

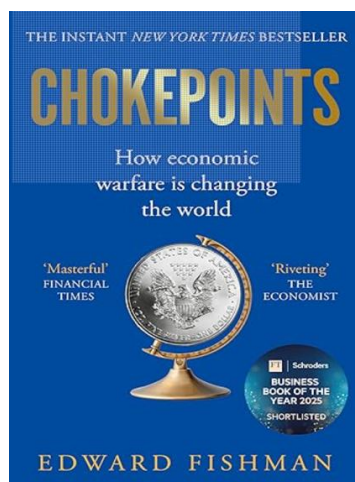
RLCi Book Club – Early Summer 2026 (Online)

Ways, Means and Ends; that taxing complex triad of competing dynamics that continue to dominate strategic planning and the prosecution of wars. Inconveniently, they keep rearing their heads in the national and coalition planning cells of the capitals across the contemporary world. The first two components of the triad are challenging; what approaches should a nation adopt for its defence and security and what resources must it agree to secure and how best does it apply them. As cases in point, readers will no doubt have witnessed the ongoing struggle with evolving tactics, techniques and procedures in Ukraine and the UK's challenge with issuing a timely Defence Investment Plan that aligns with the national budget, HMG's acceptance of risk and rapidly emerging defence realities.

As if the challenges of *ways* and *means* were not enough, it is the *ends*, or rather, *endstates*, that seems to be the factor that is concentrating the executive minds in Washington, Tehran and several European capitals today. Amongst the planning chaos, what is clear is that it is difficult to formulate a credible *endstate*, align the *ways* to help deliver it and safeguard the *means* to project and sustain it. What history has taught us is that military might on its own is not enough to guarantee a swift and favourable outcome, as Colin Powell's Pottery Barn Rule identified; '*if you break it, you have to be prepared to rebuild it.*' Powell's warning was directed at the political elites in Washington and London with whom he was at pains to emphasise that the rebuilding would likely take significantly longer than the fighting phase and the economic cost would be exponential to the military expenditure. We have been witnessing the implications of this realism play out in the Middle East for decades, where the evidence indicates that there has rarely been a cogent grand strategic plan to deliver a desired and enduring acceptable *endstate*. What we do know is that while some belligerents want a timely (read swift) outcome, the situation generally dictates that the road to any acceptable *endstate* will be long, there is rarely an epiphany moment and when the opportunity for change comes, delivering lasting geopolitical solutions demands compromise – something that is in short supply in 2026 as belligerents attempt to build new Jerusalems.

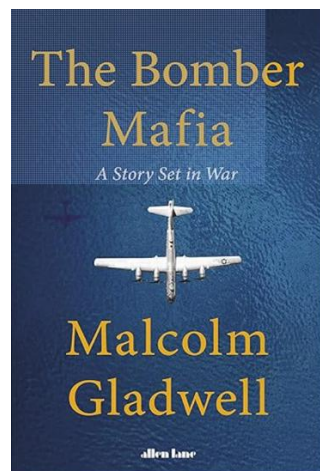
With this unnerving realisation in mind, this online RLCi early summer Book Club covers a range of publications that explore the development and application of *ways, means* and *ends*. First up is a New York Times bestseller; ***Chokepoints*** by Edward Fishman, shortlisted for the Business Book of the Year in 2025, it explores how economic warfare is increasingly changing the world. Next is Malcolm Gladwell's ***The Bomber Mafia*** which explains the development of the *ways* that eventually determined the dropping of the bombs to achieve the desired *endstate* in Japan. Then David Stafford's ***Endgame 1945*** analyses what the effect of prosecuting a total war to its final conclusion meant for ordinary people. Outside of total war, Douglas Kinnard's ***The War Managers*** provides uncomfortable evidence of how misunderstood operational and strategic *endstates* in Vietnam were for the combat commanders. Our penultimate book is on leadership, that often elusive, hard to define, core discipline that guides actions at every level. David Marquet's ***Turn the Ship Around*** is a timely reminder of how teams are built and how a collective spirit can outperform a single gifted leader. Finally, as if to remind ourselves how powerful the written word remains, even in the digital age, Charlie English's ***The CIA Book Club*** helps to remind us that an analogue approach to communications still has a place in this complex brave new world.

Chokepoints; How economic warfare is changing the world, Edward Fishman, London, Elliott and Thompson Ltd, 2026.



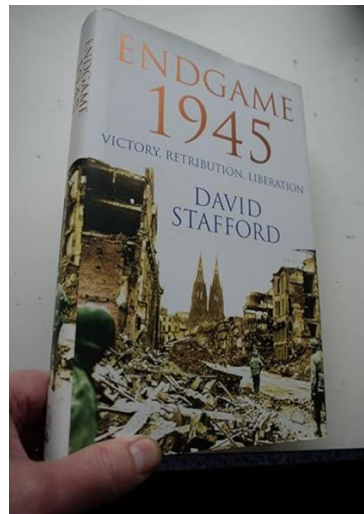
Unsurprisingly, Fishman's *Chokepoints* was shortlisted for the FT/Schroders business book of the year 2025. The RLCi Book Club has previously covered some of the core themes Fishman explores (advanced microchips, rare earth minerals, global supply chains and geographic constraints), but the author goes further in explaining how the US, followed by other economic powerhouses, have manipulated the world economy into a weapon by establishing control over economic chokepoints. The chokepoints include dominant currencies (primarily the US dollar), Iran and its nuclear programme, recognising (before the outbreak of the current war) its new found role as the gatekeeper of the Strait of Hormuz, China's long game for global technological dominance (the Belt and Road Initiative has been extensively covered by the RLCi Book Club) and Russia's dependence and influence over oil and gas as it prosecutes its war in Ukraine. Although the Iran/US/Israeli war is outside the publishing period, readers will be able to extrapolate Fishman's observations and possibly gain a better understanding of what the long-term implications are likely to be for the world economy. Interestingly, Fishman posits that it was the deteriorating relationship between Iran and the US after the fall of the Shah in 1979 that set the conditions for the US Treasury Department to formulate a new offensive philosophy built on sanctions, tariffs and, where necessary, hard power. From the early 2000s, US treasury officials streamlined their economic lines of development, perfecting them in their diplomatic and economic affairs with Pyongyang and other nations that Washington categorised as something above competitor status. *Chokepoints* is a fascinating insight into how the US has attempted to hone its economic advantage into a soft power weapon and how this is likely to affect global economics and the international institutions that are designed to offer a framework for interdependency. Students of history may argue that much of what Fishman explores is not new. Roosevelt used an oil embargo in an attempt to coerce Japan prior to WW2 and Eisenhower not only used the UN (where it voted with Russia) as a pressure point on Britain and France to force a withdraw from Suez in 1956, but it also challenged Anglo-French economics. What has changed is that with an integrated, interdependent global economy, chokepoints are now numerous and increasingly open to manipulation. A must read for those attending staff colleges or studying defence, security and/or international relations.

The Bomber Mafia; A Story Set in War, Malcolm Gladwell, Penguin Random House, 2021. (PCL).



Gladwell's *Bomber Mafia* has previously been mentioned in the RLCi's Book Club 'Victory over Japan' book review special (VJ Day Special online). The wider consideration of achieving *endstates* however warrants a further delve into how the *ways* and *means* can change to deliver the desired *endstate* – in this case, the strategic bombing of mainland Japan leading to the delivery of the nuclear bomb(s). Gladwell explains how the advocates of strategic bombing pursued the discipline, and in the case of General Curtis LeMay, ruthlessly developed the firebombing of Japanese cities. Logisticians will likely find the case study of the development of the B-29 bases in China (often referred to as Matterhorn Logistics) an insightful illustration of US ingenuity, fortitude and risk taking as Washington extended the bombing range to include mainland western Japan. The capture and subsequent development of the B-29 airfields on the Marianas, bringing all of mainland Japan into range and making the bases in China redundant, provides a poignant example of how the US changed its moral position from initially opposing bombing civilian targets to deliberately firebombing Japanese urban conurbations constructed primarily of wood. The bombing of Japan is an illustration of how national moral sensibilities can shift. The raids on Tokyo killed an estimated 80-125,000 people, as opposed to the dropping of 'Fat Man' on Nagasaki which killed an estimated 80,000 people. Like Stafford's *Endgame 1945*, Gladwell's *Bomber Mafia* is not just an historical narrative of a specific WW2 campaign, it offers an insight into how the pursuit of even a well-defined *endstate* can have significant unforeseen bearings on the *ways* and *means* (read moral, economic and political ideology) that a nation needs to devote and evolve if it is to achieve its strategic goals.

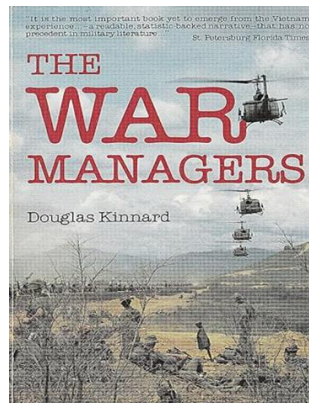
Endgame 1945; Victory, Retribution, Liberation, David Stafford, London, Little, Brown, 2007. (PCL).



After Admiral Stark wrote *Plan Dog* for President Roosevelt, the US maintained a clear grand strategic plan for fighting WW2, namely, a *Germany First* policy. The *endstate* was visualised as the total defeat of Nazism, Italian Fascism and Japanese Imperialism with unconditional surrender at its core. Stafford's *Endgame 1945* explains that even when there is a well-defined *endstate*, and the supporting *ways* and *means* to deliver it, clear cut military victories seldom, if ever, lead to clear cut peace. Readers will realise that whilst kinetic actions can give the impression that significant advantage is being delivered to a belligerent, the endgame of achieving an enduring peace is often elusive. Jump forward to the contemporary space and there are parallels between the end of WW2 and what is happening in the Ukraine/Russian and Iran/US/Israeli wars. Destroying targets at distance can prove relatively easy – rebuilding cities and achieving a lasting peace for societies to live in them continues to prove far more elusive. Using some carefully selected case studies, Stafford demonstrates that for civilians the end of the fighting merely reflects a transition from one survival challenge to the next, meaning that *endstates* are a generational issue not a clever theory developed by a political policy wonk. The underlying complex challenges of ethnicity, religion, economics, ideological competition, to name a few, follow the fighting and what we are likely to see over the next decade aligns uncomfortably with what is described in *Endgame 1945*. Rather than considered as a historic publication, Stafford's writing offers an uncomfortable warning of what is likely to come. Perhaps the quote cited by Stafford from BBC war correspondent Robert Reid¹ seems prescient for contemporary affairs, where the *endstates* seem unfathomable and belligerents must recognise that they have to start 'all over again from the rock bottom of decency.'

¹ Cited in David Stafford, *Endgame 1945*, p. 445, an extract from an interview between BBC correspondent R. Reid and B. Whittaker, 30 May 1945, WRU C/11616, Reid Papers.

The War Managers; Douglas Kinnard, University Press of New England, 1977. (PCL).

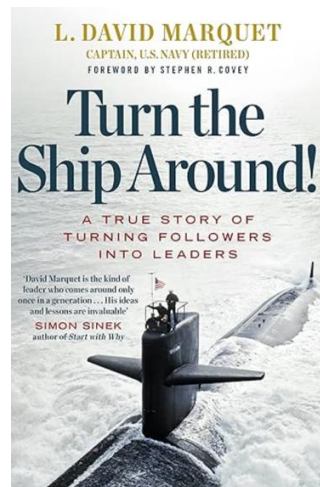


Focussing on campaign endstates, although Kinnard's study is nearly half a century old, his findings chime with recent US/UK military interventions. Kinnard canvassed 173 US Army generals who had served in combat roles in Vietnam with a 60-part questionnaire. 64% of the generals completed the questionnaire and the results remain a unique and fascinating insight into how the hierarchy were thinking (and acting) and/or came to think after the US withdrawal from Vietnam (it would be interesting if a similar study were undertaken to question British generals who commanded in Iraq and Afghanistan). In summary, the generals believed that the national (strategic) objectives were never clear; less than a third believed that prior to Vietnamization the war's objectives (as they understood them) were achievable and only 20% of the lower echelons understood the objectives. There are fascinating insights into the creeping strategic missions and how operational/tactical initiatives, such as the use of search and destroy, B-52 deep strikes and the use of herbicides for defoliation, were perceived by the troops.

While *The War Managers* offers a behind the scenes appreciation of how this modern war was considered immediately after its conclusion, it could be compared and contrasted with other wars. In many aspects of the objectives and endstates, examination of the French in Indo-China (1946-54), Algeria (1954-62) and the UK/US in Iraq (Second Gulf War – 2003-11) and ISAF in Afghanistan (2001-2021) mirrors what the US experienced in Vietnam. Perhaps evidence from an autocracy, rather than a democracy, highlights that identifying credible strategic endstates was, and remains, challenging for all nations. Roderic Braithwaite (*Afgantsy: The Russians in Afghanistan 1979-89*, Profile Books, 2012, p.57) offers an insight into the elusive nature of constructing a robust endstate where the Kremlin, 'step by step, with great reluctance, strongly suspecting that it would be a mistake, the Russians slithered towards a military intervention because they could not think of a better alternative.'

What is clear from all of these wars is that once an endstate has been agreed, seldom is any curiosity exhibited while the bombs are dropping. Voices from outliers are often drowned out, or worse, accused of disloyalty – until the bombs are deemed ineffective and part of the problem rather than part of the solution. What *The War Managers* (and other studies) exposes is that an endstate, even if achieved, is seldom an exit strategy and there will be complex and competing lines of development that need to be matured before a credible peace is realised. The takeaway is that clear cut military victories seldom, if ever, lead to clear cut peace.

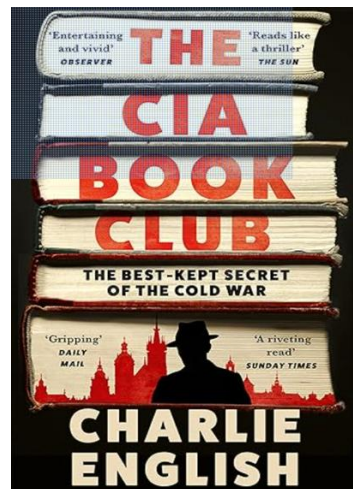
Turn the Ship Around: A True Story of Turning Followers into Leaders; David Marquet, Penguin Random House UK, 2019.



David Marquet was a nuclear submarine commander on the USS Sante Fe. Initially suffering from low morale, poor performance and the worst crew retention rate in the fleet, *Turn the Ship Around* is the story of how Marquet, often against the US Navy's adopted leadership doctrine, projected the Sante Fe from the worst boat in the fleet to the best. Recognising that he was part of a culture which, at its core, was based on 'following', Marquet crafted a leadership philosophy that encouraged subordinates at all levels to take responsibility for their actions. Readers who have experienced some degree of leadership and/or management training may dismiss much of Marquet's initiatives as common sense, but in a strict hierarchical regime that often focussed on regulations above operational capability it was his ability to change the crew's mindset that transformed the on-board team dynamics. Encouraging his crew to reach for greatness rather than constantly trying to avoid mistakes proved to be a turning point in his crew's collective performance, perversely in opposition to the US Navy's regulations and guidelines.

This is an enlightening read for anyone in a position where they are trying to make a difference. Marquet recognises that many of the regulations that organisations adopt perpetuate risk aversion, with the excuse that they are there to encourage perfection. Perfection however often proves to be the enemy of timely and pragmatic decision making – something you might need on a nuclear submarine. *Turn the Ship Around* offers an example of hope, where, even in a claustrophobic environment dominated by the often stifling apparatus of hierarchy, initiative, trust and teamwork can be allowed to develop to a degree that produces astonishing results. In the end, Marquet proves that people can surprise you – you just have to give them a chance.

The CIA Book Club: The Best Kept Secret of the Cold War; Charlie English, London, William Collins, 2025. (PCL).



No doubt there are many readers of the fashion magazine *Marie Claire* amongst the members of the RLC. In a world where promoting ideas from fashion to politics is achieved via digital means, the use of the written word in print seems more akin to carvings on sandstone. If you have ever wondered how potent the written and printed word can be, then read English's *CIA Book Club*. Even when the Cold War was at its zenith, the so called Iron Curtain was permeable to ideas committed to print from fashion to politics. You may be asking 'I've got an iPhone, what's this got to do with my life?' Well, imagine for one minute that you couldn't doom scroll into the wee hours, that purchasing goods and services was not instantaneous and that you were restricted to accessing information that only a government authorised. Such a situation exists today in certain parts of the world – there are still iron curtains behind which information is finite and closely controlled. This is why the West attempts to keep Starlink communications available to the people of Iran (with an upper estimate of 50,000 terminals operating) and why the Iranian Government deems the medium illegal. Having said that, there may be a simpler option of ensuring the message gets through – print.

English describes how the CIA channelled a broad range of printed material and printing apparatus into the East. Focussed primarily on Poland, English describes the risks individuals took, how they operated and the extremes they suffered to ensure that there was an alternative to the communist message. English also exposes the psyche of the CIA during the Cold War where intellectual initiatives, such as the Book Club, were regarded as a relative backwater to core CIA outputs. Perversely, despite the amount of people involved in the operation and the numerous countries where smuggling was conducted, as it was considered an outlier operation in Langley, it remained covert and only in 2003 did details start to emerge of the range and scale of the initiative.

Ultimately, the contemporary takeaway is that readers may come to realise how difficult it is to kill an idea and how, even with our vast array of digital communications, print still has a part to play in getting the message through. Although regarded as low tech, it seems that printed material is likely to have some life left in it – otherwise why are the Taliban so focussed on suppressing widespread literacy?