

idiosyncrasies. As for the future Gray takes the reader down a pathway where war is not to disappear from the agenda of actors. Similar problems are to be expected into the 21st century. The actors may change, the instruments may be more refined, but strategic history is to repeat itself, strategic theory is to be utilised to address these problems and strategic ends, ways and means are to remain in the deadly game of strategy.

The publication perhaps presupposes some prior knowledge of the field of strategy, but then one has to consider that this remains a matter primarily for those at the senior political or military levels. As a reader, it is preferable that the publication is read a whole and not fragmented for its value is vested in the sum of its introduction, chapters and conclusions. It is quite a weighty publication of 412 pages (references included) with no explaining figures, diagrams or maps. It contains a complete and clear system of references and an index that could be of much value to the serious soldier-scholar.

This publication is a must for senior defence decision-makers and those officers finding themselves at the strategic and joint levels of operations. It is a blueprint to understand the difficulties of strategy, but simultaneously contains pathways towards understanding the phenomenon in itself. It allows for instant reference on the matters of strategy, although one should read and re-read this publication to properly understand its contribution to the modern strategic environment. On the one hand it pursues the meaning of strategy for decision-makers, on the other it promotes understanding for the soldier-scholar on issues being of primary and immediate importance to him for successfully pursuing a professional military career. It contributes to understanding the difficulty of strategy as a phenomenon for soldiers and politicians in their respective fields. *Modern Strategy* is a definite reader for staff course students in the South African National Defence Force and those involved in Strategic Studies, the use of the military instrument and coercion at the post-graduate level.

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BLACK HAWK DOWN: A STORY OF MODERN WARFARE

Mark Bowden

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392 pages

maps, photos

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Robert D. Kaplan in his illuminating article "The Coming Anarchy", published in the Atlantic Monthly of February 1994, emphasises the fact that "*Africa may be marginal in terms of conventional late-twentieth-century conceptions of strategy, but in an age of cultural and racial clash, when national defense is increasingly local, Africa's distress will exert a destabilizing influence on the United States*". This point was clearly illustrated during 1993 in a battle between American

forces and Somali militias in Mogadishu. Bowden's book focuses on this military action on 3 October 1993, when a US task force consisting of US Rangers and Delta force operators embarked on a mission to capture two high-ranking deputies of the militia leader Mohammed Farrah Aideed. Instead of a quick success, a so-called surgical operation, the American forces found themselves surrounded and pinned down in a hostile African city. The result was a drawn-out battle in which the fierce resistance of the Somali militia and civilians and the downing of two helicopters unhinged the American forces.

Bowden points out "*The Battle of the Black Sea, or as the Somalis call it, Ma-alinti (The Day of the Rangers), is one that America has preferred to forget. The images it produced of dead soldiers dragged by steering mobs through the streets of Mogadishu are among the most horrible and disturbing in our history, made all the worse by the good intentions that prompted our intervention.*" This early Clinton administration foreign-policy disaster led to the death of 18 US servicemen, the downing of two MH-60 Black Hawk helicopters, while 73 US servicemen were injured. It also led to the resignation of the Secretary of Defence, Les Aspin, and a total US troop withdrawal from Somalia. Both the politicians and the US military see it as a failure and an embarrassment. Bowden, a journalist with the Philadelphia Inquirer, emphasise the fact that he does not have any '*experience and expertise with the military*'. However, he succeeded in delivering a thorough, captivating account of the action in what he termed the 'Battle of the Black Sea' referring to the neighbourhood of the militia leader Mohammed Farrah Aideed.

Being a journalist, the author succeeded in bringing out the human element, both American and Somalian, in his book. He tracks in much detail – in some cases too much – the movements and fates of many individual American soldiers and a few Somalis during the battle. The book's focus is on the tactical level as it describes the action, situations and events during the battle itself. The author provides a moment-by-moment chronicle of the ground and air action during the battle. A few more maps would have given the reader a better understanding of the flow of the battle. In order to place the battle in the correct context, especially for the non-American reader, the author could have included more background information on the US's involvement in Somalia from a political and strategic perspective. However, it needs to be said that Bowden succeeded in wrapping up the whole US effort in the epilogue and afterword of the book.

According to the author he had "*the best chance any writer has ever had to tell the story of a battle completely, accurately, and well.*" It is clear that the book is based on thorough research. Bowden had access to all the official documentation: official reports, investigations and even videotapes and recordings of the radio traffic during the battle. He supplements this with extensive interviews with individuals, from both sides who participated in the battle: from the fighting soldiers to the commanders and even the American politicians involved. According to Bowden "*so many of the men who fought in this battle agreed to tell me their stories that most of the incidents related in this book, were described to me by several different soldiers.*" This provided the author with accurate and detail information to even include dialogue between soldiers during the fight. It also allowed for a narrative that is fascinating and dramatic. The narrative allows the reader to experience the blood and terror of modern war: "*(t)he noise was relentless: the shooting, grenade blasts, helicopter rotors, radio calls, men shouting, crying, groaning, screaming back and forth, trying to be heard over the din.*"

The book is a very sobering and realistic reminder of how dangerous war can be and how easy it is for soldiers to become over confident – the Americans in this case. It is also a reminder of how disastrous it can be to employ well trained statutory soldiers against a unconventional foe that is well experienced and acquainted with its local environment and, unlike America, not very sensitive to losses. More than 500⁺ Somali men, women, and children were killed and possibly a 1000 injured. This history of a small battle in Africa may well point to the future of warfare, the so-called ‘community wars’. Bowden described Mogadishu as a place of Mad Max-like anarchy: a place where there was never any peace for the peacekeepers (American forces) to keep. Anyone who would like to better understand the modern world, modern war and the role of violence in modern times should read this book. The book will leave the reader feeling sombre and dismayed. It is an excellent book to recommend to the general reader and the soldier scholar.

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