

partly explains this, but Clark finds violent threat and sectarianism were elements of Civil War chaos.

A strength of this polished study is its engagement with the latest Irish and European historiography. It situates developments in Ireland in the context of broader European violent trends, arguing that the Irish Civil War remained relatively restrained compared to the mass killings of civilians in Central and Eastern Europe in the revolutionary and nationalist turmoil after the Great War. Clark also contends that Irish Civil War violence was more political and closely linked to national macro-agendas than Stathis Kalyvas's theories on civil war violence suggest. Clark is surely right that, while sectarianism occurred, it was the contestation of land and new political nationalisms that drove the Irish case. The Free State itself by offering compensation to all those targeted by the insurgent IRA, showed considerable liberal-mindedness, even if, its impecuniousness meant that payments were regularly inadequate: many of those forced to flee Ireland were unable to ever return and rebuild.

One is left with much to ponder from this fascinating study, not least how the destruction of infrastructure and purging of local urban mercantile groups may have impacted upon the struggling Free State economy in the 1920s. As the centenary of these traumatic events in Irish history approaches, Clark's measured academic scholarship is invaluable.

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Edward Kaplan, *To Kill Nations: American Strategy in the Air-Atomic Age and the Rise of Mutually Assured Destruction*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015. Notes, Bibliography, Index, pp. 260. ISBN 978-0-8014-5248-2. Hardback. Price £28.85.

The irony of the US Air Force's Strategic Air Command (SAC) – is that it worked! This is the underlying theme of Edward Kaplan's book on American strategy in the 'air-atomic age'. Unlike the film portrayals of real life characters such as General Curtis LeMay in *Thirteen Days*, or in fictional accounts such as Generals Jack D. Ripper and 'Buck' Turgidson in *Dr Strangelove* or James Mattoon Scott in *Seven Days in May*, Kaplan reassures us that US Air Force generals in the 1950s and early 1960s were not insubordinate to their political masters nor overly keen advocates of launching nuclear first strikes against the Soviet Union, even if they often appeared to be. Instead, these individuals were usually careful and calculating, if not overly self-confident, especially

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with respect to their ability to deliver 'victory' in a war with the Soviet Union. To the extent these generals were perceived as inhumane, this served a useful purpose in convincing the Soviets of American determination. Of course, whether the stereotypical images of Air Force generals emerging from the more critical elements of Hollywood were ever really thought to be accurate representations in the first place is probably a question that is worthy of further consideration, not for the least of reasons that the films Kaplan cites represent only a limited selection. By contrast, one film Kaplan does not reference is *Fail Safe*, in which it is the civilian strategist who is the 'hawk' and the Air Force general who is the 'dove'. Nor does he refer to the 1963 film *A Gathering of Eagles* that looks at SAC from the perspective of the machine-like, albeit still-human, technocrats that comprise it. Without wishing to further belabour this emphasis on cinematic portrayals of the US Air Force in the first decades of the Cold War, suffice it to say that one of the least distinguishing features of this book is that Kaplan has set up a not very convincing straw man which he then convincingly demolishes.

That said, Kaplan is on much stronger ground in his description of the strategic ideas percolating within the US Air Force about war in the 'air-atomic age' and what was needed to achieve 'victory', if not 'deterrence', and the gradual realisation, as Soviet nuclear capabilities increased, that 'victory' was no longer a possibility, even if such ideas were marginalised but never quite extinguished. It is this narrative of the ideas of the airmen that is one that needs telling, and Kaplan does a great service in providing this. Whilst this field is already fairly well-trodden, Kaplan's engagement with the historical source material is impressive. Regrettably, too much of the extant literature on nuclear strategy has focused on the ideas of defence intellectuals – and much of these works fail to seriously engage with the way in which these ideas bore any relation to the strategy debates occurring at the highest levels of the military system. Intellectuals may have shaped thinking in important ways, but as with so much of the debate about the impact of ideas on policy, it is important not to simply assume that even the cleverest ideas actually have an impact on policy. Indeed, one of the great limitations of so much academic work on the role of strategic ideas is that there is often a self-serving agenda, conscious or unconscious, with academics emphasising the ideas of other academics rather than the ideas of the policymakers or bureaucrats which may or may not have been brilliant but were usually more relevant to policy formulation and implementation. Although Kaplan does not exclude the role of the defence intellectuals, especially those associated with the RAND Corporation, they occupy a relatively limited role compared to the ideational preferences of the Air Force leadership, as expressed in their internal correspondence, military plans, procurement decisions, and so forth. Kaplan is also keen to highlight the importance of inter-service rivalry and service culture as key determinants of strategic choices, rather than more independent evaluations of their merits and drawbacks.

This relates to a more long-standing civil-military relations problem in US nuclear policy, strategy and targeting, which Kaplan also touches upon; there was often a chasm between the ideas and priorities of the policymakers and those of the military bureaucracy, though one would probably also need to account for the role played by the military-industry and their allies in Congress for a more holistic understanding of the shaping of strategic preferences. As for the ideas generated within the military – and supported as a matter of course in the absence of some outside pressure – e.g. domestic or allied political considerations, technology developments, adversary behaviour, etc. – these were often logical, or at least, natural, extensions of the prevailing professional knowledge and experience of the senior leadership, service culture more generally, bureaucratic interests, and occasionally, personal ambition. For instance, as Kaplan shows, regardless of the merits, or not, of alternative strategic arguments put forward by the US Navy, the Air Force was incapable of looking beyond its narrow service interests, and vice versa, not for the least of reasons that they each had discursively associated their military mission as making the most vital contribution to national security. Rival views that resulted in a lesser role for one's own service had to be dismissed regardless of their merit. No wonder then that the somewhat less parochial civilian officials found this system not only frustrating to interact with, but even more frustrating to try to change. Often, they ended up going their separate ways co-existing simultaneously.

In this sense, like Vietnam, the system worked at one level, and yet failed at another – perhaps reflecting a more important fault in the system itself. The Air Force did what it was supposed to do and did it well enough. Ultimately, however, the Air Force was just one cog in a much bigger machine – sometimes influential, sometimes not. Thus, although Kaplan does a commendable job enunciating the Air Force case as it evolved, too little attention was placed on contextualising its influence relative to other internal and external drivers of US nuclear policy, particularly those factors outside US control. That being said, readers interested in understanding Air Force thinking about nuclear weapons as it evolved within the service through the early 1960s will be well-served by this book.

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