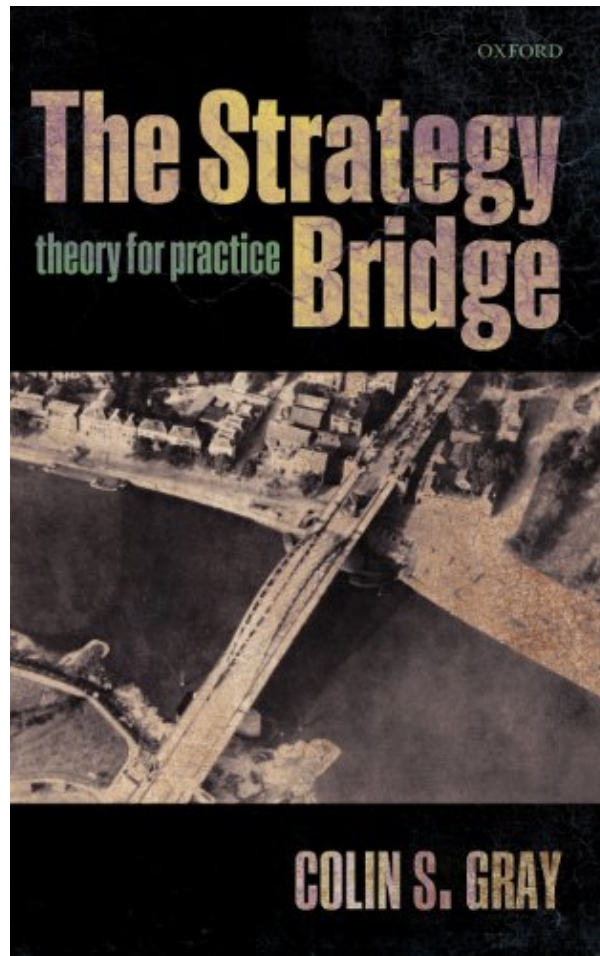
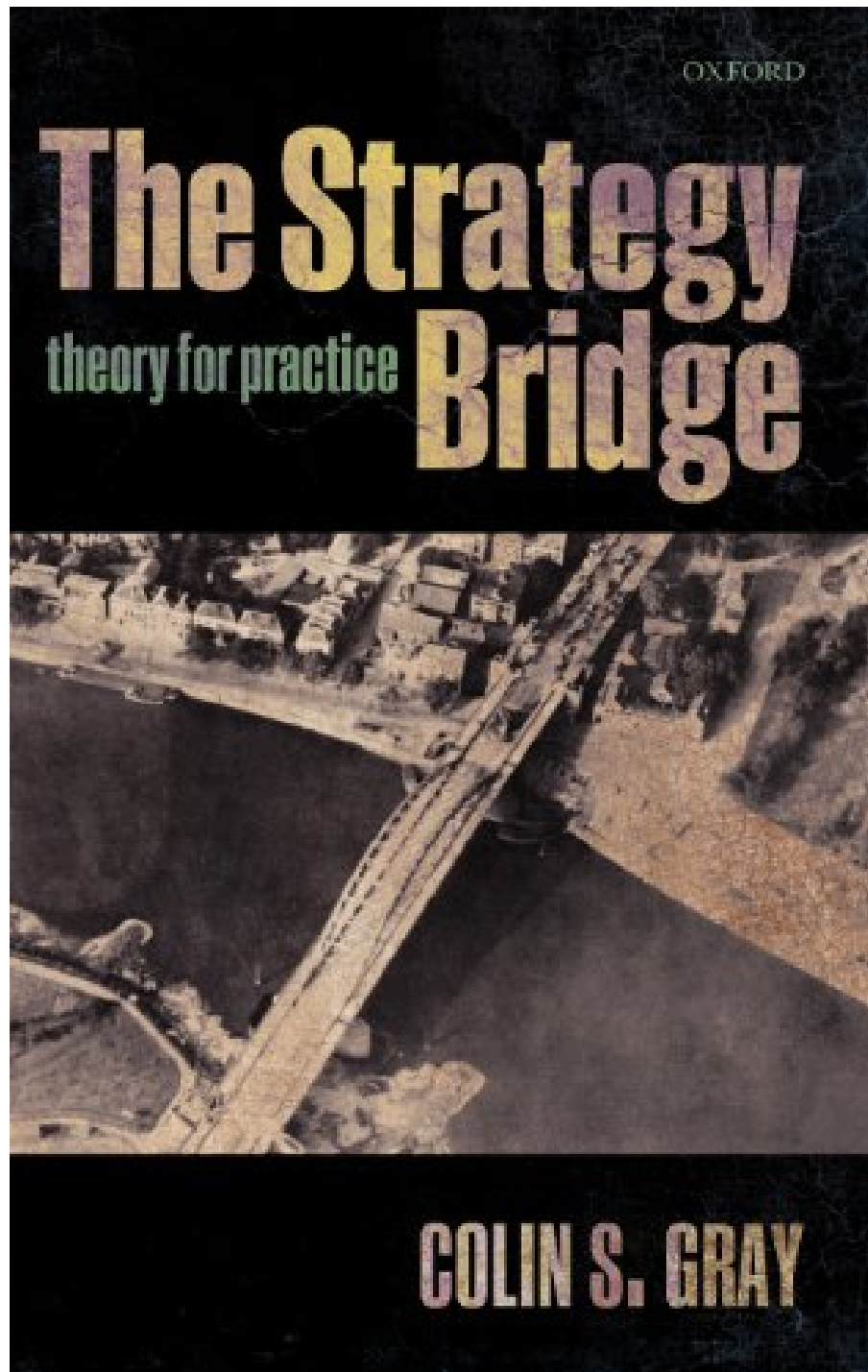


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Review

"For any aspiring military officer, there could be no better book than this."--The RUSI Journal

"What Gray has provided here is more than ample as a base line work for anyone who wishes to get serious about strategy."--Infinity Journal

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The Strategy Bridge presents the general theory of strategy and explains the utility of this general theory for the particular strategies that strategists need to develop in order to meet their historically unique challenges. The book argues that strategy's general theory provides essential education for practicing strategists at all times and in all circumstances. As general theory, The Strategy Bridge is as relevant to understanding strategic behavior in the Peloponnesian War as it is for the conflicts of the twenty-first century.

The book proceeds from exposition of general strategic theory, to address three basic issue areas that are not at all well explained, let alone understood with a view to advancing better practice, in the extant literature. Specifically, The Strategy Bridge tackles the problems that harass and imperil strategic performance; probes deeply into the hugely underexamined subject of just what it is that the strategist produces-strategic effect; and 'joins up the dots' from theory through practice to consequences by means of a close examination of command performance.

The author takes a holistic view of strategy, and is rigorously attentive to the significance of the contexts within which and for which strategies are developed and applied. The Strategy Bridge regards the strategist as a hero, charged with the feasible, but awesomely difficult, task of converting the threat and use of force (for military strategy) into desired political consequences. The strategist seeks some control over the rival or enemy via strategic effect, the instrumental produce of his instrumental labors. In order to maximize his prospects for success, the practicing strategist requires all the educational assistance that strategic theory can provide.

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Baroque

By RedWell

Gray is a prolific and respected scholar of strategy, but in this case, he leaves the field more cluttered than how he found it.

Gray's goal is to introduce a general theory of "strategy" that both scholars and practitioners can access. Remarkably, Gray manages to do the opposite by attempting to include every conceivable level and conception of strategy without a clear organizing mechanism. A statement in chapter 2 (p 82) exemplifies Gray's problem: "To avoid needless opacity, it is essential to recognize no fewer than eight sets of binary distinctions that are vital to understanding." In the conclusion (p 238), Gray then alerts the reader that understanding strategy requires "six broad, more than a little compound and generally positive claims [to be] assessed. These are succeeded by five cautions, or caveats, significant for both the theory and practice of strategy." You got all that?

Gray rightly wants to bypass the theoretical abstractions that make social scientists and their theories anathema to policy makers. However, Gray can make no one happy because he seems either to consciously ignore or not to understand the one value social scientists CAN do well: parsimony. Neither scholars nor policy makers will be content with a theory that reads like a catalogue. A good, contemporary counterpoint to Gray's expansive "general theory" is Yuan-kang Wang's "Harmony and War" (2011)*, which lays out a simple realist theory of grand strategy and then applies that framework to analyze two relevant periods in Chinese history. No, Wang is not developing a general theory, but my point is that he does articulate a mainstream theory about certain kinds of strategy that is simple and generalizable.

By contrast, Gray spends dozens of pages articulating 21 "dicta" of strategy, but at the end of the exercise, he still lacks a general theory of strategy that he could describe to a government official during a moderately long elevator ride. Some of Gray's dicta offer real insight, such as the notion that "all military behavior is tactical in execution, but must have operational and strategic effect," but most are hopelessly general, such as the uncontroversial claim that "strategies are driven, though not dictated and wholly determined, by their contexts, all of which are constantly in play."

By neglecting social scientific "theory"--or some other independent model of theory--Gray is left with lists of organizing principles and a promising but underdeveloped notion, the "strategy bridge" (which asserts that strategy of all types is, in essence, the path between intended and actual outcomes). Gray strives to situate this work in a modern intellectual trajectory originating with the always too easily accepted grand master of strategy, Clausewitz. Gray says we must move beyond the Master, and he tips his hat to famous theorists such as Liddell Hart and Schelling. In the end, though, Gray circles back to Clausewitz: strategy is about proscribed ends and requires flexible means contingent upon circumstances. Gray concludes that strategy is "awesomely difficult to do well" and that the strategist bears ultimate responsibility for influencing adversaries and shaping outcomes. This, however, is a familiar general observation about strategy, not a new general theory.

* http://www.amazon.com/Harmony-War-Confucian-Politics-Contemporary/dp/0231151403/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1335366998&sr=8-1

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Five Stars

By Chris A.

Excellent

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