Few senior government officials leave lasting legacies. Admiral Stansfield Turner, who was Jimmy Carter’s director of central intelligence, is a notable exception. But he left his imprint not so much on CIA as on the Naval War College, where some still speak of the “Turner revolution.” Admiral Elmo Zumwalt, then chief of naval operations, sent Turner to Newport to reform the curriculum in the wake of the Vietnam War. Among the lessons of that unfortunate experience protracted war which, for all its ostensibly great power as a city-state, it could not maintain a reputation for decency, on the other, as Cleon and the Spartan King Pericles argue over the fate of the faithless Mytilenians. Then again, it is hard to contemplate a more straightforward, graphic description of Thucydides’ brilliant and students must write multiple essays that are graded. Moreover, events leading to the battle between the Athenian and Sicilian fleets in Syracuse’s harbor become in the hands of Thucydides a dramatic and poignant illustration of how clear strategic decision-making can found on the shoes of operational incompetence. Thucydides...
discusses the difficulties of land and sea powers in bringing their main forces to bear on each other, the dubious compatibility of democracy and domination, the effect of democratic process on defense planning and execution, the utility of economic and indirect warfare, and the uses and limitations of fifth column movements. All form the intellectual warp and woof of this splendid work, written almost two and a half millennia ago with an acuity and depth of insight which have rarely been matched and never surpassed.

Although Thucydides consciously tried to write a possession for all time—which explains in part why his work remains intelligible today—he could not avoid taking some knowledge for granted lest he bore his contemporary readers to tears by telling them ad nauseam what they already knew. Serious students of Greek history, with access to other sources and modern analyses, can fill in the gaps created by time. Others who wish to understand Thucydides without taking history courses—be they students of strategy or modern political science—will find help in a new edition of this difficult but rewarding work, The Landmark Thucydides, edited by Robert B. Strassler. In this new edition readers will find not only the most accurate (albeit not necessarily the most readable) translation of Thucydides, which has been slightly updated by Strassler, but a number of highly readable appendices by some of the foremost scholars in the field as well. The essays cover Athens' government and empire, idiosyncratic domestic institutions in Sparta and the nature of its alliance, land and sea warfare, ancient Greek dialects, religious festivals, monetary systems, and Greek calendars. These appendices are masterpieces of concision and clarity. Together with an insightful and elegant introduction by Victor Davis Hanson, Thucydides is rendered much more intelligible and enjoyable for nonspecialists. What is more, Strassler has included the most useful collection of maps—141 in all—at every assembled in any edition of Thucydides. These allow readers to walk unknown terrain in ancient Greece and become familiar with the names and nature of its battlefields. Finally, the volume includes a complete, user-friendly index that will serve not only students but scholars who want to locate passages quickly when they remember only the subject.

In sum, it is difficult to imagine an edition that could do more to make this great classic by Thucydides accessible to students, amateurs and, not least importantly, officers at senior colleges interested in the essence of strategy. The only remaining service to be performed for the benefit of would-be readers must come from the publisher—The Free Press—which, after a decent interval, should bring out The Landmark Thucydides in an affordable paperback.