

We Need a New MoMS

By

Michael Hennelly, Ph.D

(Originally appeared on Tom Ricks website "The Best Defense" Oct 2017)

Many organizations eventually realize that they should be interested in the leadership development of their people. These types of programs can provide an organization with competitive advantage and they provide motivation to those who participate. There are a variety of tools that are readily available to organizations that are interested in such development programs. Professional reading lists are commonly used as a development tool for two distinct reasons. First of all, the choice of books on these reading lists can reinforce organizational culture and values, thus providing guiderails to the development of new generations of leaders. In addition, reading lists are attractive to readers because of their accessibility and their value.

It has become customary for U.S. Army Chiefs of Staff to issue professional development reading lists while they are in office and, as a result, six different lists have been issued by the chief of staff's office since 2009. Oddly enough, the books that are recommended on these lists vary widely from version to version, as if every chief of staff has a completely different idea of Army professionalism. There is not one single book that is common to all six editions of the reading list but the one that is most popular (appearing on five of six lists) is *Makers of Modern Strategy* (aka *MoMS*) and thereby hangs a tale.

In 1941, a wave of global conflict crashed over American heads and the United States entered a world war of unprecedented size, scope and complexity. The limited American experience of World War I and the subsequent two interwar decades did nothing to prepare America for the demands of a protracted global war. With the coming of World War II, the thought arose that a clear understanding of the concept of strategy might enable Americans to more strongly support the demands and sacrifices of the war. To this end, a group of scholars spearheaded by historian Edward Mead Earle met in 1941 at Princeton University to discuss the various threads of political, economic and military strategy. The result of that meeting was published in 1943 as *Makers of Modern Strategy: From Machiavelli to Hitler* (hereafter *MoMS 43*).

Conceived at the Institute of Advanced Studies at Princeton, *MoMS 43* was highly regarded as soon as it was published and it has since been recognized as "the birth of modern strategic studies." It focused on thirty-five strategists sprinkled over four hundred and twenty years of strategic thinking beginning with Machiavelli and ending with an epilogue on Hitler and the Nazi concept of war. Most of the chapters focused on individual strategic thinkers such as Clausewitz, Du Picq, Trotsky and Mahan but two chapters examined more general topics of strategic thought (e.g. Japanese naval strategy). The guiding principle of

the book was that America was facing unprecedented threats to its security and this situation required an unprecedented approach to the study of strategy.

The post-war era saw the rise of new and unfamiliar strategic concepts. The Cold War, the nuclear arms race and the concept of deterrence became part of a new strategic vocabulary. It gradually became evident that *MoMS 43* needed to be updated. In 1986, Earle's intellectual descendants produced a second edition entitled *Makers of Modern Strategy: From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age* (hereafter *MoMS 86*). This is the book that has appeared on so many Army reading lists. *MoMS 86* is twice the size of *MoMS 43* but in many ways, it is a very similar book. In fact, seven chapters of *MoMS 86* feature the same author writing about the same subject as *MoMS 43*. So, for example, both editions have chapters on Machiavelli that are written by Felix Gilbert. The primary difference between the two editions is the focus of each chapter. The 1986 edition has a much heavier emphasis on general topics of military strategic thought (e.g. "The Political Leader as Strategist" or "Revolutionary War").

MoMS 86 is a valuable work but it was written before personal computers, cellphones and the internet were invented. When *MoMS 86* was published, the world was a very different place. In 1986, the United States was happily providing arms and money to Islamic fundamentalists in Afghanistan and the Berlin Wall was still intact. It had never occurred to anyone that an attack on a nation's computer system could be construed as an act of war. In the decades since the publication of *MoMS 86*, the concept of strategy has acquired both a new grammar and a new logic. A new edition of *Makers of Modern Strategy* is long overdue.

I have two recommendations for a new edition of this book and these recommendations follow the spirit of Earle's original impetus for developing the field of strategic studies. It is not enough to simply expand *MoMS* in a chronological manner (i.e. adding chapters on the implications of new technologies that have arisen in the last few decades). The guiding principle of first edition of this book was that America was facing unprecedented threats to its security and this situation required an unprecedented approach to the study of strategy. The same situation exists today. Newly developed threats to national security still present the need to adopt unprecedented approaches to strategy.

Recommendation 1: expand the cross-cultural approach to the study of strategy. One of the shared characteristics of both editions is a preoccupation with Western perspectives of strategy. About ninety-five percent of both editions focus on American or European perspectives of strategy. In *MoMS 86*, even the chapter on revolutionary warfare adopts a predominantly Western view of the subject. So, for example, a new edition of *MoMS* should include substantial considerations of strategic thought from around the world.

Recommendation 2: expand the cross-disciplinary approach to the study of strategy. The first two editions of *MoMS* demonstrated an awareness of the value of linking military strategy to other disciplines- specifically, political science and economics. A new edition of *MoMS* should continue and expand this line of thought and consider, for example, the relevance of the field of corporate strategy (i.e. the field of strategy that is taught in business schools). This idea is not as far-fetched as it might seem. The vast majority of people who study strategy and the vast majority of scholars who write about the theory and application of strategy all do so in business schools.

Consider one of the articles in *MoMS 86* entitled “*Voices from the Central Blue: The Air Power Theorists.*” This article traces the development of the technology, doctrine and strategic implementation of air power. Interestingly, there is no awareness in this article of several strategic concepts that are of great interest to management theorists. For example, the article does not address air power from the perspective of being a new, disruptive technology even though the development of air power was surprisingly rapid (only sixty-six years elapsed between the first powered flight at Kitty Hawk and the first lunar landing). The article also does not address one of the most fundamental issues of strategic management- the logic of aligning organizational strategy and organizational structure. This omission is significant because the most appropriate organizational structure for air forces was a very contentious issue for decades. For example, the Royal Air Force was set up as an independent branch of the British armed forces during World War I while the United States Air Force was not set up as an independent branch of the American armed forces until after World War II. The creation of a new branch of the U.S. military (Space Force) demonstrates the relevance of this approach to strategy.

In conclusion, we need a new *MoMS* and it should be one that incorporates cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary approaches to the concept of strategy. This approach would do a more effective job of expanding our understanding of the field of military strategy.