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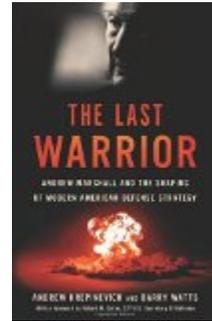
The Last Warrior: Andrew Marshall and the Shaping of American Defense Strategy, is an intellectual biography of "the most influential man you've never heard of" (p. xxi). Having spent twenty-two years at RAND, Andrew Marshall was made director of the Office of Net Assessment (ONA) in the Pentagon in 1973. He held that unique position until his retirement in 2015. During this time he provided net assessments on some of the major defense issues of the day directly to the incumbent secretaries of defense. This book charts the development of Marshall's intellectual approach to defense issues, focusing especially on the methodology (loose though it was) of net assessment. In doing so, the book provides a fascinating glimpse into the making of US defense policy during the Cold War and after. At the same time, it addresses important debates about how best to undertake defense policy analysis.

It should be noted at the outset that the book's authors, Andrew Krepinevich and Barry D. Watts, are Marshall alumni (or part of St Andrew's Prep, as Marshall's protégés are sometimes called). This works both for and against the book as an academic enterprise. On the one hand, it gives the authors a unique insight into the workings of Marshall's intellectual approach to defense matters. Equally though, it may partially explain why there is little criticism of Marshall's work. Indeed, on the few occasions that negative points are suggested, the implications are left frustratingly undeveloped. In many respects, the book reads as tribute rather than as an objective assessment of Marshall's career. That being said, the authors are well versed in defense matters, and the book is still an important read for anyone interested in US defense policy and analysis.

The Last Warrior is divided into nine main chapters and takes a chronological approach to Marshall's career. Each chapter deals with a period of development in Marshall's thought or methodological approach, or focuses upon a particular subject area. This is illustrated in such chapter titles as "The Quest for Better Analytic Methods, 1961-1969" and "The Military Revolution, 1991-2000." For the most part, the book avoids Marshall's personal life, although it does make passing reference to important moments in his life, such as his upbringing and marriages. This approach works reasonably well since scholars of defense and strategic studies will likely have little interest in Marshall's personal life. The chronological approach works well because it enables the reader to get a sense of the development of US defense policy over time. Quite understandably, since this is not a book about the development of defense policy per se, the goings on in the Pentagon are discussed primarily when they interact with Marshall's career or intellectual development. Nonetheless, we do get some interesting discussions of changes in nuclear strategy, defense spending, and approaches to military innovation. Thus, this book will be of interest to those with a more general interest in the history of US defense policy, even if they lack a specific interest in Marshall himself.

It is evident from this book that Marshall's focus has been primarily restricted to nuclear matters and those relating to large-scale regular state-based conflict. Alongside detailed discussions of defense thinking during the Cold War, the authors discuss in some depth Marshall's attempts to give the ONA a new focus in the post-Cold War world. In the new security environment, "two topics dominated ONA's work: the rise of China and the

maturation of the revolution in military affairs" (p. 236). *The Last Warrior*, one assumes reflecting the tenor of the ONA, thus leaves us with little to no discussion of Vietnam or 9/11 and the ensuing counterterror and counterinsurgency campaigns. Indeed, Krepinevich and Watts state that Marshall remained somewhat removed from discussions surrounding the conflict in Vietnam so as to continue his focus on the Soviet Union. Similarly, the campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan appear to have somewhat frustrated Marshall's attempts to promote military reform. The armed services, "preoccupied with the ongoing wars," failed to support a defense strategy based upon long-term competitiveness and innovation, as recommended by Marshall (p. 234).

This is one area where the book would have benefited from a more critical approach. Whilst it is recognized that the ONA was primarily interested in long-term analysis of state-to-state competition, to largely ignore significant irregular conflicts is problematic, especially when they have had such a substantial impact on US foreign and defense policy. One cannot help but conclude that the book should have discussed these areas in more depth. If nothing else, it implies that the methodology of net assessment may be ill suited to irregular forms of conflict–a significant point regarding its future use. The authors state that the ONA was primarily interested in "broad trends that could produce disruptive shifts" in military competition (p. 36). Surely irregular forms of war occasionally fit that bill?

The most notable theme of *The Last Warrior* is the development of net assessment itself. On this issue, the book provides an interesting discussion on the different forms defense analysis can take. In contrast to the quantitative approach found at RAND in the 1960s, with Systems Analysis as its poster child, Marshall was adamant that net assessment should avoid simple metrics as the basis for analysis. Although he still insisted on the need for empirical evidence, assessments were always to include intangible factors that are so intrinsic to human decision making and action. The inclusion of uncertainties in net assessment classifies Marshall as a significant and important critic of the rational actor model. In a similar vein, Marshall also drew attention to the influence of organizational issues in defense outputs. Indeed, in the work of the ONA he was conscious of the need to escape the interdepartmental bunfights of US policy making. The danger of such bureaucratic forces was clear from his first net assessment, NSSM 186, which the authors, in a rare critical moment, describe as "bland" (p. 100). The same problem is also evident in the strug-

gles over the 2001 Defense Review, authored by Marshall. Marshall was also wary of intelligence assessments emanating from the CIA. Fearing that his net assessments would be forever hostage to unreliable intelligence, Marshall established his own databases on Soviet capabilities and intentions, Project 186 and the Foreign Systems Research Center.

On the issue of methodology, *The Last Warrior* is to be commended for its discussion on the development of net assessment. In contrast to statistically driven forms of defense analysis, net assessment is described as a holistic approach. Marshall describes the process of net assessment as akin to writing a PhD (p. 110). For the ONA, comparisons of defense capabilities had to be comprehensive, taking into account a wide range of matters, including, "operational doctrines and practices, training regimes, logistics … procurement practices … and the political and economic aspects of the competition" (p. 90). Of particular importance to Marshall's approach was the notion of "competitive strategies." The authors explain clearly how the ONA sought to identify strengths and weaknesses within defense capabilities, which then could become the basis for policy action. Examples that are provided include the US advantage in quieter submarines and the burden associated with Soviet air defense. The latter was an important basis for the decision to develop and deploy advanced bombers such as the B-1 and B-2. From Marshall's perspective, rather than seeking to match a competitor system by system, it was preferable to focus one's efforts in areas where one had an advantage or the enemy a particular weakness. As a rule though, he sought to make net assessment diagnostic rather than prescriptive. The decision to avoid prescription was premised on a cynicism that complex and uncertain conflict outcomes could be easily predicted.

Despite being rather strong on the development of net assessment methodology, *The Last Warrior* could have gone further in its discussion of this matter. The authors point out that Marshall rejected any attempt to establish a rigid methodology for net assessment. This is not an unreasonable methodological position to take. Nonetheless, the book would have benefited from more critical analysis on this point. For example, without a well-established methodology, how can one ensure that net assessments are consistent across time? In such a fluid methodological environment, how can one ensure that the methodology adopted is not chosen to suit a preordained outcome? Such questions should have been addressed in this book.

With Marshall's preference for an independent and comprehensive approach, it is easy to understand why secretaries of defense would find ONA assessments a useful perspective on defense matters. Indeed, the ONA has been described as the defense secretary's "own private think tank" (p. xvii). Since the vast majority of ONA assessments are classified, it is difficult to judge how influential Marshall's analysis has been. It is reported that some defense secretaries, such as James Schlesinger and Harold Brown, were very taken by net assessments. At the same time, the authors report that Caspar Weinberger had little time for Marshall's work. This thought is muddied somewhat by the claim that Marshall's notion of competitive strategies was adopted, to some degree at least, by the Ronald Reagan administration. On the issue of influence, it is not unreasonable to claim, as the authors do, that the ONA was crucial in identifying and developing thinking on the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) and the rise of China as a defense rival. However, there is almost a congratulatory tone to the book on these matters. The authors claim that "Marshall's net assessments have been remarkably prescient in identifying the 'next big thing'" (p. xix). Yet, as previously noted, if that is the case, why are irregular conflicts given such little coverage? Nor is there any real acknowledgement that the RMA hypothesis may have had some negative impact on US defense policy. For example, it has been suggested that Donald Rumsfeld's overly enthusiastic adoption of the RMA may have contributed to the difficulties in Iraq. As in other areas, a more balanced appraisal of these issues would have served the reader well.

The Last Warrior also provides an interesting insight into Marshall's influence in pushing forward defense analysis in the United States. It is remarkable how many Marshall alumni have written important works in modern defense analysis. These include the works of Williamson Murray and Allan Millett, Stephen Rosen, Eliot Cohen, and the authors of *The Last Warrior* themselves. Taken alongside the influence of the RAND generation from the classical period of Cold War thinking, it is remarkable how influential these groups have been over the years. Indeed, through his connections, Marshall has clearly exerted an important influence over the defense debate agenda. As if to illustrate this point, the book informs us that Herman Kahn was Marshall's best man at his first wedding. One would not necessarily expect the authors of a book to discuss their own influence, but one is left thinking that another book needs to written about the influence, both positive and negative, of these small groups of defense thinkers.

Upon publication, *The Last Warrior* elicited very differing reactions to Marshall's career. Some see Marshall as a much-respected long-serving adviser to successive US governments, fully deserving of his Presidential Citizens Medal award from President George W. Bush. Others bemoan the influence that this one man has had over US defense policy. From a neutral perspective, *The Last Warrior* is to be recommended for anyone interested in defense analysis methodology and the development of US defense policy over the last sixty years. However, had this book taken a more neutral, even critical stance, it could have been even more useful. In the final analysis, what we have here is a tribute to Andrew Marshall's work, rather than an objective assessment of net assessment as an aid to defense policy in the United States.

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