

Jeff Appleget, Robert Burks and Fred Cameron. *The Craft of Wargaming: A Detailed Planning Guide for Defense Planners and Analysts*. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2020. Pp. 376.

Two former United States Army colonels and an analyst from Canada's Department of National Defence are the authors of *The Craft of Wargaming: A Detailed Planning Guide for Defense Planners*. Their collective experience in teaching and conducting wargames has led them to conclude that the military has neither the processes nor the practitioners necessary to allow their services to rigorously wargame operational plans.¹ In addressing this perceived oversight their book offers a roadmap to create and carry out a wargame, using 'best practice' lessons, to describe clear linear and sequential steps to create and deliver effective wargames.

Appleget, Burks and Cameron observe that the arrival of computers and the nature of the Cold War as a zero-sum game, coalesced to offer authoritative predictions about the likely outcomes of planned military activity. Yet, in the very midst of this trend, in 1990, wargaming expert Peter Perla challenged the veracity of the increasingly scientific application of computer-assisted wargaming. In essence, he claimed that wargaming was an art not a science and suggested that there were limits to the application of computer modelling techniques. The authors follow Perla's reasoning to argue that the increasing use of computer combat simulations, in lieu of interactive wargaming between people, led military organisations to unconsciously dilute their repository of analytical wargaming skills.

One of the authors' main arguments is that the increasing complexity of modern war has rendered the closed-loop computer simulations unreliable in predicting likely outcomes. In particular, they believe that the changing nature of warfare, influenced by western perceptions of civilian casualties and collateral damage, has reinvigorated the need for wargaming to explore the type of decision-dilemmas leaders are likely to face. Consequently, they have deduced that future leaders will need to be increasingly adept at making

¹ In NATO's Allied Command Operations Comprehensive Operations Planning Directive (COPD) Interim v 2.0, 4 October 2013, wargaming is used to verify troops to actions and transport and feasibility assumptions, to establish decisive conditions, verify courses of action and synchronisation activities, 4-72.

difficult decisions quickly when under pressure (p. 24). Leaders' exposure to such pressures in wargaming, they claim, should promote improved outcomes that coherently embrace the panoply of government business across the political/military spectrum of activity (p. 4). Their line of argument is commendable and their thinking in this regard has much in common with arguments discussed around a decade ago, over the suitability of a deterministic and mechanistic application of an "effects-based operations" methodology to warfighting.² Essentially, the book serves as a counterpoint to formulaic operation planning mechanisms.

After making their baseline case, the authors set out a handbook of activities with checklists that provide a foundation of "best practice" methodology necessary to run wargames and build a cadre of wargaming specialists. Because it is particularly aimed at those with a cursory understanding of the topic it maps out a mechanism for people to develop skills necessary to lead a wargame (p. 35). Yet, despite laying out a comprehensive and credible methodology to run wargames, the authors' assert that the range of activity covered by wargaming cannot be encapsulated in any single "best-practice" methodology (p. 22). While this point highlights the crucial role played by those who provide direction and guidance to those conducting a wargame, it also allows wargaming advocates a "get out" clause should the analysis that emerges be flawed or controversial.

The authors of *The Craft of Wargaming* make clear that a noticeable resumption of interest in wargaming only emerged in 2010. In the United States this was characterised by interest in analytical wargaming designed to extract knowledge or information to assist a sponsor to understand a particular problem and provide answers to it (p. 6). In 2012, Philip Sabin's book *Simulating War* explained a variety of analytical modelling techniques and provided a methodology to design conflict simulations, but it was 2015 before wargaming saw the beginnings of a minor renaissance in the US Department of Defense. Thereafter, a steady trickle of handbooks, reports, working papers and pamphlets have emerged, providing a plethora of best practice guidance to those interested

² Gen James Mattis, "On Effects Based Operations, Luncheon Address: Joint Warfare in the 21st Century," 12 February 2009, Foreign Policy Research Institute (FPRI), accessed 10 March 2021, [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hk7GkKmXOGg>].

in running a wargame.³ More detailed books on the topic have been surprisingly sparse until Graham Longley Brown released *Successful Professional Wargames: A Practitioner's Handbook* in 2019. Brown's work added granularity to a framework document issued by Britain's Defence Concept and Doctrine about how best to construct and deliver a wargame.

It appears that the ideas of those involved in the resurgence of the wargaming genre have begun to coalesce. American organisations, which had concentrated on educational wargaming as a method to promote the education of a certain topic, have recently warmed to analytical wargaming. Similarly, the British, who initially concentrated on experiential wargaming as a way to assist players to perform their jobs or tasks, have also begun to take analytical wargaming more seriously (pp. 5-6). The authors of *The Craft of Wargaming* have therefore embraced the direction of travel and have devoted their book to analytical wargaming. Their clear and concise guidance provides a coherent, reasoned and detailed methodology for practitioners to plan, execute and evaluate wargames. Their intention is to provide a framework that enables players to identify an opponent's risks and vulnerabilities and use this information to identify options that can be explored to create viable and executable plans that are likely to achieve desired outcomes. The framework also helps wargamers conceive strategies to prevent the objectives of an opponent being realised.

My only minor criticism of the book revolves around the authors' assertion that wargaming is a craft. While they acknowledge Perla's foresight in anticipating the complexity of modern conflict, they do not agree with his judgement that wargaming is an art. But neither are they convinced that wargaming is a science either. Instead, they deduce that technologically-supported operational art ought to be codified in a formalised framework (pp. 19-20). Unfortunately, the authors overextend this train of thought to assert that by blending art and science together wargaming becomes a craft. It has been argued that "mysteries" associated with craft terminology were deliberately devised by the British working class during the industrial revolution to

³ Yuna Huh Wong, Sebastian Joon Bae, Elizabeth M. Bartels and Benjamin Smith, *Next-Generation Wargaming for the U.S. Marine Corps: Recommended Courses of Action* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2019), iii.

gain status and increase wages from uncooperative masters.⁴ Those in the military may be similarly perturbed by the authors' use of craft-like descriptors such as novice, apprentice and master to recognise a practitioner's familiarity with wargaming (pp. 30-31). Such terms betray the genres evolution in the hobby and fantasy market, but do not sit easily within traditional military structures. It is therefore likely that using such terms would undermine the credibility of the military wargame design courses and interfere with its acceptance into formalised doctrine.⁵

It transpires that when choosing which wargaming process to adopt the authors opted for a modified version of Perla's design as the most appropriate. The format includes a comprehensive section describing the process of initiating, designing, developing, constructing and analysing a wargame. These are followed by other chapters describing how to plan and manage wargames before a series of appendixes provide an example scenario, an array of practical exercise solutions and case studies in wargaming design. Cunningly disguised as a practice examination, one appendix has been designed to allow the reader to evaluate how well they have understood the preceding chapters. Overall, the book seeks to provide a framework through which art can be married with the best available science to provide an environment in which leaders can exercise and demonstrate their agility in making decisions under pressure. Appeget, Burks and Cameron make a significant contribution to the knowledge and understanding of wargaming and its place in the deciphering and deconstruction of complex problems. By contextualising the current utility of analytical wargaming the book provides a readable, thoughtful and useful guide to help the military and businesses to consider problems and make decision. It is highly recommended.

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⁴ Correlli Barnett, *The Lost Victory: British Dreams, British Realities 1945-1950* (London: Macmillan, 1995), 16, 36-37; and Correlli Barnett, *The Verdict of Peace* (London: Macmillan, 2001), 260-261, 266.

⁵ James 'Pidgeon' Fielder, "Reflections on Teaching Wargame Design," War on the Rocks, 1 January 2020, [<https://warontherocks.com/2020/01/reflections-on-teaching-wargame-design/>].