



Williamson R. Murray, Military Adaptation in War: With Fear of Change. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2011.

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In Military Adaptation in War: With Fear of Change Williamson Murray differentiates between innovation and adaptation. Innovation, the focus of a previous book (with Allan R. Millett, 1998), includes peacetime advancements and learning. In contrast, adaptation is comprised of wartime changes and battlefield lessons. Murray argues that militaries able to adapt to battle conditions have a higher probability of

ending the conflict as the victor. He expands on this point, writing that the United States has demonstrated a lack of adaptability in recent conflicts, and therefore the purpose of this study is to glean lessons about adaptability that may be applied to the US military.

Through historical case studies Murray draws out common threads which lead to both military successes and failures. The book examines adaptation during three conflicts: the First World War, the Second World War, and the Yom Kippur War. The first case study of the Western Front seeks to dispel the myth commonly held by historians that adaptation was stagnant during the war, and that battlefield leadership was incompetent. The next chapters are a succession of overlapping case studies from the Second World War that are carried out in the same vein. The first chapter from the Second World War cases is an examination of German adaptation at the beginning of the war and an analysis of way they held the upper hand for over a year into the war. The next chapter details the battle for Britain and how the British struggled to integrate new suites of technology into their strategies. The third chapter explores the new reality of air war during the Second World War and the challenges both the Germans and the British faced.

While these cases offer excellent examples of outcomes following both successful and unsuccessful adaptation, the rationale for choosing these specific cases is somewhat vague. In his introductory chapter Murray argues that true adaptation was born out of the Industrial Revolution, which is reflected in the modern selection of case studies. Other than this connection, there is a lack of continuity or connection between any of the cases. The chapter focusing on the First World War explores adaptation generally, touching on areas where both the British and the Germans were able to adapt and where they failed to. It is argued that not only was adaptation not stagnant, but that it took place in all areas of war including tactics, technology, logistics, field medicine, etc. In contrast to this, the three chapters addressing the Second World War all delve into specific areas of adaptation, focusing largely on adaptation to technology and the air war. The final case study, that of Egyptian and Israeli adaptation during the Yom Kippur War, once again returns to a general analysis and seems adrift in the book. The Yom Kippur War has neither the scope nor the depth of either of the World Wars: it took place over a significantly shorter period of time, there were fewer states in conflict, and the development and planning stage of the conflict was minimal. While this case study does substantiate the author's intended findings, that is the only characteristic linking it to the other cases.

The conclusion of Military Adaptation in War returns to the modern day and the US military. Murray presents the current strategic environment and the variety of

potential challenges and conflicts that the US may face in coming years. From the threat of a growing Chinese power to turmoil in the Middle East (including an uncertain outcome in Afghanistan), to the threats associated with the future of energy, Murray details a complex international environment. The author argues that the US is facing a wider spectrum of threats than ever before and that they are militarily unprepared to meet these threats. Murray then seeks to apply the lessons from his case studies, stating that the US should heed these lessons in order to become more adaptable to the international environment.

Murray's working hypothesis throughout the book is that the peacetime culture of a military will dictate its adaptability in conflict. His ultimate recommendation for the US military is to build a strong culture of education and institutional learning. This includes applying lessons learned from past conflicts, moving away from becoming dependent on technology, and introducing strong leadership throughout the military.

While these lessons are persuasively drawn out over the course of the case studies, Murray's arguments would have been much more convincing with a greater scope of cases. The concentration of cases taken from the World Wars at first leads the reader to assume that the book will focus solely on these two conflicts. Indeed, the initial chapter focusing on the First World War almost seems to be an introduction to the variety of case studies that are then developed from the Second World War. When the narrative suddenly enters the Yom Kippur War, it is somewhat disjointed and lacks an intuitive flow. The book would have benefited from analyses of a greater variety of conflicts, from both large and small-scale wars to insurgencies or unconventional wars, to fully develop the lessons Murray seeks to impart and to convince the reader of their validity.

Individually the case studies are exhaustively researched and extensively detailed. The chapters are long and would benefit from more structure or a different organization. In the introductory chapters Murray takes a distinctly Clausewitzian lens when laying out his analytical framework. This lens is not applied to best advantage evenly throughout the chapters, and often disappears altogether, only to be reintroduced in the concluding chapter. Organizing the case studies around Clausewitzian themes may have been an excellent way of laying out Murray's arguments. Despite structural struggles, the chapters manage to provide both large-scale views of the strategic history of the cases and small-scale narratives of the contributions of individuals to the war efforts. The reader will also appreciate the balanced and objective analysis of the adaptive abilities of both the Germans and the British through the first four case studies.

At first glance the title of this book seemed to be a contradiction in terms. Is adaptation not synonymous with change? How can modern militaries, faced with constant technological and strategic transformation, be afraid of change? Murray does an excellent job of explaining adaptation as forced change under the worst of circumstances, and of explaining the military mindset that views civilian innovation with trepidation. While the book may struggle with depth, the lessons highlighted throughout the book hold value for the development of military policy for all militaries.

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