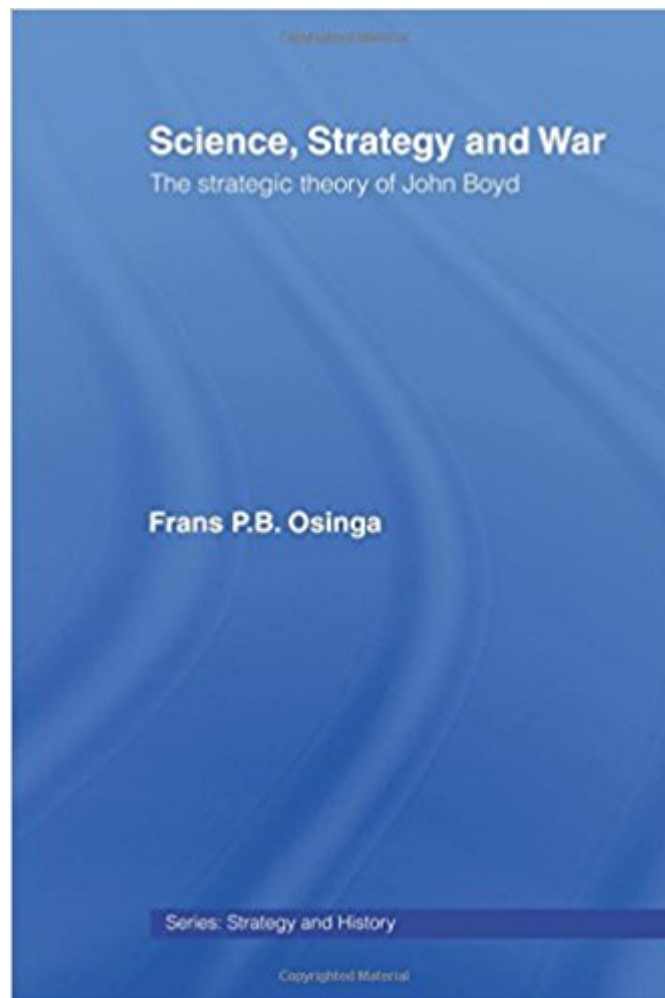




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# **Science, Strategy And War: The Strategic Theory Of John Boyd (Strategy And History)**



## Synopsis

John Boyd is often known exclusively for the so-called OODA loop model he developed. This model refers to a decision-making process and to the idea that military victory goes to the side that can complete the cycle from observation to action the fastest. This book aims to redress this state of affairs and re-examines John Boyd's original contribution to strategic theory. By highlighting diverse sources that shaped Boyd's thinking, and by offering a comprehensive overview of Boyd's work, this volume demonstrates that the common interpretation of the meaning of Boyd's OODA loop concept is incomplete. It also shows that Boyd's work is much more comprehensive, richer and deeper than is generally thought. With his ideas featuring in the literature on Network Centric Warfare, a key element of the US and NATO's so-called military transformation programmes, as well as in the debate on Fourth Generation Warfare, Boyd continues to exert a strong influence on Western military thinking. Dr Osinga demonstrates how Boyd's work can help us to understand the new strategic threats in the post- 9/11 world, and establishes why John Boyd should be regarded as one of the most important (post)modern strategic theorists.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

If you have any interest in war, this is a book your library cannot do without. Just as America cannot do without John Boyd's ideas, although our military has not yet figured that out. William Lind,

Military.com Osinga provides lucid expositions of the various elements that Boyd synthesized into some truly original formulations and ways of thinking about strategy. Lawrence Freedman, Foreign Affairs Osinga's book should be read by military professionals and academics alike, but also by anyone interested in the social and cultural impacts of science in general, and chaos and complexity theories in particular. Science, Strategy and War will and should remain required reading for years to come. Sean Lawson, Emergence --This text refers to the Digital edition.

Joint Air Power Competence Centre, HQ SACT, Virginia, USA --This text refers to the Digital edition.

Contrary to several reviewers of Osinga's book, I found it easy to read. The presentation of Boyd's concepts is lucid, logical, and leads the reader through some of the less obvious aspects of Boyd's work with commendable aplomb. The recent growth of interest in COL. Boyd's work led to certain mystification of it ("One has to be Boyd to understand Boyd" - as if one had to be Einstein to understand the Theory of Relativity!). It should not be so. As a matter of fact, the work of Boyd is straightforward and, like all general theories, relatively simple. Like any good general theory, it applies to essentially all situations and environments encountered within the field for which that theory has been created. In the case of Boyd, the field is practically all that pertains to any form of creative human activity. Hence, the major drawback of many analyses of Boyd's work (including the work of Osinga) is placing intellectual restraints on Boyd's Discourse, and consequent the insistence that it belongs only to the realm of military strategy and its lesser expressions. In reality, Boyd applies, and his work has been admirably fitted to, domains as varied as business, healthcare, homeland security, education and training etc. Boyd is a full and exhaustive precursor of what somewhat faddish business terminology describes nowadays as "adaptive leadership". His work goes, however much farther than that that, and in order to learn how to lead oneself, organizations, or even nations in turbulent, dynamically changing environments, one really needs not go further than Boyd's analyses. The greatest attribute of Osinga's book is making that point abundantly clear. Boyd IS simple, and it is this simplicity that often baffles the students of Boyd's work - it is that very same simplicity that leads to a profound synthesis of the exceedingly complex subject. Osinga helps the reader to understand these relationships, and helps the reader to understand that understanding Boyd's work leads to a higher form of knowing and interacting with the surrounding environment. It was the breadth of knowledge and intellectual curiosity rather than narrow professional specialization that allowed Boyd to see relations among facts and disciplines that have been entirely missed by others. It was the spirit of a generalist that allowed him to present his

quintessential analysis of patterns which constitute the basis of our responses to all, not only the military, challenges. Osinga's work provides a most needed bridge between those seeking solutions to these problems and John Boyd who provides seemingly simple, yet profound answers.

This is an excellent description of John Boyd's ideas. Osinga begins by summarizing key ideas expressed in the books Boyd read or cited--which is essentially a summary of several scientific schools of thought--as well as Boyd's analysis of military history. This provides a clear understanding of where Boyd started, and makes his own work easier to understand. Boyd took certain patterns, turns of phrase, and ways of thinking, from other field and applied them to war. The significance of this would not be clear had Osinga not provided the necessary background information. Equally valuable is Osinga's explanation of Boyd's essays and lectures, which are very abstract. Each one builds off the previous work, and in some ways that process is as important as the result. Boyd did not provide a comprehensive doctrine, but rather a mindset. This way of thinking permits the development of a doctrine suited to the circumstances. As Osinga demonstrates, the "OODA Loop" is NOT Boyd's only idea, or even his most important one. He also shows that the common belief that Boyd claimed the key to victory was rapidly cycling through the OODA Loop is incorrect. Successful armies act quickly, but acting quickly does not make an army successful. John Boyd's other ideas are difficult to summarize here without reproducing Osinga's excellent book, because they build on one another. But Osinga clearly and concisely connected the dots without overshadowing Boyd's own words. This book is as essential for understanding modern military theory as ON WAR.

I have read Boyd's papers (I have them all printed and filed in a massive binder), a handful of "Boydian" articles, and the books of Chet Richards. I always felt like I was coming up short. Well, this book solved my problem. Science, Strategy, and War covers every concept from Boyd (meaning it's not just a book about the OODA "loop") as well as their origins. You, the lucky reader, get to discover how Boyd formed his ideas, how they are applied, and how they all link together. So any of you who want to battle the armchair theorists or clueless executives who pretend they know about Boyd, or try to fumble through the implementation of some OODA-based strategy, I suggest you read and reread this book. Then USE it. Some business renegades (Steven Blank immediately comes to mind) have figured out how to strip the warfare context and use these ideas to rapidly test concepts in the real world before dumping millions into yet another failed start-up. Join that crowd, because Boyd's concepts are alive and well in both the private and public sectors, and are working

brilliantly when they aren't twisted up by bureaucratic meddling. Multiple thumbs up, and then some.

Keeping this short as most was said in other reviews. An extremely comprehensive view answering the questions of "what is strategy?" and "how do we make decisions?". Draws upon and documents the many influences on John Boyd's thinking and I believe focuses on the most relevant. Given the breadth of influences difficult to go too deep in specific areas but that is up to the reader's interests. This book combined with Marine Corps' "Warfighting" provides basis for any organization wanting to adopt agility as a cultural characteristic. I only wish I had discovered it sooner.

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