding of the Navy: Gray's view of its role and importance has demonstrably informed the personal attitudes of naval leaders as evidenced by the way that they articulate its function. Unusually for a doctrinal statement, Joint Doctrine Publication (JDP)0-10 *British Maritime Doctrine* actually quotes Gray twice. The epigraph to the Navy's online 'Fact Sheet' is Gray's well-known remark that 'the greatest value of the Navy will be found in events that fail to occur.' The former First Sea Lord and Chief of Naval Staff, Admiral Sir Mark Stanhope, made use of Gray's words to conclude his Remembrance Day Address of 2011 to the Henry Jackson Society.

Thirdly, the research has **affected the attitudes and practices of an international community of defence professionals**, especially when adapting to new problems. The Dean of Academics of the US Army War College wrote to Gray in 2009 that his monograph *Schools for Strategy* 'could not have come at a more propitious time', and recommended it to his staff to inform the 'epistemological debate on how to teach strategy.' Lieutenant General Paul K. Van Riper reported that Gray's critique of the RMA concept influenced him and fellow admirers, who 'would return to Gray's writings often as they argued against the purported visionaries' technically focused plans for the future force.' In 2013, US Strategic Command requested his advice on the value of Dual Capable aircraft for NATO. More recently (August 2013), US Army Special Operations Command requested advice while noting that 'your work has naturally informed our discussions here' on the subject of a proposed 'operational concept for space.' Perhaps the most sensitive index of the reach and depth of the research's service to the international defence community community is its extensive presence not just on the syllabus of mainstream professional training, but also on more informal reading lists through which non-academics have revealed the works they have found practically useful. Thus UK Chief of Defence Staff General Sir David Richards included *The Strategy Bridge* (2010) on his list of recommended books and articles for officers. When *The Diplomatic Courier*, a global diplomatic-affairs magazine, included *The Strategy Bridge* on its 2012 reading list, it noted that Gray was 'by far the most selected writer' recommended by its panel of advisers.

As such remarks suggest, Gray's work has characteristics that make it very attractive to reflective security experts; no academic strategist of comparably global reputation is found so readily usable by serving officers. But in spite of his large following among professionals, Gray's primary aim is not to offer technical advice, but to locate and frame debates correctly. The impact that is claimed for the research is not, for example, that the US operational concept for space will adopt some

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detailed practical recommendations directly traceable to Gray himself, but that the initial discussions that took place were, as a matter of course, informed by *Airpower for strategic effect* (2010) and allied writings. As an academic who straddles the worlds of strategic studies and of military planning, Gray has delimited a field of study, defended its integrity and coherence, especially in its relation to advanced professional training, and shaped the self-understanding of its practitioners.

5. Source to corroborate the impact

- **(Retired) Commander, United States Central Command.** Source can corroborate the impact of Gray's original research on the international community of defence professionals in military education and doctrine, and the authority with which his works on the theory of strategy and on specific policy issues are regarded.(*)
- **Dean of Academic Policy, US Army War College.** Source can corroborate the impact of Gray's monograph *Schools for Strategy* on the shaping of the College's teaching curriculum and more broadly within American military education.(*)
- **Senior Defence Fellow, National Defence University.** As a retired USMC officer and strategic theorist, source can corroborate the impact of Gray's original research on US defence policy debate, and can corroborate the central place of Gray's theory of strategy among defence professionals.(*)
- **(Retired) Chief of Defence Staff, UK 2009-2013.** Source can corroborate that Gray's original research has informed and structured debates among military leaders in all three of the UK Armed Services, and that Gray's book *The Strategy Bridge* is a key text for developing the leadership skills of British officers.(*)
- **(Retired) Regius Professor of Modern History, University of Oxford.** As a former Army officer, Professor of Military History and active contributing authority on British strategic debate, source can corroborate that Gray's original research on the theory and practice of strategy has had a great influence in shaping the terms of debate about defence and national security.(*)

(*) Contact details provided separately