

## Book Review: “*Difesa, Sicurezza ed Economia. Enrico Barone e la Guerra tra Razionalità e Sentimento*” by Catia Eliana Gentilucci, ESI, Napoli, 2017

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<sup>2</sup>doi:10.23756/sp.v5i2.395



### Abstract

Barone proposes a theory of war influenced by marginalist theory and Prussian military thought which is critical of historical determinism and includes the belief that the main reason of social evolution is the search for power.

**Keywords:** War and Economy, Enrico Barone, Prussian military thought.

If we look at the way in which studies focusing on military history or analysing the military in a more general sense are received in Italy, the picture which emerges is not promising.

From a methodological point of view, we can say that military studies develop along three lines: the first focuses on the struggle between nations in a political and diplomatic sense, and does not require particular military skill; the second, or *histoire bataille*, is more technical and generally left to members of the military; the third is a study of military institutions, their dealings with countries in times of peace and war and their internal dynamics.

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<sup>2</sup> © Enrico Pino. Received: 5-10-2017. Accepted: 27-12-2017. Published: 31-12-2017.

This sort of analysis is generally left to sociologists and researchers in a variety of subjects.

If the first two can be said to have their own "market", the last, increasingly viewed as a "niche" subject for few insiders, produces works of high value which are largely ignored by the media and public opinion, unaccustomed as they are to deal with the subject of defence, the military readiness of a country and the economics of war. It can be argued that Italy, as one of the major world players in an economic and military sense, should tackle these subjects in the same way as they are in Anglo-Saxon countries, where the leading national newspapers run articles on military policy and discuss changing military doctrines without fear of sounding politically incorrect.

Italy, however, is home to authors who examine military institutions, their theorists and the relations between military and civil society but remain largely ignored. Consequently, observations and intuitions that might be useful to the country are not shared with political decision-makers, who are increasingly geared towards choosing short-term measures over wide-scale strategic policies.

This is the case of a volume by Catia Eliana Gentilucci, researcher in the history of economic thought at the University of Camerino, entitled *"Defence, security and economics. Enrico Barone and the war between logic and emotion"*<sup>3</sup>, in which she performs an in-depth review of the writings of Enrico Barone, a member of the Italian High Command who was a gifted military historian, economist and sociologist. A truly eclectic individual who was also one of the most interesting military theorists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and whose writings, in particular, stressed the importance of overcoming the above-mentioned division between military and civil life in the hope that the military, cultural and social spheres of life in their various components (above all economic) would become more closely connected.

Enrico Barone (1859-1924) voluntarily took his leave from the Army after being promoted to the rank of Colonel. Though he was an able teacher, serving in the main military academies as well as being one of the foremost Italian scholars of military matters, he is known to national and international literature almost exclusively as a neoclassical economist; a unique member of the military, equipped with "two souls": the soldier by training and profession, the economist by vocation.

As a soldier he is a source of precious ideas and insights on the subject of war. His theories were well-ahead of their time, inspired as he was by von Clausewitz, a figure he was aware of well before the Italian translation of *Vom Kriege* was published in 1942. In fact, when Barone becomes professor of Military Science at the War College, Turin, in 1887, he publishes his "Lezioni

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<sup>3</sup> Napoli, Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane 2017.

di Arte Militare" (Lessons on military strategy). This work is inspired by Clausewitz's *On War* and it shows the strong influence of the Prussian military tradition on his military theories on war and, subsequently, the economic and social theories that will become his main focus.

It is clear from a study of his military analyses that Prussia's military victories did not depend on a superior military technology, nor on the increased aggressiveness of its soldiers, but instead could be seen in the intellectual capacity of the military tool to obey a clear political mandate within a command system founded on the autonomy and accountability of the officer corps, as well as the ability to rapidly adapt to unpredictable events on the battlefield.

These considerations have found little acknowledgement from the world of Italian politics, which has not always seen the military complex as a "tool" to be utilised responsibly in foreign policy. This can help us understand why, in the last century, Italian military history has been so troubled starting from the first Libyan campaign. In this case, the government only informed the Chief of Staff of the Army of their decision to proceed with the campaign one month before it was due to commence.

As he was aware of the fact that the Army had already planned for overseas operations, Prime Minister Giolitti thought that briefing General Pollio on starting the campaign by September was a mere formality, and this speaks volumes on the consideration politicians had for the difficulties that had to be overcome during a military campaign.

A few years later, Marshal Cadorna was not given any information, nor allowed to have his say, on the methods and schedule of Italian intervention in the European (First World) war. At the outbreak of hostilities in Europe he hastened to show the King the plans for Italy's participation in the war of the Triple Alliance, of which Italy was a member. These involved sending some divisions to the German army as reinforcements, but Cadorna was taken by utter surprise when a declaration of neutrality was issued a few days later.

During the meeting with the Italian Prime Minister which he immediately requested, Cadorna instinctively knew that he should start thinking about planning a war against long-standing enemy Austria, though he received no formal communication about it. This shows the notable lack of harmony between Government and military authorities in an extremely delicate moment for the country. A lack of harmony which was to continue, as the Government chose to cultivate contacts with the warring parties in secret, leaving the military leaders, who should have been responsible for managing the war, in the dark. Political conduct and military conduct, instead of communicating as they should have, were like completely watertight compartments, as if independent one from the other.

The gulf between politics and the military was harmful during the Second World War, too, starting with the choice of when to join the hostilities. Mussolini actually declared war on France and Great Britain on 10 June 1940, even though General Graziani had confirmed a piece of intelligence some months earlier, in April: the Italian Armys' current state of readiness stood at 40%. The politician decided to take a risk in military matters, a field in which technical considerations should have taken precedence, as the level of military readiness was so low.

Barone's idea of the need for more communication between the political and military worlds has, therefore, been observed in military events of the past, with consequences we know all too well.

The need for integration should be considered by present-day politicians, too, seeing as troops are often sent to crisis areas without the necessary mandate from Parliament being clear; this happens because political forces tend to be split according to electoral requirements and when the time comes to make difficult decisions the ground commander, not having the unanimous backing of Parliament and the nation, is often under great pressure.

Some blame can surely be laid on the inefficiency and impossibility of military leaders to adapt quickly to changing situations, but what has been lacking in the past and is lacking still is the autonomy and accountability mentioned by Barone. A telling example of this is offered by the "caveats" limiting rules of engagement during missions, forcing the commander to bow down to political requirements without necessarily considering that this could be counter-productive for military operations.

This link between the political and military world recurs often in Barone's thinking, sure as he is that historical, economic and military events should be analysed in such a way as to reveal their interconnectedness in order to choose the most effective decision-making processes for politics.

These ideas are visionary and contemporary, as are his considerations on the nature of war, which he expresses in the following syllogism: "War is a terrible thing; 2. War is fatal, immanent; 3. One must therefore prepare carefully in order to be able to do it well".

Of all Italian Twentieth century scholars, Barone anticipates a view of war as the immanent image of the evolution of the history of civilisations, and in his interpretation war becomes morally instructive, a time in which virtue, namely the faculties of the soul like courage, audacity, boldness and sacrifice, is exalted, while he sees no guarantee that peace brings economic equilibrium and social well-being. However, he states that if peace is desired, it must be supported by using arms; sustained, that is, through an economic effort which finances military equipment which has the dual goal of deterrence and dissuasion. A nation cannot set off on the road towards eternal peace unarmed, and waiting until it is too late to start making preparations for war is

unadvisable: forces and economic resources must already be deployed in times of peace.

Consequently, if Barone in his "military" incarnation views social evolution as being influenced by situations of conflict or periods of armed peace, Barone the "economist" perceives two distinct types of economics: the economics of war, in which the state submits its industry to an organised system in order to satisfy the requirements of war, and military economics, understood as a form of political economy implemented by a country in times of peace in order to ensure that defence and internal security are upheld.

In substance, the financial costs of war and maintaining a military force are necessary for Barone; therefore, the legitimacy of military costs and wars is not called into question, but how to best employ military institutions and the army within a normal national policy is fundamental. In this aspect, too, he is just as relevant to modern culture.

His studies on economics contain another important consideration, and one which is emphasised very well by Gentilucci.

In Barone's words, *"it is often to be observed in the history of thought: nordic theories, children of the snow, descend triumphant to Italy, only to dissolve in the ardent rays of our logic"*.

That is to say that applying economic and social models in places which are foreign to the culture that generated them is never easy. The idea that an economic model created in a particular historical context cannot be applied in the same way in another cultural milieu is entirely relevant, seeing as one of the main criticisms of Europe has been the unconditional application of the German model of economic logic to all national economies, independently of their historical traditions.

The basic problem of the Europe of today is, in fact, that the Mediterranean (Spanish – Italian) social model is very different to the German, and politics should take that into account and act accordingly.

The author reflects a great deal on Barone's world, which is interdisciplinary and removed from the economic dogmas that were shared by the orthodox academia of his time, and she is right to conclude that *«war is part of the social system, an ever-present and active aspect of human relations, it pushes relations between State and individual to the extreme, it is the fight for survival and economic conquest, reason and emotion, impulsiveness, built into the evolution of civilisations, a clash of ideologies and fight for power. It is, in short, a complex problem which must be tackled with all available instruments of analysis, economic, sociological, historical and military, in times of peace»*. In essence, analysing war exclusively in the confines of military or economic thought is limiting and Gentilucci, in explaining Barone's perspective, gives us ample proof of this.

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We hope that this type of study on war and peace does not come to nothing, as studies of a military and sociological nature have shown us that war events are an integral part of the system and have applications in fields other than geopolitical.

It is hoped that Gentilucci's studies on this subject might be pursued and that the political world realises that Italian military thought can be innovative and worthy of consideration.