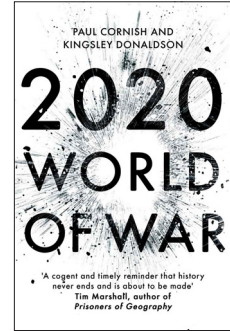


## Book Reviews

# 2020: WORLD AT WAR



**BY PAUL CORNISH AND KINGSLEY DONALDSON**

PUBLISHER: HODDER & STOUGHTON 2017, (ISBN-13:978-1473640337, 320 PAGES)

## REVIEWED BY WING COMMANDER ANGUS MACINTYRE

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**Biography:** Wing Commander Angus MacIntyre is a Chief of the Air Staff's Fellow and received an MA in Applied Security Strategy from Exeter University's Strategy and Security Institute. His thesis covers the declining influence of the UK in Africa, and what could be done to recover influence. Wing Commander MacIntyre is currently a desk officer in Military Strategic Effects, Operations Directorate

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### INTRODUCTION

Paul Cornish and Kingsley Donaldson's book is published at a time when there is a broad acceptance that the world is probably the most unstable it has been since 1946. The institutions and agreements that have kept Europe at peace are creaking; the big power alliances, such as NATO, are struggling to meet the threats posed by non-state actors, and the dramatic transfer of power away from the state to non-state actors challenges the accepted norms of how hard and soft power are utilised to meet national strategy, and enforce equilibrium and peace. Cornish and Donaldson argue that in this complex operating environment an absence of national strategy leaves governments in an entirely reactive position. They pursue the premise that, while the future cannot be predicted with certainty, it may be possible to predict where a crisis is likely to occur and skilfully avoid it before it becomes critical. However, an absence of national strategy can leave governments in an entirely reactive position.

Cornish and Donaldson use General Sir John Hackett's book *The Third World War, August 1985: A Future History* as a compass to navigate through a series of vignettes that present the reader (or Western governments) with a series of *crises*. In each vignette,

they consider how General Hackett would have viewed the slowly revealing drama. But before exploring each crisis, Cornish and Donaldson also set the context by providing realistic background scenarios which explain how the particular crisis being discussed emerged and the conditions that incubated it. Crises can be catalysed by unrequited ambition or outcomes that are left incomplete (China and Taiwan), deep festering old wounds (Pakistan and India), water scarcity, the requirements for hydrocarbons and minerals, balancing super-migration with oil sales, food scarcity, extremist religious interpretations, and the often-overlooked world of the dark net and cybercrime. All are powerful driving factors on their own, but become unstoppable when pitched together as an ensemble. Equally, an understanding of super-power politics is introduced so that the reader can appreciate that to create an effect in the East, something may need to be done in the West, whilst also ensuring that when a crisis is escalated to whip up domestic support at home, adequate preparations are made to allow a climb down without losing face. The authors demonstrate that trigger events and miscalculations could lead to overreactions, or worse, unanticipated reactions, which might lead to complete destruction.

The price of getting it wrong in a high stakes enterprise is presented well by Cornish and Donaldson. When a hard-edged strategy is pursued from which foreign policy is drawn, is it sufficiently coherent and flexible to allow room to manoeuvre in a crisis? How does a Government deal, for example, with the potential for nuclear weapons to fall into the hands of non-state organisations, or rogue state elements? How does a '*no first strike*' policy hold up to a high level of provocation in a crisis between India and Pakistan over the disputed Kashmir region, where one side may have lost control over its nuclear weapons to rogue elements? In the Egypt and Saudi vignettes, the difficulties of completely eradicating a rogue organisation (Al-Qaeda) are clearly exposed, against the likelihood that the organisation will reappear somewhere else under a new name (Daesh). Ideally, for the West, the long-term solution would be to address the extremist ideologies directly with a *hearts and minds* like strategy, but to be effective this could take generations and require long term investment and commitment. In reality, countering violent extremist ideology under current practice is entirely short-termist, tactical and kinetic.

This book is a must for students looking to understand and promote the study and use of national strategy, and reflects the current methods of teaching strategy by identifying a crisis, and then immersing the observer (be they students or practitioners) in it, and tracking the crisis through its entirety. The current resurgence in the study of national strategy, driven partly by the perceived absence of it, and a propensity of governments of any colour to 'muddle through', has been partly led by Paul Cornish and is evident in this and his other works. The book is a compelling read and should be understood as much more than an examination of a few worst-case scenarios. A strategist will never claim to be able to predict the future, but if you at least have a strategy, you can maintain a

direction of travel, identify your 'ends way and means', and minimise the impact of any speed bumps that you encounter along the way.

In his conclusion to *World War Three*, General Hackett noted:

*We who have put this book together know very well that the only forecast that can be made with any confidence of the course and outcome of another World War, should there be one, is that nothing will happen exactly as we have shown here.*

The first responsibility of any government is to defend its people, and Cornish and Donaldson make a very good attempt at predicting where crisis could come from in the complex global operating environment where we all now live. *Fact* can often be stranger than *fiction*, but the two idioms highlight well the total folly of national unpreparedness.



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