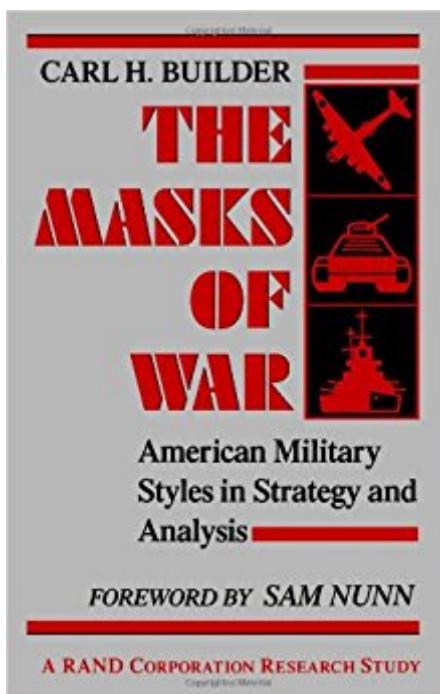


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The Masks Of War: American Military Styles In Strategy And Analysis: A RAND Corporation Research Study



Synopsis

Book by Builder, Carl

Book Information

Series: Rand Corporation Research Study

Paperback: 256 pages

Publisher: Johns Hopkins University Press; 1 edition (February 1, 1989)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0801837766

ISBN-13: 978-0801837760

Product Dimensions: 5.8 x 0.6 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 15.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.2 out of 5 stars 8 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #116,386 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #44 in Books > Textbooks > Social Sciences > Military Sciences #223 in Books > History > Military > Strategy #249 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > International & World Politics > Security

Customer Reviews

"Builder's provocative book is institutional profile at its best, probing far beyond the flip phrases that usually describe the essence of each service, e.g., that the Air Force likes things it can fly." (Foreign AffairsA RAND Corporation Research Study)

Military reformers have often been frustrated when what seem like highly rational ideas for greater military effectiveness meet with passive or active resistance by various sections of the military establishment. What Carl Builder did in this book was to abandon attempts of dredge through ancient history and instead try to understand what fundamental motivations the three major services bring to considerations of proposed change. He found each military service to be a complex organism with internal differences and tensions but each with a specific key motivational paradigm. As clearly stated by other reviewers, the Air Force sees the love of flight and flying to be the central principle that guides it forward, the Navy sees the sanctity of independent command of the ship as basic to its organizing principle and the Army sees itself as the faithful and dutiful servant of the nation and its population validated by its role and function in 1944/5. If this were all Carl Builder had done, it would have explained a great deal, but there is more to this book than some specific insight

that left to itself might be interesting but not all that significant. In addition, the author spent some time describing what he means by strategy and by analysis and then shows how each service's self image affects its style of doing strategy and doing analysis. Finally, Builder tries to wrap up his understanding of these matters by reviewing the implications for national military planning and the prospects of change. Something that makes this book all the more remarkable is that Builder, writing in 1989, just as the Soviet Union was coming to pieces, was able to see that the Army had already been repeatedly tasked with carrying out styles of war that really did not follow the 1944/45 triumph of the nation in arms narrative. He foresaw that this would continue to be the case and that the other two services would continue in their role of offering necessary support without having to question either of their fundamental self conceptions. He could not, of course, have predicted the unending war in the Islamic world of the "all-volunteer" force, but the challenge that has created for the Army's self conception would certainly be of no surprise to anyone using this work as a guide. In many ways, Builder so correctly captured today's reality from the perspective of 25 years ago. Close air support is still an orphan in the Air Force as it tries to shed the A10 force. Minesweeping is still the lowest status job in the Navy and the aircraft carrier is still king even though debate is allowed on the subject. Engineers and civil action assets are still undervalued in the Army. The tension between Special Operations and line combat arms in the Army goes on. He also made clear that in the final analysis, it was going to be the Army and its commitment to ground based action that would actually define American commitment to military activity. The best example of that after the writing of this book was in the Balkan wars where the use of or credible threat of ground force action was the factor that forces the Serbs to consent to the dismemberment of Yugoslavia. I think Builder really had the point of view that the personnel of the services were good and well meaning people but quite constrained by the necessarily strong internal cultures and cultural assumptions he identified. It is perhaps unfortunate that he used the word "toys" to describe the machinery of combat that each service employs, though he did try to explain he did not mean it as disrespectfully as it sounds. In the end, this book could seem discouraging to potential military reformers but Builder wanted to make the point that change had to be worked through the culture as it really existed, taking truly into account the fundamental and different self images of the services. From this point of view this work is of quite significant value. Many books are out there about our military and what is wrong with it and what needs to change. Reading this book should provide a better perspective on all the others.

A must read for the professional. I bought 5 of them for some folks who work for me. The material is timeless. Seminal Work.

good price; shipped quickly.

Seminal book on this topic-it is what you would expect it to be - somewhat dry and academic, but well written and worth a look

The book showed up on time and appeared to be like new. However, the binding completely fell apart on its first reading. I'm not at all rough on books, and this is the first time I've experienced it. However, it may be due to the age of the book.

The late Carl Builder researched and wrote this Rand Corporation study in the late 1980s. Its findings on military culture in the different services are as valid today as they were before the end of the Cold War ... perhaps more so. To understand the behavior of the military services, which sometimes seems contradictory, it is necessary to delve into their cultural make up. Builder does this with clarity and insight based on years of intimate involvement as a defense analyst. The Air Force, for example, is the embodiment of a single idea, one that also happens to be a strategy of war. It is not love of the Air Force but love of flight and flying machines that is the common bond of its members. The Navy, writes Builder, "jealously guards its independence and is happiest when left alone." It is perhaps the closest thing we have to a state within a state. The Army, on the other hand, is schizophrenic, viewing itself on the one hand as the loyal servant of the nation, but on the other hand the "heady memories of triumph in the closing months of World War II contradict this modest role." We are left to ponder how conditions in the post-Cold War era, and particularly with the advance of technology, will affect these cultural outlooks and service behavior. Will the Air Force ever accept a pilotless cockpit in one of its planes? Will the Navy, drawn closer to the littorals and within global reach of communications, surrender some of its cherished independence? Will the stunning success of ground forces in Operation Desert Storm supplant the glow of victory in World War II for the schizophrenic Army? "The Masks of War" is a terrific study and a great read. But it does leave some questions begging for answers. Builder does not explore the culture of the Marine Corps, which comes under the Navy Department. Nor does Builder address the distinct cultures of the reserve components, particularly Army National Guard and the Air National Guard. This is a great book for the beginning defense analyst and the old pro alike.

The book is well written and provocative. I used to use it as a supplemental text for my graduate

National Security Policy course and know others have used it that way as well. His characterizations of the culture of the individual armed services remains dead-on. Unfortunately, many of the examples are mired in the Cold War days and are therefore overtaken by events. Still, worth reading if you can find a copy on the cheap.

Mr. Builder does an excellent job of comparing and contrasting the styles of the three main branches of the U.S. military. From warfighting to peacetime, the approaches to missions, roles, procurement, leadership styles, and corporate cultures are studied. After reading it, I am convinced I should have joined the Army instead of the Navy.

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