

Summer 2025 Connect Book Club – Feast or Famine?

Many readers will by now have read the 2025 SDSR published on 2 June 2025 and its 62 recommendations which the UK Government has accepted. Described by Lord Robertson, the lead for the Review, as ‘genuinely transformative’, the document lays out the direction of travel for UK defence for the next decade (2035) with Russia identified as the primary threat to British security. Lord Robertson has gone on record as believing that ‘Russia is at war with us at the moment’ and one of his external reviewers, Dr Fiona Hill, has also stated that Britain is ‘already at war.’ With these sobering thoughts, the Government committed to increase defence spending to 2.5% of GDP by 2027 (an increase of £13.4Bn in current terms from the 2024 defence spending commitment of 2.3% (£55Bn in 2024/25 prices)) with a further commitment to aim for 3% by 2035.

This financial commitment allowed the planners to build in new capabilities and reinforce others. In 23 days however, things had changed. At the recent 18-hour NATO summit at the Hague, members issued a five paragraph communique (referred to as a NATO Directive), outlining an agreement to spend a minimum of 5% of their respective GDPs by 2035 on defence - and every year thereafter (with no caveats of ‘when fiscal opportunities allow’). For the UK, this equates to 3.5% for ‘core defence’ and 1.5% for ‘resilience and security.’¹ As ever, the devil is in the detail. Whilst NATO has had a common definition of defence expenditure since the 1950s, what constitutes the resilience and security segment of the defence budget is less clear. Perhaps some of the strategic infrastructure projects analysed in the 2025 RLC Review (Special article) offers some insight into the spectrum of potential capabilities that the UK could commit to. As an aside, if NATO members do reach the 5% in 2035 they will be making a greater proportional financial commitment to collective NATO defence than the US. Whilst the US will, no doubt, remain the largest global defence spender (currently 40% of defence spending worldwide) by 2035, the estimate is that in 2025 Washington would have authorised 2.9% of GDP to defence, falling to 2.4% in 2035.² This financial commitment may put a different complexion on future defence, trade, security and international relations. That said, whilst the US has assured NATO members that it is still committed to the alliance, unlike during WW2, it has not declared a ‘Europe first’ policy in its strategic thinking. Rather, the US has reinforced the 2011 Obama administration’s ‘pivot’ towards the Indo-Pacific region, underlining the importance of building four new bases in the Philippines and increasing its technology exchange with Australia.

Whatever the views of the supporters or the detractors of the Review, the document clearly articulates that the UK is facing an existential threat from Russia. As with all strategic reviews, there is a fair amount of continuity and some transformation, but readers should recognise that the chief authors have acknowledged that the Review has been designed within assumed parameters.³ The Prime Minister declared that Britain will move to a state of warfighting readiness with some key elements built into the strategic vision (NATO first, lessons from Ukraine, whole of society approach etc). Some readers who have experienced a fair few Defence Reviews will of course recognise much of the narrative. This Review declares that there will be ‘*a new partnership with industry*,’ which closely aligns with the 2015 Review which articulated a ‘*new industrial...arrangement between government and industry*’ (National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review, Nov 2015, p.36) or the 2010 SDSR which identified that ‘*partnership with industry will be key*’ (SDSR10, p.47).

¹ The Hague NATO Summit Declaration, 25 June 2025, Online [Accessed 28 June 2025], https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_236705.htm

² US Congressional Budget Office Estimates, cited in The Daily Telegraph, 27 June 2025, p.13.

³ Lord Robertson interview on Times Radio UK, 8 June 2025.

Outside of the political rhetoric, it seems that most are in agreement that UK defence industry is a key facet in the security of the nation – potentially reinforcing the service-industry relationship initiatives being driven by the RLC Connect. How the UK Government builds in resilience by increasing contracts with UK based defence companies remains to be seen but anyone with experience of complex, integrated supply-chains will know how challenging it is to restructure support to ensure guarantees on the levels of component supply and key ancillaries for some of the more expensive capital platforms. Just how big the challenge is can be appreciated by the procurement of TNT and nitrocellulose, both key components in large calibre shells. Within the European NATO members, TNT is currently only manufactured in Poland and military grade nitrocellulose is sourced almost exclusively from Redmond, Virginia. The opportunity therefore for the UK to build logistic resilience, especially in the short-term, for products such as these by onshoring is therefore limited. Even if a national source could be developed, many ordnance products, such as gunpowder and propellants, come with significant environmental challenges – one of the reasons they were off-shored in the first place. For those specifically interested in the development of national on-shoring solutions should refer to three recent articles by **Professor Ash Rossiter and Martin Novella in The Journal of Military and Strategic Studies**.⁴

Aside from the intent to increase logistic resilience through closer relationships with UK defence industries, there are other areas of the Review that remain more opaque and contested. General (Retd) John McColl⁵ highlighted two interconnected areas of the Review that will likely prove particularly challenging to deliver. Firstly, the timing of fielding the trained personnel required and secondly, the fiscal viability of the uplift against the desired equipment programme. With regards timing and personnel; the elephant in the nations' recruiting offices remains numbers – whatever the technology, Ukraine has proven that mass matters. With an Army that labours to recruit and retain up to its current authorised liability of 72,000, the small uplift articulated in the Review to 78,000 seems overly challenging – although it should be recognised that prior to the NATO summit this uplift came with a caveat where *'the increase in the total number of Regular personnel [is] when funding allows'* (SDSR 2025, p.18). One former CGS envisaged that Britain needed an army of 120,000 by 2027. If this is the case, then even rolling in reserve numbers with the regulars means the timeline to recruit, train and field is short. The other factor, which is also not fully articulated, is that the timing of readiness needs to be correlated to the perceived threat. Logically, now that the Review is in the public domain, why would a potential near peer enemy wait until their adversaries were at their optimal desired strength and capability? If Russia could disengage from Ukraine in the next 3-5 years then the 2035 projection for readiness could be rendered useless. After all, President Zelensky is already on record saying that he believes Russia could be in a position to attack a NATO member within 5 years.

The second concern that General McColl raised is that the equipment programme, over a number of decades, has proven to be more expensive (requirement creep etc) than first calculated, leaving little headroom for other defence initiatives. The declaration to procure *up to* 12 new attack submarines might be a case in point. Whilst it is envisaged that a platform from this class of submarine could be built in 18 months, incorporating all the sub-systems, completing crew training and conducting sea trials may push their full in-service date well

⁴ Rossiter, A. *Defence Priorities of Small and Medium Powers*, pp.247-257 and *Abu Dhabi's drive for defence industrialization: paramountcy of the economic diversification agenda*, pp.407-424 and Novella, M. *Defence industrial policy in small and semi-industrialized countries: an application for Argentina*, pp.361-382, *Defence Studies*, Volume 25, Issue 2 (2025) - *Defence Industrial Strategies of Small and Medium Powers: Challenges and Prospects*.

⁵ Times Radio interview (2 June 2025).

outside the 18 month period – especially recognising that historically, the first in class often has had to overcome teething problems. Again, based on historical precedence, the last platform in the class is likely to be more expensive to deliver, whilst the first in class may be ready its first upgrade as the last enters service. These are not reasons to avoid building the capability, but they are real through-life considerations to be acknowledged up-front if realistic assessments are to be made on Britain's future ability to defend itself.

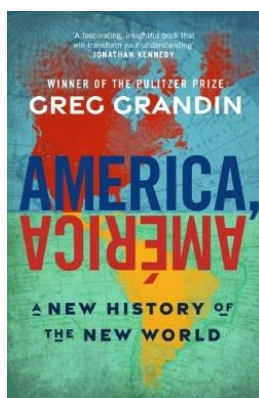
There is also one other commitment baked into the SDSR that adds to the complexity of the contemporary Continental challenges; Britain retains a responsibility for international commitments with a force '*ready to deploy globally*' (p.40) with the '*Middle East and Indo-Pacific as the next priority regions after the Euro-Atlantic.*' Realistically, the only way that such commitments can be addressed is by double (or even triple) hatting existing liability and capabilities and earmarking them against regions – an approach that has historically led to periods of overstretch, and all the downsides that can appear with it.

One final comment on strategic visions and lessons from history. Whilst the 2025 Review is a 'vision', with a stated ambition to fund increases in capabilities, it is worth reflecting that even some of Britain's most acclaimed politicians have found it difficult to make accurate geopolitical predictions. Against the advice of Admiral Beatty, Winston Churchill supported the naval arms limitations articulated in the Washington Treaty⁶. He is on record as believing that '*We cannot have a lot of silly little cruisers which would be of no use.*' (cited in Herman, A. *To Rule the Waves*, London, Hodder and Stoughton Ltd, 2005, p.520). How sought after those little vessels were when Doenitz opened the U-boat campaign in the Atlantic is also an inconvenient matter of record. Churchill also prophesized that with regards Japan (who had benefitted from the Washington Treaty), there was '*not the slightest chance*' of a war in his lifetime. In fairness, Churchill was espousing the government's current 'ten-year-rule' policy which prophesied that there would be no major conflict within a rolling ten-year horizon. The ruling elite might be forgiven for getting that wrong but it is bizarre that a nation which believed that it would not be engaged in a major war in the next decade was still spending 7% of its national income on defence in 1938.⁷ A warning for all of us that future gazing, even for those believed to be strategically gifted, well-informed and highly paid, can be perilous. That said, better to have a vision and a partially funded plan than no plan at all!

Moving on to this seasons' review of publications, this Connect Book Club has two guest reviewers. The first, Major Colin Taylor RLC, has examined a publication on Russia; ***Overreach***, and readers may discern from a further review of the related ***Intent To Destroy***, that a pattern emerges in how Russia approaches its operations of choice. Members who are drawn to studying the conflict in Ukraine may also wish to consult historical Russian campaigns, some of which have been reviewed in earlier Book Clubs. The second guest reviewer, Dr Jacob Thomas-Llewellyn, has offered an insight into two professors who focussed the bulk of their academic work on military logistics (blowing the myth that Martin Van Creveld's *Supplying War* is the only worthwhile book on the subject). The remainder of this seasons' publications have once again been drawn from a wide spectrum of topics, offering readers some interesting areas for further personal study – or even to partially help support some formal studies outside of the 'directed reading' lists. No contemporary Book Club would be complete without a review of a publication dealing with America – and so, we start with ***America, América: A New History of the New World***.

⁶ Also known as the Five-Power Treaty, originally signed in 1922 and renewed thereafter.

⁷ Harrison, M. *Resource Mobilization for WW2: The USA, UK, USSR and Germany 1938-1945*, The Economic History Review, May 1988, No2, p.174.



America, América: A New History of the New World, Greg Grandin, London, Penguin Press, 2025.

Far from the global monolith that is frequently used to describe America today, Grandin explains that for much of its existence the US has been focussed on its immediate southern neighbours – and for good reason, it needed them. Although this dependency did not change until WW2, readers may obtain a more nuanced understanding of Washington’s contemporary policies if they explore the forging of US relations with Latin America.

From its emergence as a sovereign nation, US dependency on Spain’s Latin American colonies to help sustain its conflict with Britain in the Revolutionary War (1775-1783) is both surprising and logical. A broad range of resources were provided which allowed George Washington’s Army to defeat Britain. From the end of the war, America started to develop its isolation policy and after much of Latin America had broken free of European rule, its foreign policy was deliberately weighted to benefit the expansion of the US. The Monroe doctrine of 1823 was framed in deliberately ambiguous language. Whilst it was promoted as Washington’s warning to Europe to steer clear of any further colonialism in the Western hemisphere, it provided a political baseline from which the US could coerce, influence and ultimately expand its territory – Texas was annexed from Mexico in 1845 and by 1848 half of Mexico had been captured. Washington also developed relationships which benefited its influence – the recognition of Panamanian independence from Columbia in 1903 being one.

When Franklin Roosevelt came to power during the Great Depression, he cultivated trade relations with Latin American countries by reducing tariffs (anybody reading this in the White House?) and devaluing the dollar. This relationship paid dividends in WW2 when the US relied heavily on the Panama Canal (opened in 1914) to facilitate the fighting of its Two-Ocean War strategy and the development of the deep supply chains that helped build logistic resilience into the US order of battle together with its allies. After the war, the US changed its focus and looked to flex its global dominance on a world that it believed was threatened by international communism – as a consequence, Latin America suffered while Europe was rebuilt as a priority on the foundation of US aid.

Grandin, a Pulitzer prize winner and Yale Professor, has offered an insight into US policy making over the centuries. Any realist would say that we should not be surprised by the approaches that the US has taken, the aim has always been to promote American interests – some might even be so bold as to suggest that the contemporary ‘America First’ policy being promoted in the corridors of US power is merely part of a prolonged strategic plan – uncomfortable perhaps but equally unsurprising. A great read for those wishing to understand America better – should be directed reading for White House staffers.



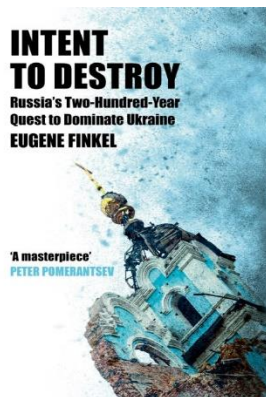
Overreach, The inside story of Putin's war against Ukraine, Owen Matthews, Mudlark, 2022. Reviewed by Maj C W Taylor RLC.

There are many unknowns concerning Vladimir Putin's rationale for his 'Special Military Operation' in Ukraine which has brought a conventional war to Eastern Europe which, thus far, has lasted for over 1,200 days. Putin's decisions and the ongoing backing of the war by the Russian people both require an understanding of the Russian leader and his inner circle, and an appreciation of the national psyche. These subjects are still opaque to many in the West and require an experienced 'Russia watcher' to attempt to unravel them.

In ***Overreach***, Owen Matthews does an excellent job of explaining the background of the conflict that he describes as; '... the bloody final act of the collapse of the Soviet Union'. His experience from over 27 years as a journalist in Russia, and having covered previous Russian conflicts, gives him unique access to numerous sources within both Russia and Ukraine. The breadth of the interviews Matthews has conducted are significant and he has masterfully merged considerable information from these sources into his narrative. His examination of the changes in the Russian media and increasing support for the war showed how quickly patriotism and fear have trumped previously more liberal beliefs and Western outlooks. The book is journalistic in style giving an overview of events and he often achieves this through snapshots and vignettes concerning multiple participants in the conflict. These range from the political to the tactical. His narrative is both easy to read and enables bitesize consumption. It is not however a comprehensive 'blow-by-blow' account but provides a greater understanding of the 'why' and 'how' rather than covering every chronological detail.

It is worth noting that Matthews does not name all the protagonists in his vignettes to protect the identities of his sources. This has enabled him to produce a more candid and insightful account of events, certainly from inside Russia. However, as he states himself, a certain amount must be taken on trust. Whilst there is no reason to doubt his sources, it may make it harder to cross-reference his work in the future. There are limitations in terms of the coverage of the conflict as Matthews' account only encapsulates the 'road to war' from February 2022 to March 2023. However, it is incomplete for good reason, and he makes several predictions concerning the endgame in Ukraine.

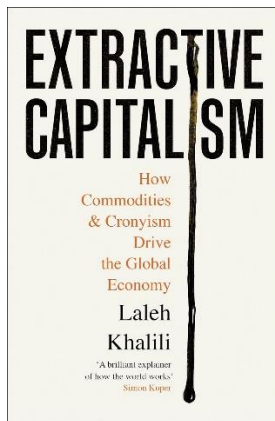
Matthews describes his book as a 'first draft of history'; it is that, and more, providing detailed insights into the rationale behind the war. I would recommend it as a good read, and I hope that he produces a further book covering the latter stages of the Russia–Ukraine conflict.



Intent to Destroy: Russia's Two-Hundred Year Quest to Dominate Ukraine, Eugene Finkel, London, Basic Books, 2024.

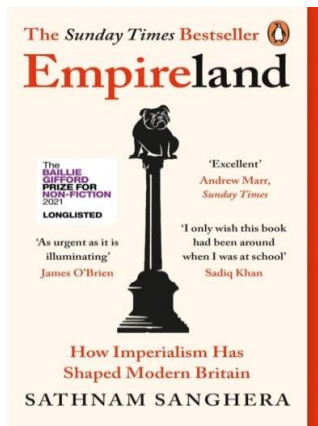
From the outset, Finkel provides some comprehensive and useful historical context to the current Russian-Ukrainian war. The author believes that without a broad understanding of the nation's history, observers will not be able to fully appreciate the contemporary war and the challenges to peace. Finkel's core premise is that 'identity' rather than 'security' is the main reason for Russia's long-standing aggression towards Ukraine. The author provides a historiography of the relationship between the belligerents, starting in the medieval period where the belief within Russia that Ukraine is an artificial state, first emerged. Finkel posits that "The Russian violence against Ukraine is neither sudden nor unprecedented" – "they are products of a two-hundred-year old history" (p.3). Whilst Russia may proclaim that it is concerned over its border security, Finkel explains that it is much more concerned with controlling the cultural identity of Ukraine, to a degree where the Kremlin will only be content when Kyiv's governance apparatus and policies mirrors that found across motherland Russia. Finkel has a point; Russia borders a number of NATO states (Norway, Poland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) and has done for at least two decades without feeling the need to revert to open conflict – Ukraine is therefore clearly regarded as a special case. To achieve the Kremlin's strategic aim in Ukraine, no instrument of coercion, is (or has been) considered too extreme. Depressingly, the author prophesises that Moscow's desired end-state is nothing short of the erosion and then the erasing of Ukraine's national identity. The Kremlin's vision of control is a cloned governance system that closely aligns with the cultural, economic, security and political policies espoused by Moscow.

The strength of the book lies in Finkel's explanation of the Russian mindset, why they believe Ukraine is part of the motherland. As for sustaining the human costs of the war, Russia seems to have the ability to absorb the pain. Unfortunately, at the time of this Book Club's publication, there was no time to complete a review of **Svetlana Alexievich's** Nobel Literature Prize winning ***Boys in Zinc* (London, Penguin Random House UK (2017))**. This documentary book gives an indication of why (and how) Russia fights and the prescribed messaging which passes between the Moscow elites, the home base and the deployed force. Russia fought in Afghanistan for over nine years and of the half a million troops that rotated through the theatre over 15,000 were killed – all for the motherland. Even the title offers an insight into the Russian psyche where the fallen were repatriated in zinc lined coffins – listed on the flight manifests as 'cargo 20' to screen their true identity. Even with significant casualties, the Russians continued to endure until the Kremlin could not see a route to their desired end-state. This ability to endure is what underpins Russian foreign policy today. Towards the end of the book Finkel examines the various options for Ukraine's future, including Zelensky's vision of a 'big Israel' – a heavily militarized society capable of defending itself through force. Finkel's depressing conclusion however is that of all the post-war options available to Ukraine 'none offers a viable long-term solution that would ensure the peaceful and respectful coexistence of Ukraine and Russia' – a sobering thought as Britain commences its transition towards a war footing.



Extractive Capitalism: How Commodities and Cronyism drive the Global Economy, Laleh Khalili, Profile, 2025.

The Connect Book Club has previously reviewed one of Khalili's publications, ***Sinews of War and Trade*** (2021) in the 2025 RLC Review, and ***Extractive Capitalism*** is a logical follow-on for Connect readers, describing how capital (now commonly referred to as *geoeconomics*), infrastructure and commodities are now the modern tools for obtaining dominant control on a global scale – but at some crippling costs. Through some specific commodities, such as oil and sand (both reoccurring commodity case studies in previous Book Clubs – for example, refer to Miller's ***Chip War*** (Review 2024)), she explains how high value end user commodities, fabricated from some of these seemingly basic, but often secretly extracted commodities, are manipulated to wield power – but there is a cost, which many are now questioning. The inequality in the supply chains and the environmental challenges are examined, with a plea for further reflection on how societies (rather than industries) rebalance the human economic benefits whilst reducing exploitation. There are no templated solutions offered by Khalili, but perhaps that is her point, we all need to think about them and determine a fairer and more sustainable approach to global betterment. If we chose not to, rather than betterment for a small proportion of the population, we might all eventually feel the repercussions of a collapsing environment, followed by the faltering of some of the cornerstones of capitalism. A relatively small book (200 pages), but with some huge issues to reflect on.



Empireland: How Imperialism has shaped Modern Britain, Sathnam Sanghera, Penguin Random House Uk, 2021.

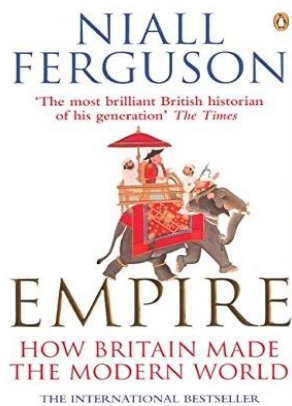
Although the British Empire is consigned to history, it remains a rare thing. Any study or comment on its historiography never fails to highlight one point – there is something to offend everyone. Of course, the reason for this is that throughout its turbulent history there were winners and losers, saints and sinners and victims and villains. Who fits into what category however is contested, and that is where the trouble and the interest in the subject starts.

Sanghera's ***Empireland: How Imperialism has shaped Modern Britain***, is a very interesting book for lovers of British history, although the author states that he is not a historian, nor is the publication categorised as a history book (although that is where you will find it on high-street bookshelves), rather, the aim is to explain how empire history has shaped contemporary Britain. The publisher advertises it as 'ground breaking', declaring that 'imperialism is everywhere – though we often choose not to see it.' There is an alternative school of thought – perhaps not many people are that interested in history or contemporary influences, especially British history (there is quite a lot of it after all). So from the outset, there is a publishers' assumption that understanding the British Empire is important and we should therefore all be interested.

For those who do enjoy history, ***Empireland*** should not disappoint, although many of the books' reviews point out that some of the evidence makes an uncomfortable read – not for this reviewer though. Some might be puzzled by this. Sanghera explains how for example, for a time, slavery was part and parcel of the Empire and was instrumental in determining how it was initially built and sustained. What the book is not so clear on is that the agency within Britain and across the globe was (and arguable still is) dominated by a relatively small minority (the power elite), those who designed British imperialism and profited disproportionately from the Empire. At the other end of the social scale, to what extent coal and copper ore miners or canal navvies working in the 'Golden Age' in Britain benefited directly from the Empire is less clear. Likewise, the extent of benefit to land workers who toiled under tithe contracts (not abolished until the 1830s) and who were required to pay a projected percentage of tithe in a form of agricultural produce is absent. The point is that a great proportion of the population in Britain, and across the Empire, were coerced to work under gruelling conditions with little or no agency or life-changing benefits. Without acknowledgement of this widespread social imbalance, the broader peoples' relationship within the Empire apparatus and its administrative policies is difficult to fully appreciate. So, from this social/agency/benefit point of view, there seems to be a layer of the Empire story missing. When the picture is built up, it should come as no surprise that there were winners and losers – as ever, the majority of the losers form the silent majority – those who were not well placed to write the history of the Empire phenomena.

The book could also benefit from some deeper comparison with other European empires and perhaps even the fabricated *manifest destiny* doctrine that provided an excuse for European settler expansion across the United States during the 19th Century. Sanghera's next book (*Empireworld* – not yet reviewed) does offer a global view of how the British Empire influenced wider historical events. Ultimately, while it is interesting to have some not-too-distant British history explained, it is not clear how, according to the publisher, the book will change minds. Throughout the pages and publisher's advertising, the question of 'what does it mean to be British' is only partly explained in ***Empireland***. Ask the Scots, Welsh and Irish what it means and you are likely to get a myriad of answers! Then ask a Cornish lawyer, a refuse collector from the Isle of Man and a teacher working in East London, and you'll probably get four alternatives! Whilst ***Empireland*** does help explain some transitions in British cultural history, the author's belief that teaching of Empire in schools should be compulsory is problematic. There is no doubt that its study would be beneficial (and enjoyable), but as already alluded to, there is a lot of British history and what goes into an already congested national curriculum is likely to be highly contested. As the national curriculum stands, there is no water safety on the teaching schedule, despite 150 children dying in our waters every year – five full school classes. Ask yourself, if water safety or the history of the British Empire should be a teaching priority?

To further complicate the debate over centralised power, if you want to understand our contemporary governance system, then the English Civil Wars (there were three, preceded by the Bishop's Wars) must surely warrant a place on the curriculum. How the sitting monarch is secondary in the apparatus of governance to Parliament can be better understood with some 17th Century history. Why the current monarch's namesake lost his head after a peoples' court and why, for a time, Britain was a republic under a Lord Protector, arguably also justifies squeezing into our formal (formative) education – generations Z and Alpha should be delighted! The problem is that the British Empire developed over centuries, deciding which part to cover in any reasonable detail is likely to be tricky – although this reviewer would have loved to have had the opportunity to analyse imperial pros and cons. Not being a descendent from the power elite will allow many readers to study the Empire without any pang of personal or collective guilt. After all, the current and future generations should not be held to account for the values, standards and behaviours of those that are now dust – so read about Empire with empathy but without self-reproach. An enjoyable read but, without broad understanding, it is arguable whether ***Empireland*** will change minds – but it might just make people better informed of what has gone before and why some things are the way they are.

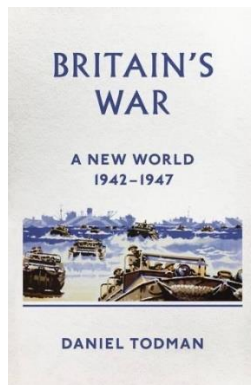


Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World, Niall Ferguson, London, Penguin random House, 2004.

The second book on Empire by Niall Ferguson, ***Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World***, has been around for over two decades, but is worthy of re-examination as it clearly lays out the pros-and-cons of the system of British global governance and trade. Again, like Sanghera, Ferguson does not back away from some of the inconvenient truths of how the system was established, how it was sustained and why it still has some peculiar influences over how Britain approaches certain geo-political and economic challenges. Ferguson's book is particularly worth reading for his conclusion, which explains the continuing phenomenon of a desire to 're-ordering' the world (or parts of it) that we do not like. Of course, the 'we' has changed. Spoiler alert - global policy is no longer designed by gentlemen wearing top hats in SW1, contemporary imperial decision making has migrated to the power elites in Washington, Brussels, Beijing and a few other capitals of the world – the outcome remains the same however, there are winners and losers, victims and villains. The story depicted in ***Empireland*** and ***Empire*** may be part of history, but the way that global governance and economics is currently practiced seems to have many parallels with the pink countries depicted on the Victorian map of the world. All of the vices of the British Empire still exist in various forms around the world, which, after a study of ***Empireland*** and ***Empire***, is perhaps why we can all find something to dislike in the past and the present.



Britain's War: Into Battle (1937-1941), Daniel Todman, Allen Lane, Penguin Random House UK, 2016.



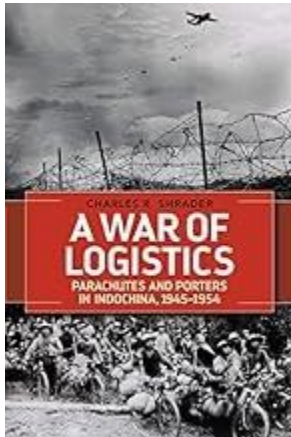
Britain's War: A New World (1942-1947), Daniel Todman, Allen Lane, Penguin Random House UK, 2021.

Any reader who enjoyed David Kynaston's *Tales of a New Jerusalem* series, should also find Todman's two books on pre-WW2, the conflict and its immediate aftermath, highly readable. The volumes are relatively fast paced; they have to be considering the amount of storytelling that is covered in the war years and the immediate aftermath. Todman's style is very similar to Paul Kennedy (*The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* and *Victory at Sea*) and although he deals with complex issues that many readers may not be familiar with, the narrative is enjoyable and thought provoking – especially as Britain is now in the throes of moving *towards warfighting readiness*. The decade covered by Todman initially reshaped Britain, and then changed it forever. The relationship with the US was developed and deepened (only recently is it being reassessed), Britain's remaining Empire was rebranded and significantly reduced, the welfare system that we still recognise today emerged and our defence capabilities were expanded and then restricted to meet crippling fiscal realities (sound familiar?). The question of how the British Government approached the growing despotism of Nazi Germany, Italian Fascism and Japanese Imperialism resonates with how the international community is responding to today's despots. How Britain formed and reinforced alliances with other European countries (a pre-cursor NATO first type policy) and how we brokered an often fractious partnership with the US is explained. Far from being a foregone conclusion, readers may learn how close the Allies came to not agreeing on a grand strategy (Stark's Plan Dog), and how the view of the world looked different from London to that of Washington. A well-researched, informative and reflective pair of books that readers will no doubt find thoroughly engrossing. Highly recommended.

A Neglected Facet of War: The Works of Professor Charles R. Shrader

Dr Jacob Thomas-Llewellyn, Assistant Professor, Defence and Security Program, Rabdan Academy, UAE.

The RLC Connect Book Club has previously reviewed two of Charles Shrader's books, *The Withered Vine* and *The First Helicopter War* (Book Club Online 2024). Shrader's last publication, *A War of Logistics: Parachutes and Porters in Indochina, 1945-1954*, is considered by many in the academic community as his best publication, and possibly one of the best across this niche market.



Over a period of 23 years, Professor Charles R. Shrader cornered a unique area of the military literary market. That said, outside of the US, he still remains largely unknown – even amongst military logisticians. After completing two tours in Vietnam as a commissioned officer in the US Transportation Corps, Shrader recognised the paucity of studies dealing with military logistics and embarked on a second career addressing the omission. With his passing in August 2018, he left behind a wealth of knowledge for future practitioners.

***A War of Logistics: Parachutes and Porters in Indochina, 1945-1954*, Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2015.**

Arguably one of the most accomplished publications examining the complexities of COIN logistics; *A War of Logistics* stands out as a rare triumph in military logistic scholarship. The importance of Shrader's work was first noted by William Waddell, because until its publication, 'in the Anglophone world – knowledge of the first Indochina war operated from a series of well-worn stereotypes and clichés rather than from rigorous historical research.'⁸ Across 373 pages, Shrader captures in detail the tragedy of the French deployment to Indochina, where military commanders were resigned to operating on a shoestring budget whilst blatantly aware that they lacked the support of the French public. The quality of Shrader's research is evidenced across 70 pages of notes, where he makes extensive use of both US and French archival sources.

Even in this exemplar piece of academic work however, there are some shortcomings. For the uninitiated, it is advisable to have a timeline and a map of Indochina close at hand, as the narrative can, at times, be confusing and the wealth of information overwhelming. Whilst Shrader focusses on the challenges faced by French forces in theatre, the text could have been enhanced by devoting some attention to the mechanics of French strategic and operational level decision making (or lack of) in Paris by the Fourth Republic's governance regime. Added to this, there is a notable absence of Vietnamese sources, with the result that

⁸ Waddell, William, 'Review: A War of Logistics', H-Net Reviews, May 2016.

the work is unbalanced in its exposé of the logistics of all the belligerents. At points throughout the book, readers may well ask themselves ‘what was the other side doing (Wellington’s ‘other side of the hill’)?’ This omission does however leave the door open for an equally detailed study of Viet Minh logistics – a valuable academic project which is yet to attract an author.

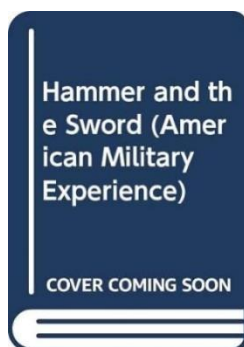
Along with his other works, those who are serious about studying military logistics and especially the unique dynamics of COIN operations, should consider adding this book to their collection. A government health warning - as ever with Shrader’s work, it is expensive, but well worth the investment.

Bureaucracy and Brute Force: The Writings of Professor Paul A.C. Koistinen

Few authors can claim in their lifetime to have covered 405 years of a nation’s history, but this is exactly what Professor Paul A.C. Koistinen achieved. A specialist in the history of the political economy of American warfare at California State University, Koistinen spent 40 years transforming his research of American warfare and economic mobilization into a unique collection of books and articles which have stood the test of time.

Modern authors, including Rick Atkinson and Ian Toll through their respective European and Pacific trilogies, have generated works now widely hailed as the definitive studies of American warfare during WW2 (both trilogies are on MGL’s Professional Reading List). However, after two initial studies of US Government organisation, its relationship with industry and the mobilization for total war, Koistinen raises the bar. In the early 1990s he declared that he would complete a pentalogy of ‘The Political Economy of American Warfare’.

Writing with the grace and quality of the classical military scholars such as John Terraine and Correlli Barnett, the works of Koistinen capture the reader with their rare level of research and original arguments. Utilizing a vast range of primary archival sources, this collection traces the origins of the modern US nation, concluding in the period when the country was experiencing major challenges during the ‘War on Terror’ and was desperately trying to find a politically acceptable exit strategy from Iraq and Afghanistan.



Sadly, Koistinen’s first work, ***The Hammer and the Sword: Labour, the Military and Industrial Mobilization, 1920-1945***, is now a rare text but for those passionate literary aficionados out there, if you manage to locate a copy, you have struck gold. This is a dense text, based upon Koistinen’s 1965 doctoral theses and showcases the framework he would later adopt to structure his expansive commercial publications.

Whilst devoting much of his attention to his books, Koistinen complimented his research with a small collection of insightful journal articles which were conveniently compiled into a single volume; ***The Military-Industrial Complex: A Historical Perspective***. As the shortest of Koistinen's books, at 168 pages, the reader is provided with a brief, yet valuable, overview of American commercial leadership during wartime and the challenges that successive US administrations have encountered in asserting their will over corporate leaders and high-ranking military officers.

It was at this stage in 1996 that Koistinen embarked upon his most ambitious project which he would later state was designed to provide a 'comprehensive schematic, and interdisciplinary study of the economics of America's wars from the colonial period to today.'⁹ The reader is provided with five texts which trace the development of the American Military-Industrial Complex from the 17th through to the 21st Century. If you accept the challenge of reading this collection, you should be prepared to enter a labyrinth of overlapping government departments and internal battles over access to multiple US administrations and, more importantly, the industrialists who would come to prominence during the Second World War and go on to dominate modern defence procurement strategies for the next seven decades. This pentalogy is well worth the investment as many of Koistinen's arguments and observations are still relevant today and remain a valuable source of primary material.

Doctoral Theses:

- 'The Hammer and the Sword: Labour, the Military and Industrial Mobilization, 1920-1945', Doctoral Theses, University of California, Berkely, 1965, (later published with Arno press in 1979).

Books:

- *The Military-Industrial Complex: A Historical Perspective*, New York: Praeger, 1980.
- *Beating Ploughshares into Swords: The Political Economy of American Warfare, 1606-1865*, University Press of Kansas, 1996.
- *Mobilizing for Modern War: The Political Economy of American Warfare, 1865-1919*, University Press of Kansas, 1997.
- *Planning War, Pursuing Peace: The Political Economy of American Warfare, 1920-1939*, University Press of Kansas, 1998.
- *Arsenal of World War II: The Political Economy of American Warfare, 1940-1945*, University Press of Kansas, 2004.
- *State of War: The Political Economy of American Warfare, 1945-2011*, University Press of Kansas, 2012.

Articles:

- 'The Industrial-Military Complex in Historical Perspective: World War I', *The Business History Review*, Vol.41, No.4, 1967, pp.378-403.
- 'The Industrial-Military Complex in Historical Perspective: The Inter-War Years', *The Journal of American History*, Vol.56, No.4, 1970, pp.819-839.
- 'Mobilizing the World War II Economy: Labour and the Industrial-Military Alliance', *Pacific Historical Review*, Vol.42, No.4, 1973, pp.443-478.

⁹ Quoted in; Mark R. Wilson, Review: 'The Political Economy of American Warfare Vols. 1-5', Professional Reading List, Defense Acquisition University, July 2019.

- 'Warfare and Power Relations in America: Mobilizing the World War II Economy', *Proceedings of the Tenth Military History Symposium*, 20th-22nd October 1982, pp.91-110.

Postscript:

The next online Connect Book Club is planned to switch focus towards international relations and the Iran/Israel/US conflict. Corresponding with the 80th Commemoration of Victory over Japan Day (2 September 1945), a historical campaign case study (covered in several book and article reviews) will also be published online. Compared to Europe, in Britain at least, the war in the Far East and the Pacific has remained a relatively neglected area of study and post-war reflection. Many of the lessons the Allies identified in fighting Japanese Imperialism on sea, air and land however proved invaluable in the immediate post-war conflict challenges that emerged.

And a final plea to members; reviews for the Book Club, via the Business Support Manager, are always welcome – especially from serving or veteran soldiers. For the last five years, less than six members have submitted reviews, with one member completing circa 98% of those published. The Corps and corporate members may consider themselves *well read*, but sadly, there is little evidence of this in the Book Club. Members are encouraged to consult the foreword to MGL's Professional Reading List (available on the Connect website) which explains the benefits of broad reading and reflection.