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Infinity Journal

War and Strategy: BACK TO BASICS

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Introducing "Back to Basics"

Strategic history is ever changing. At any one point around the world wars come to a close, while simultaneously others appear. These changes, however, can lead to the view that so much of – if not everything – happening today is new and the future can only be novel. With superpower ambitions rising in the East, tensions are increasing and driving the development of new military concepts to address perceived nascent threats. From anti-access to cyber, "new" concepts stir debate about where war and strategy fit in, or perhaps more accurately, where these concepts fit within war and strategy. Despite these current issues of the day driving the need for "the new", essentially nothing new is happening – the fundamentals of war and strategy still apply. To demonstrate this, we have chosen 12 articles that, in their own way, shows the enduring nature of war and strategy even in current times, offering for our readers a quick 'back to basics' primer.

This edition begins with three IJ Briefs that provide short, easily digestible perspectives on what strategy is, the importance of clarity in terminology, and how the study of war and strategy is essential to students and practitioners in international relations. It continues with five select articles that cover everything from the place of war in the 21st Century to the importance of strategic theory in contemporary war. Following this basis in strategic theory we have provided four articles that are either unique to strategy or are misunderstood in a strategic context.

Colin S. Gray, in "Another Bloody Century", argues "that there is sufficient continuity amid the change in strategic history for us to be confident that the 21st will be yet another bloody century — as usual." With ongoing wars in Afghanistan, Somalia, and Syria, and the probability of new ones always on the verge of breaking out, Gray's prediction is most likely correct. As humans perpetually caught up with our own experiences, we must be reminded that the logic of war is enduring across history.

William F. Owen's "Seek and Destroy: the forgotten strategy for countering armed rebellion" purports, "that as insurgencies are violent armed rebellions, defeating them via military force is the measure from which all other success flows." In a military environment wedded to a population-centric approach after a decade of experimentation, some may find Owen's conclusions uncomfortable. However, from the Battle of the Saw to the Sri Lankan civil war, the history of war seemingly proves that Owen's argument is largely accurate.

In another article by Colin S. Gray, "Strategy: Some notes for a user's guide", it is held that "Strategy is a 'high concept' that nearly everyone claims to value." However briefly, Gray explores and explains, through short topics on "education in strategy" to "the dilemma of ignorance" to the unchanging nature and the ever-changing character of strategy, that the concept's "nominal popularity typically is celebrated in its attempted application by a host of potentially disabling difficulties."

In the article "Explaining Strategic Theory", M.L.R. Smith and John Stone clarify what is often perceived as complex. In their words, "The word strategy is an over-used and much misunderstood term" and the authors attempt to "show how strategic theory should be conceived as an analytical method" and in doing so "demonstrate how strategic theory offers a mind-opening and intellectually liberating path that is able to clarify complexity." Ultimately, Smith and Stone show that strategic theory is not as difficult as many perceive.

Adam Elkus has written on one of the most important and misunderstood ideas in war and strategy, "The Policy-Strategy Distinction". By applying Clausewitz's distinction between these two terms, Elkus "explains Clausewitz's distinction between policy and strategy and argues for its signal importance in 21st century strategy." For Elkus, "it's not just semantics: knowledge and proper application of Clausewitz's ideas about policy and strategy can help military analysts think better about today's security problems, while a poor understanding of the policy-strategy distinction can produce conceptual confusion." Is Elkus correct that Clausewitz's distinction, written nearly 200 years ago, still applies? Events, both contemporary and current, suggest that it does.

Moving beyond strategic theory, we have provided four articles dedicated to clarifying concepts frequently misunderstood. Grand strategy is a concept under constant scrutiny, as it is often applied commonly and generally. In "The Mythology of Grand Strategy", Lukas Milevski holds, "The common history of grand strategic thought is dominated by only a couple of names, and the interpretation of this history is dominated by assumptions about the trajectory the evolution of the concept has taken based upon misinterpretations of the past. These two factors blend together into a mythology which not only obscures most of

the real history and development of grand strategic thought but also supports the current major interpretations of the concept, which are otherwise unquestioned and arguably unjustified. Ultimately, the way to a full and conscientious understanding of grand strategy necessarily lies through a serious study of the concept's history." This is sage advice. Like all elements of war, a deep analysis into history and strategic theory provide more clarity for today's complex issues.

Like grand strategy, discourse on the very merits of strategic culture continues in earnest. Some thinkers hold strategic culture to be one of the most important topics in understanding war and strategy. However, strategy itself is ubiquitous. As Michael I. Handel noted in his seminal work on classical strategy, "the basic logic of strategy, like that of political behavior, is universal". Particular strategies, however, will differ from culture to culture. Yet the latter begs the great strategic question, "so what?" In the article "Strategic Culture: more problems than prospects", Antulio J. Echevarria II writes, "Over the last thirty-five years, strategic culture has become a popular and influential concept." However, and importantly, he argues, "Proponents of the concept have never truly reconciled its inherent tensions."

The literature on so-called cyberwar and cyber strategy is voluminous, perhaps overly so. Debatably, many are putting too much emphasis on an area that might not be so complex, as regards war and strategy. One clear issue is that many writers on cyberwar and cyber strategy do not fully grasp the fundamentals of strategy, and ultimately, that all cyber power is governed by the one general theory of strategy. In his piece "'Cyberwar' is not coming", David Betz persuasively argues that there is "much similarity between today's talk of decisive 'cyberwar' and the overblown claims of the prophets of air power almost a hundred years ago."

Lastly, Nathan K. Finney has penned one of the clearest articles on one of the more opaque concepts to enter the military lexicon: AirSea Battle. A key question is, why is ASB, the newest concept for the US military, not tied to an enemy or a desired policy? One answer seems to stem from the original document itself, which did not sufficiently explain the concept. Subsequent articles claim it is a strategy, while others suggest that ASB is an American response that is specific to the growing interests in the Asia-Pacific domain – that it is a military answer to dealing with China, should that become necessary. In "Air-Sea Battle as a Military Contribution to Strategy Development", Finney incisively explains to readers that, "A large degree of the discussion on the United States' focus on the Asia-Pacific has conflated Air-Sea Battle with strategy." He argues that "Air-Sea battle and its associated concepts are in reality merely the military's contribution to strategy development; a starting point in the negotiation."

Each of these items has been selected to act as a primer for minds curious to understand war and strategy. It is our hope that in your pursuit for greater knowledge, clarity, and insights into both of these topics, you will find these past articles to be a potent source of assistance.

A.E. Stahl
Publisher, Infinity Journal
December 2013

Note: all articles in this special edition have been published in past issues of Infinity Journal. No aspect of the articles has been altered, including author biographies. In some instances, author biographies may have changed since the publication of the original articles.

Contents

IJ Brief What is Strategy?

What are we talking about? The noun and the adjective, strategy and strategic, are so commonly, indeed casually employed that it can be shocking to appreciate how frequently they are misapplied. Given the very high stakes of this subject for national and international security, misunderstanding and therefore misuse of the concept of strategy can be dangerous and expensive. Fortunately, such perils and costs are as easily avoidable as they are gratuitous. For an efficient definition of strategy, the following has sufficient merit to serve well enough: "Military strategy is the direction and use made of force and the threat of force for the purposes of policy as decided by politics".[i] This definition obviously and suitably is heavily indebted to Carl von Clausewitz, who told us, "Strategy is the use of the engagement for the purpose of the war".[ii] What matters most for the definition of strategy is that it must be crystal clear in the necessary assertion that the subject is all about instrumentality. Strategy is about the use made of force for political purposes. Strategy is not the application of force itself, that is warfare and there is a professional term for it – tactics. Combat is tactics and tactical, the use made of that combat is strategy.

All military behaviour has some strategic meaning, be it ever so minor, net positive or negative, but it is not inherently strategic. It may make sense to consider war as having strategic, operational, and tactical levels, but all forces of all kinds behave tactically, just as they all contribute to net strategic effect. Despite conceptual abuses asserting to the contrary, there are no strategic forces. Strategic always refers to the consequences of military behaviour, not to its conduct. "Long-range", "nuclear", or "most important", are not synonyms for strategic. An important reason for this apparent pedantry is to enable, at least encourage, strategic thought about the forces in question. It can be very hard to recognize the need for strategic thought about forces that one has already labelled strategic. Surely, everything they do must be strategic, by definition?

The conceptual architecture of strategy is expressed most economically in the simple three-way formula of policy ends, strategic ways, and military means – with the whole construction fuelled substantially by prevailing assumptions. Since strategy is always future-leaning, rather than retrospective, the unavoidability of assumptions is obvious. It is important to remember that assumptions are never empirically certain; if they were they would be facts. Strategic thoughts and plans for tomorrow or the day after are especially in need of reminder that future events are incapable of empirical verification now. Each leg of the triad for strategy is essential to the integrity of the whole project. If policy goals are either missing from the action or can provide no meaningful guidance, then the strategist cannot select ways in which to achieve (unspecified) ends. Should strategy and its selected ways be absent from proceedings, then the action by the military means must be conducted according to no purposefully intelligent design beyond its immediate tactical opportunistic significance. And finally, if the military means are not able or willing to fight hard enough or smart enough to beat the enemy's military means, it will not matter what policy goals and strategy might be, because the whole enterprise will collapse in failure.

It is argued convincingly that policy (meaning politics) and strategy are relatively more important than are their tactical military means, because tactical mistakes can be corrected, provided the geography of a war allows you a sufficient sanctuary in space and time. In sharp contrast, political error and strategic error typically are fatal for a contemporary conflict; they can only be corrected in time for the next war.[iii] If this sounds remarkably like NATO's adventures in Afghanistan, so be it!

Strategy functions in historical experience in the form of particular plans for using the threat and use of force to solve the problems of the day. It is important, however, to recognize the distinction between strategies to do "this" or "that" now, and Strategy (capitalized perhaps) the subject. The latter, Strategy, is an eternal and ubiquitous function that all security communities have required, past, present, and we can anticipate with extremely high confidence, future also. Human security communities – extended families, clans, tribes, states, even gangs of bandits – have to do strategy, functionally understood, because they all have purposes (political ends) that need protecting or advancing by choice of effective methods (strategic ways), using whatever instruments of coercion (military means), they have or can acquire. All human social communities seek security through a stable and advantageous distribution of power. This quest for security both internally and inter-communally has a generic name, politics. We do politics because we are human and we always find that we need it. And in order to manage the relationships of power distribution one has to do strategy.

To cite this Article: "What is Strategy?", *Infinity Journal*, IJ Brief, March 2013.

It does not matter that strategy in our common meaning of the word, distinctive from tactics, did not appear in English, French, German, or Italian, until the 1770s, our ancestors of all races and persuasions conducted strategy as the use of available means in effective ways to achieve political ends. [iv] The idea that polities in Ancient and Mediaeval times could not have thought or behaved strategically because they did not have a word for it, or an obvious synonym to our contemporary meaning of it, in their language, is simply absurd. The idea of a strategy-absent Roman Empire is ludicrous. The necessity for strategic thought and behaviour is a condition of secure political existence. The 30 Legions of Imperial Rome and their Auxiliary support were not deployed at random.

The strategists who must devise and execute strategies for their day are able to seek and find educational help in the general theory of Strategy. This theory explains what Strategy is, what it does, and how and why it works. The principal authors of the theory, of course writing in the language and with some of the stamp of their time, place, and circumstances, most notably were Thucydides, Sun-tzu, Niccolo Machiavelli (arguably), and Carl von Clausewitz. The two and a half millennia of provenance of the shortlist of classics on the theory of strategy attests more than adequately to the persistence of thought about Strategy in general, and to the persistence of its practice of strategy in local particulars of time, place, and context. Discontinuities in detail of character abound, but continuity in nature is the enduring reality of strategic history.

Endnotes

[i] Colin S. Gray, The Strategy Bridge: Theory for Practice (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p.262.

[ii] Carl von Clausewitz, On War, eds., Michael Howard and Peter Paret (1832-4; Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), p.177.

[iii] "Mistakes in operations and tactics can be corrected, but political and strategic mistakes live forever". See Williamson Murray, War, Strategy, and Military Effectiveness (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p.33.

[iv] On the historical provenance of 'strategy' the concept, see the outstanding discussion in Beatrice Heuser, The Evolution of Strategy: Thinking War from Antiquity to the Present (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), ch.1, "What is Strategy?"

IJ Brief Terminology: Clarity, Context and War

Within the halls of academia, doctrine-writing shops, and other institutions of prolific pontification two phrases are frequently bandied about: *words matter* and *context is king*. And while these two phrases have been overused almost to the point of cliché, their accuracy in the context of war and strategy cannot be overstated.

First, let's address the importance of terminology. Indeed, as the phrase says, *words matter*, but not just any words. The words must accurately describe "the thing" in as brief and clear language as possible. It is next to impossible, however, in the realm of politics, war and strategy, all of which are inherently human endeavors, to sum up such complex concepts in pithy alliterations and catchy buzzwords, despite what modern military doctrine and twenty-four hour news cycles lend us to believe.

The language that most clearly and accurately describes the topics important to strategists is not the overly scientific and "insider" language found in other disciplines. The language – the words used – most useful for describing strategy can be found in a common dictionary (though the dictionary definition of strategy itself is quite problematic). However, the genius found in the great works of modern strategy is not prophetic simply through their use of common language, but rather how they use it to clearly describe the complex interaction of humans in politics and war. Their genius comes from their clear description of how these interactions impact – and are impacted by – the context.

And this brings us to our second phrase: *context is king*. Besides being wonderfully pithy and alliterative, why is this phrase important to strategy? In the main, it is because strategy is 'all context'. Without an understanding of what is occurring, why it is occurring (including historical context), how is it occurring, and what an actor is trying to achieve, then there is no strategy. In other words, to truly understand a 'thing', and thereby attempt to change it according to some desired policy, those that are developing the strategy must know the context in which it is occurring and how it can be channeled to achieve a desired strategic effect.

Additionally, as described above, the complex nature of politics, war, and strategy cannot simply be described in catch phrases and buzzwords. These areas of human endeavor require narrative, not bullet points on a PowerPoint slide. Therefore, the context in which strategists lay out their work is as important as the language they use. The context must describe the key elements – most important of which is the "why". Without the context of the political and strategic effect that policy makers aim to achieve, the ends (policy), the other two elements of strategy, the *ways* and the *means*, are largely worthless.

With the concepts of words and context in mind, and in the spirit of education that is at the core of Infinity Journal's mission, let us be very clear in our terminology here; namely in regards to the terms *politics*, *war* and *strategy*.

Far too often, when people hear the word 'politics' what immediately comes to mind are politicians or places, such as The White House, 10 Downing Street, Moscow Kremlin, The Knesset, CPC Politburo, and so on. Politics is not about a place or one's occupation as a politician. Moreover, one may hear pithy statements such as "power over people" or, as the eminent American political scientist Harold Lasswell once wrote, "who gets what, when, how". Although correct, they do not give us a sufficient understanding of what politics is. Let us be clear: politics is all about the distribution of power. The White House and the politicians found there, using one example, represent simply one place where politics is occurring, albeit on a large scale. Politics is best understood as a cycle concerning how power is distributed. That is, politics is the distribution and the redistribution of power that occurs both over and amongst any human community – a definition more along the lines of the views of Max Weber; though, reading between the lines you can see Lasswell's "who gets what, when, how" in that definition as well.

War is not simply the interaction of two state-sanctioned militaries interacting through military means. Rather, war is the use of violence as one tool of politics in order to compel an adversary to do your will.[i] The violence can take many forms and your desired effect of an adversary can be infinite, but what always remains is that it involves the use of force as an instrument to achieve an end. War is a political act to create a political change in an adversary that is beneficial to your own situation.

Strategy is a process of negotiation between those that develop the ends (policy makers) and those that execute, through ways and means, war.[ii] This negotiation creates a narrative for employing the forces in such a way as to create the desired effect on an adversary. It is not a static product

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designed to allocate resources for a set contingency, nor simply a plan of action updated every five years. It is a living and breathing process undertaken by and between human beings that is dedicating to determining the best policy for a desired outcome against an adversary, which must have the capacity to use or threaten violence, and how to develop and employ resources to achieve it. Any definition of strategy must contain the element of violence. The reason is simple: if one has no means (combat), one cannot have a strategy.

As can be seen by just the three concepts briefly illustrated above, the words used and the context described show that *words matter* and *context is king*. This is not only important to Infinity Journal (and are the standards to which we rigorously hold all submitted articles), but to a more thorough understanding of politics, war and strategy.

Endnotes

[i] Howard, Michael and Peter Paret, eds. Carl von Clausewitz: On War (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), pages 75-99 and 603-610.

[ii] The best description of strategy as a negotiation can be found in: Colin S. Gray, The Strategy Bridge: Theory for Practice (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

IJ Brief Bringing the Fundamentals of Strategy to IR

Are you a student of international relations (IR)? Are you finding IR theory elegant, but detached? Are you wondering whether something essential has been left out of a discipline that covers centuries of warfare, but not sure what? Are you finding yourself asking how the winners win, and the losers lose? Or what strategy actually is and how is it developed? Or what war is, and why is it important, and whether it is ever unimportant?

We at Infinity Journal believe a solid grasp of the fundamentals of war and strategy is absolutely critical for a true understanding how states and non-state actors interact with one another. War is a fundamental aspect of international relations. Always has been; always will be. And, yet, most IR courses talk around war, as if it were ancillary, something avoidable, an aberration — so long as war isn't studied, it isn't a threat.

Unfortunately, most IR degrees do not offer the student a full appreciation for how strategy works or how war extends the reach of policy. Many IR courses do not actually give us a functional understanding of policy.To get that understanding, we have to make a special effort, take additional courses, study the history of warfare, and talk to military practitioners.

The good news: it can be done, and for a true education, our efforts along such lines are well worth the price. To be clear, international realtions – and the theories that are a part of this area of study – is a truly wonderful discipline: it both enlightens and obscures; it instructs and obstructs. What other field can do as much? To know the difference, we have to be critical, even skeptical.

But, where to turn? If we don't have the experience to temper theory, and can't realistically understand it, what are we to do? Let's be clear, all theories require tempering, not only IR theories. We must check them against practice, even if we are not practitioners ourselves. As the great military theorist, Carl von Clausewitz[i], reminded us: "Just as some plants bear fruit only if they do not shoot up too high; so in the practical arts the leaves and flowers of theory must be pruned, and the plant kept close to its proper soil—experience." [ii] So, if we are not practitioners, our knowledge of the fundamentals of war and strategy become all the more important. That knowledge can help us prune theory, making sure that our theory is sound and will help us understand the larger picture.

The list of necessary fundamentals is not a long one. While perhaps overly simplistic but befitting for this brief, we can place five into numbering format:

- It includes understanding that war is a violent contest of opposing political wills;
- That war takes place within an atmosphere of chance and uncertainty;
- And, that war is a continuation of political intercourse by other means.

War extends the reach of policy by allowing political leaders to communicate their intentions through military power whether employed on land, sea, or in the air, when, for example diplomacy fails.

The list of fundamentals must also include the following fourth and fifth items on our list of necessary basics on war and strategy.

- A functional definition of strategy — as the "bridge" that connects political aims and means.[iii] Concerning bridges — what was it, for instance, that made German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck a remarkable strategist in terms of his foreign policies, but a near failure with regard to his domestic policies?
- To answer the latter question, we need to have a working knowledge of military history. Military history assists us in understanding how wars have been fought over time and across cultures — and political history, which tells us how people have prioritized their political choices.

Regrettably, we will not find these items discussed appropriately in IR courses; but they are incredibly essential to the IR student, if he or she wishes to truly understand why war is one of the most consequential ways in which political entities have interacted with one another throughout history, and the critical role that strategy plays.

The field of international relations is justifiably rich in theory. It has to be. IR is about explaining the behavior of states and non-states, and about finding patterns in that behavior. This, too, is valuable knowledge. It can help us make better policies and strategies. But, in our view, that goal of understanding can

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never be reached without a firm grasp of the fundamentals of war and strategy because theory limits our understanding at least as much as it enlarges it. It is no better than the agendas, biases, and ignorance of its authors allow it to be. Theory, if left to its own devices, will take on a life of its own. To prevent that, we need Clausewitz's pruning shears, and the ability to use them with confidence and precision.

At Infinity Journal, we aim to help with the pruning. The articles we publish get at the heart of the fundamentals we discussed above. It is the scholars and practitioners who write these articles, some of whom are both. We don't eschew theory; nor do we privilege practice. We seek to understand strategy better, both in theory and practice.

Infinity Journal is more than a publication on the theory and practice of strategy. We, at Infinity Journal, are dedicated to helping you better understand war and strategy – whether you are a student or academic, military practitioner or policymaker.

Endnotes

[i] Infinity Journal highly recommends reading so-called "primers" to Clausewitz, prior to jumping into the Prussian military theorist's Magnum Opus, On War. We recommend reading various writings by such scholars as Antulio J. Echevarria II, Colin S. Gray, Hugh Smith, Christopher Bassford, Christopher Daase, Daniel Moran, and Peter Paret, among many others. However, feel free to email us to ask for specific recommendations, and we will do our best to assist you.

[ii] Carl von Clausewitz, On War, trans. by Michael Howard and Peter Paret, (Princeton: Princeton University, 1984), 61.

[iii] Colin Gray, The Strategy Bridge: Theory for Practice (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

Another Bloody Century?

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Professor Colin S. Gray is a strategist, author and professor of international relations and strategic studies at the University of Reading, where he is also the Director of the Centre for Strategic Studies. Professor Gray served five years in the Reagan Administration on the President's General Advisory Committee on Arms Control and Disarmament, including studies of nuclear strategy, maritime strategy, space strategy, and Special Forces. He has written 24 books. His most recently published book is *The Strategy Bridge: Theory for Practice* (2010).

Introduction: Time Marches On

It can be a humbling experience, even revelation, to read over work you have written some years ago! Very recently, I have had students tell me what they believe I believe to be true about nuclear strategy and war, quoting my own words from 1979 back at me today. It is very difficult, I can assure you, to write and lecture about contemporary issues over a forty- year professional timespan, and be confident that every golden sentence you craft will look equally golden forever (which means perhaps only 4 or 5 years).

Recently I rewrote (really self-edited) a textbook on strategic history, *War, Peace, and International Relations*, the first edition of which came out only in 2007. Unsurprisingly, I discovered that while I could gallop from the 1770s to 2001 with little need to rewrite myself – except for adding desirable sections on the American Civil War; and Fighter Command and the Battle of Britain – my chapters on the 2000s and on 'irregular warfare' brought me to an emergency stop. The reason, of course, is because there was no historical perspective on the 2000s; in fact half of them had yet to happen when I first wrote the book in 2006. Even now in 2011 we are in the realm of journalism and not history on the 2000s. Because we need to assess behaviour in terms of its consequences, obviously that is hard to do on the later (perhaps even the earlier) 2000s, because it is far too soon for us to see consequences we can register with confidence.

I am not suggesting that time is the magical elixir that reveals all. Why not? Because we cannot help but try to interpret past events, including very distant past events, in terms that make some sense to us today. This is true even when we spot behaviour that obviously is non-contemporary. Our take on that alien activity is ours, modern to us. When we find historical analogies, as we need to do and we do all the time, our choices of analogies and our interpretation of them is emphatically ours. We cannot recover the *mentalités* of historical figures with high confidence that we understand their motivations. Part of the difficulty lies in what one can call the unspoken and unwritten assumptions. By these I mean the beliefs that are so widely shared, are held so deeply, and are so non-controversial in a community, that people do not need to make them explicit.

When we find historical analogies our choices of analogies and our interpretation of them is emphatically ours.

For example, if we all agree, explicitly and implicitly, that God exists, that he has a human representative on Earth, and that that person and his (or her) institutionalised church can intercede for us with God, we are only going to debate details of theology, even if we fight about the details. For another example: if your culture tells you that people of a particular colour or religion or ethnicity are not really human beings of the same species as us, whoever us may be, it will be hard for historians and strategists today to recover properly those distant attitudes that informed action then.

Strategy - Now and Then?

I am going to suggest that in order to look forward we can only look back, because all too obviously the future is a tourist or combat destination that we can never reach. In the same way that as a professor I grow older and older, my students, annoyingly, remain 19 years old. But, just because the future is always unreachable, it does not follow that we have to be ignorant of its nature. I want to make a twin-headed argument as a proposition for your consideration that is simultaneously conservative with a small 'c', yet is fully accepting of the probability of radical change. When working for government,

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both in Britain and the US, most recently when advising on the Green Paper and then the White Paper phases of our somewhat unlovable British Strategic Defence and Security Review, I objected repeatedly to the popular phrase and concept of the 'foreseeable future'. By and large, the concept is misused by officials who have not thought deeply enough about its possible meaning. But, there is an important sense in which the concept of a foreseeable future makes a great deal of sense.

we can know little, if anything, about the contingencies that will drive future strategic history

So, my twin-headed argument is the following: On the one hand, we can know little, if anything, about the contingencies that will drive future strategic history. As Prime Minister Harold Macmillan, who was then a wise old bird, once observed, 'events, dear boy, events', are what moves history on, or sideways, or apparently backwards (cyclically). But, on the other hand, I maintain that at the level of possibilities we know everything that we need to know about the future. How can that be? The answer is because we have variable access to a human strategic past extending back approximately 2,500 years. In variably good measure, we know who did what, even if we cannot often be certain why they did it. Though even in that regard, I will argue that the basic strategic function that is most simply accurately expressed in shorthand form as 'ends, ways, and means', explains most of what needs explaining.

Of course times change, but not everything changes. And, dare I say it – by far the more important things that bear upon human conflict seem not to change at all. So that there can be no misunderstanding of my argument, let me be absolutely clear in my statements (as politicians like to assert, though in their case reliably only for the purpose of deception). I am claiming that the twenty-first century will be just 'another bloody century' because there are no reasons that have weight that suggest why the century will have any other nature. To be blunt about it, why might this one, uniquely in all of history, not be a bloody century? I put it to you that when we have had at least 25 bloody centuries, uninterruptedly so, in our somewhat recoverable past, it is highly implausible to suggest that this 26th century is going to be different.

I am claiming that the twenty-first century will be just 'another bloody century'

Unfortunately, perhaps, this century is going to be different from all past centuries in vital detail. To know the 5th century BC, or the 6th and 20th centuries AD is to know, I suggest that it is to know for certain, what the 21st century will be like. But, it is not to know what will happen in this new century. Let me challenge your imagination for a moment. Instead of being in 2011, try to imagine that you are in Staff College or university in 1911. You are required to write an appreciation of 'the twentieth century that is to come' – the foreseeable or anticipatable future, 1911-1999. I wonder how well you would have done? In point of obvious fact, I cannot really challenge you to put yourselves back in Camberley or Carlisle a hundred years ago, because you cannot expunge from your minds your knowledge of then future events. This is one of the inescapable curses from which historians must suffer. To illustrate with a question: is it possible to write fairly about the politicians of the 1920s and 1930s, given that we cannot help knowing that a very great war was to conclude their sundry efforts in 1939 (or 1937, or 1941?)?

Britain's most distinguished living military historian, Sir Michael Howard, has made a particularly potent thought-provoking claim that is supremely relevant to my thesis. Sir Michael has argued that wars — all the wars in history — have more in common with each other than they do with any other human behaviour. In addition, to lend strength to that claim, Sir Michael insists that our contemporary wars have more in common with ancient, medieval, and early-modern wars, than they do with behaviours other than war today. This argument for eternality and universality is indeed imperial.

all the wars in history have more in common with each other than they do with any other human behaviour

I would like to offer a little personal testimony on my subject here under discussion. My doctoral dissertation was on *The Defence Policy of the Eisenhower Administrations, 1953-1961*, and for the better part of 20 years, from the 1970s through the early 1990s, most of my professional focus was on nuclear matters, which I worked on in the United States. I worked for the US Air Force and with defence industry for more than 10 years on ICBMs in particular. I went through every one of the dirty-30 MX ICBM basing modes, small ICBM options, then the Strategic Defense Initiative, every missile defence argument, ASAT argument, nuclear war planning issues; and most of the arms control topics from SALT through START, and the rest. And, more recently, in the late 1990s I worked on the SDR, and a decade-plus later, on the SDSR. The reason I cite these professional biographical facts is because I want to be able to claim plausibly that my focus has always been on today and tomorrow. The core of my interests has never been historical or antiquarian. And yet, by far the most extensively used books in my library are, and have always been, Sun-tzu's *Art of War* (probably written in the 490s BC), Thucydides' *Peloponnesian War* (written in about 400 BC), and Carl von Clausewitz's *On War* (written in the 1820s, and published unfinished in 1832). How is it possible for someone focused on contemporary and future defence issues to find those three books so useful?

The answer lies in Michael Howard's claim that I just cited. The three authors, writing millennia apart and in exceedingly different contexts of politics, culture, technology, geography and so forth, were all writing about the same subject. It didn't really matter whether their human agents were assumed to drive chariots, thrust with spears, or fire smooth-bore muskets with the essential aid of black gunpowder. At the level of general theory about the nature of their subject, the subject was and is just one subject, eternal and universal. Of course, this thought is more than a little depressing if you

subscribe to some variant of what used to be known as the Whig Interpretation of History. If you see our human past, duly reconstructed as history by historians, as a steady or unsteady march through and towards an ever improving future, then it is a little shocking to hear someone claim that although many things change, they don't improve in a significant sense morally. In other shocking words, human progress with respect to the truly big things, is a conceit, an illusion. It is the realm of politicians' promises, and about as reliable. This is why Sun-tzu writing 2,500 years ago is a source of profound wisdom for us today. His writing on statecraft and strategy is by no means strictly of antiquarian interest.

human progress with respect to the truly big things, is a conceit, an illusion

My slightly reluctant argument is that although change is a law of human history, key continuities are unmistakable. I cannot claim that the future must resemble the past closely, but I do claim that 2,500 years provide solid enough evidence for the correctness of Thucydides' argument that human political behaviour is driven and shaped by a mixture of three master motivations, ` fear, honour, and interest'. His insight, expressed as quoted, is probably worth more than the whole library of studies produced since 1919 on the 'causes of war'.

It is plausible to suggest that the main reason why people, including some scholars, have difficulty coping with the challenge of understanding the relations between change and continuity is because they have neglected their education in the relevant theory. You can tell that I am a dangerous social scientist who is not strongly theory-averse, rather than a historian. There is change in continuity, and there is continuity in change. War and strategy should be considered to be singular and plural. Both war and strategy have an eternal and universal nature, but simultaneously both phenomena are expressed historically in ever-different wars and ever-different strategies. This all but banal and I would think obvious point bears hugely on some of our contemporary confusion over strategy and war. Let me move swiftly, though you may feel, belatedly, to some current matters.

Surveying the Debate

Recent debates between and amongst theorists and practitioners about war and its allegedly changing nature, illustrate what happens when we lose sight of forests and focus on trees, and indeed mistake trees for forests. Rather than risk boring you with academic style point-scoring for and against particular theorists, let me state a clear position that covers recent and still current debate.

- However else it is characterised, what US and British armed forces have been doing in Iraq and Afghanistan since 2001 has been war. By sensible definition, with due attribution to tests locatable in Clausewitz's *On War*, we are talking about war.
- Similarly, recognised or not, the single eternal and universal general theory of strategy has had authority over our efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan, a fact that should not be obscured too seriously by noting the plurality of situation-specific strategies.
- Metaphorically, for the sake of hoped-for clarity through analogy, there are two elephants in one room of war and statecraft – war and strategy (in peace and war). When viewed in specific perspectives, these metaphorical elephants can appear to inspired theorists as being asymmetrical, low-intensity, irregular, hybrid, or 'amongst the people'. But these, and other, characterisations are simply particular perspectives on generically whole phenomena – war and strategy. My most recent favourite is the concept of the 'difficult war', concerning which I hope any comment would be superfluous.

Recent defence and strategic debate reminds me, rather sadly, of the debates we used to hold on strategy for nuclear weapons that persisted, with succeeding 'waves', for nearly thirty years, from the early 1950s to the early 1980s. If you are sufficiently unfortunate as to be obliged to try to take seriously the contemporary debate among theorists of irregular war, you should have some understanding of my argument already. Is our primary problem in Afghanistan one of global insurgency, or is it something else? Which of several competing grander theories of counterinsurgency is The Truth? Is it COIN as 'armed anthropology', as prophet David Kilcullen asserts? If not, can we kill our way to victory (defined how) by good old fashioned military attrition? And, whose competing interpretation of history is the more reliable? If Basra and Helmand were not just South Armagh with sand and poppies, or the Malayan jungle similarly altered, what were they? Just how granular does your detailed cultural terrain knowledge need to be to do COIN and CT well enough? Is there a general wisdom on COIN and CT that can be applied, when duly adapted, to specific contexts? Or, is each case of war, if it is war, so different that there can be no general theory to help educate for good practice in a particular case? (I don't believe that, by the way.)

Which of several competing grander theories of counterinsurgency is The Truth?

A few years ago, I researched and wrote a study for the Pentagon on the subject of the Anglo-Irish War of 1919-1921 – they were interested in cases of (fairly) successful COIN. As a social scientist, foolishly unafraid to theorise, I concluded with a list of 'lessons from 1919-1921'. I believe, and still believe, that those lessons continue to have valuable meaning for today. I should mention that strategic history keeps producing prophets who amazingly rediscover what has always largely been known. From Prophet T.E. Lawrence, with his 27 Articles and 'Science of Guerrilla Warfare', to David Kilcullen, whom has gone one better with his '28 Articles' for good practice at the company commanders' level on COIN. Repeated epiphanies occur, and they tend to repeat the revelation.

The basic reason is not all that hard to spot. Whenever they were writing, historically, the problems of strategy essentially

have been the same. Writing in aid of the Norman (actually Angevin) conquest of Wales in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, which was to be nothing if not a COIN campaign, Gerald of Wales (1146-1223) wrote the equivalent of a COIN manual that, with minor adaptation for the concepts of today, could be judged wise had it been translated and adapted for Iraq and Afghanistan in the 2000s. The general subject has endured, alas. Lawrence of Arabia and now David Kilcullen did not and do no know much about insurgency and COIN that Gerald of Wales did not know, and advise, when the latter's writings were used in the occupation and pacification of Wales by the kings of England.

The Temptations of Novelty

We would protect ourselves against undue capture by the novelty of the moment were we to be more careful in the adjectives we use. When in doubt, avoid them in reference to war and strategy. To explain, if one refers to nuclear strategy or air strategy, or today cyber strategy, it is natural to lay emphasis upon that which is new, the adjectives and not the noun. What you should refer to is strategy for nuclear weapons – if that is not an oxymoron – or strategy for air power, or strategy for cyber power or cyberspace. If you say cyber strategy you risk implying that the strategy is somehow distinctive as strategy because it is owned by its cyber tools.

one must recognise that strategy is just strategy

In fact, boringly, one must recognise that strategy is just strategy, regardless of the geographical domain to which it relates or the military or other agents that it employs. Although the military capabilities by and large unique in kind to each of war's five geographical domains (land, sea, air, Earth-orbital, and cyberspace), must work in harmony towards a common goal, it is quite proper to develop domain-specific strategies as contributing sub-sets of the whole endeavour. To conceive of a strategy for air power is not to postulate a strategy that only employs air assets as its means. It is, however, to suggest strongly that each geographically defined military tool is likely to be able to make a unique contribution to the common strategic purpose. In every war it is necessary to identify what friendly land, sea, air, Earth-orbital, and cyber capabilities bring to the strategic table. Because fungibility usually is not extensive among the different military instruments, the strengths and limitations of each geography's kind of military power have to be reflected in distinctive land, sea, air and so forth strategic narratives – in aid of a single political purpose, of course.

When you use the term cyber strategy you risk misleading people into thinking that they are entering a new and mysterious domain. Happily, we know a great deal about strategy. We should, with 2,500 years of past experience from which to learn. And we have readily to hand a good enough general theory of strategy that certainly has authority over cyber power. This recognition helps reduce the 'wow' factor about computers and provides useful historical perspective for those who, yet again, claim that 'the sky is falling' and strategic Armageddon is nigh! In the course of the last century the human race has made sense of air power, has made such sense as can be made of nuclear weapons, has begun usefully to corral and understand space power. Cyber power in its turn will be mastered strategically, and seen for what it is, just another (fifth) quasi- geographical domain of warfare. It will have its own tactical 'grammar', to cite Clausewitz, but not its own political or strategic logic. Of course, cyber power is ill understood today; how could it be otherwise? Cyber power today is approximately where air power was in, perhaps, the First World War, or nuclear weapons in about 1947-8.

Conclusion

You can find some reassurance, if not quite comfort, in the fact that we are still here in 2011, despite the awesome hazards of the Cold War. And, German conquest or hegemony was given its comeuppance twice in modern history. We know that the twenty-first century will record wars and rumours of wars. Why? Because human history in every century has done so. No changes in culture, politics, technology, or anything else, have reduced our capacity or inclination to inflict collective self-harm as a competitive species for what seem at the time to be good enough reasons. It is always possible, but exceedingly unlikely, that the twenty-first century will be different. For so long as *homo sapiens* remains as he is revealed by history to have been, and as he remains today, then for so long can we sadly be certain that in vital senses we have seen the twenty-first century before.

the twenty-first century will record wars because human history in every century has done so.

You might care to reflect on these propositions.

1. We are no better or worse at strategy than were the Greeks, Romans, and Byzantines.

2. Despite the technical progress of the past two centuries, that progress does not transfer from tactics and operations to strategy/politics; let alone to the realm of applied morality that is strategic ethics.

3. Skill in warfare - or even armed and sometimes violent social work in COIN - is always likely to be useful, but it doesn't produce strategic success automatically.

4. Even skill in strategy will not deliver victory if policy insists on political ends that subvert the value of tactical and operational effort.

5. "Another bloody century" is an oversimplification, but arguably a useful one. It may be worth contrasting it with its logical polar opposite, "a century of co-operation". Somehow, I doubt if we will be allowed to choose. In the 1930s, most people, including most Germans, wanted peace, but that was not what they received,

Seek and Destroy: The Forgotten Strategy for Countering Armed Rebellion

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> *"If the people of Georgia raise a howl against my barbarity and cruelty, I will answer that war is war,* ***and not popularity-seeking****."*
>
> William Techumseh Sherman, in a letter from 1864
>
> *Kind-hearted people might of course think there was some ingenious way to disarm or defeat the enemy without too much bloodshed, and might imagine this is the true goal of the art of war. Pleasant as it sounds, it is a fallacy that must be exposed: war is such a dangerous business that the mistakes which come from kindness are the very worst.*
>
> Carl Von Clausewitz, "On War" - Book II, Chapter 7.

The purpose of this article is to argue that the destruction of the enemy's forces lies at the heart of countering both terrorism and insurgency.[i] Nothing here is original or insightful, since such assertions were once statements of the obvious. At the time of writing, they no longer are. Insurgency and terrorism are defeated primarily through killing and capturing those who participate in it.

It is not the aim of this article to advance or discuss why many do not agree with this obvious and enduring fact. Rather, it is to lay out the case that any policy that seeks to have a terrorist organisation or an insurgency cease their pursuit of an objective via armed violence, should focus on the physical attrition of such groups as being the primary contribution of force to gaining such a policy goal.

The words "terrorism" and "insurgency" are only used here to denote the difference given to them by common usage. Neither is a rigorous or useful term for what is best described as "armed rebellion."

Countering armed rebellion - what's the policy?

Any government that faces armed rebellion will usually first make it clear that it will not alter any existing policy or re-distribute political power because of armed threats made against it. It may have to alter that position subsequently, but generally speaking, most governments will strongly resist any policy being dictated to them via violence, and rightly so. It seems fair to suggest that getting any armed opposition to unconditionally cease violent action will form the core of any reasonable policy. If the policy is merely to achieve a cessation of violence, then this can be achieved by appeasement or acquiescence to the enemy's demands. Thus the strategy should actually be to force the enemy to give up fighting, by breaking their will to persist in the endeavour.

but generally speaking, most governments will strongly resist any policy being dictated to them via violence, and rightly so

The most appropriate initial policy should thus seek an "unconditional and permanent cessation of violence" from all or any violent actors except the government. If that goal proves elusive within the time and resources that the policy deems reasonable, or the political will to endure in combat evaporates, then the policy will have to alter. This will most likely occur when bad tactics fail and/or undermine the policy. This situation would thus create conditions where a negotiated settlement would seem appropriate. However if the rebels are still actively conducting operations, then the strategy has already failed and the enemy has benefited from armed violence. This will nearly always have negative implications for the future.

So the policy should always be to force the armed enemy group to renounce violence. This essentially means delivering much the same effect as unconditional surrender, though

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it may not use those terms. However emphasis should be placed on forcing compliance, not merely requesting it, though procedures by which the rebels can request a cease-fire should always be in place.

So, the strategic objective set forth by such a policy will generally be most effectively achieved by killing and capturing those using violence.

So the strategic objective set forth by such a policy will generally be most effectively achieved by killing and capturing those using violence. Who will (or will not) need killing or detaining will be a critical detail at the tactical level, but the strategy will be one of attrition. This strategy has to be realised in tactics; and the tactics chosen will be specific actions that kill or capture those who are instrumental to and/or materially supportive of illegal violent opposition to government policy.

Therefore the precise nature of the tactics and against whom they are applied will have to support the policy. Killing and detaining the wrong people will at best be irrelevant to achieving the policy, or at worst catastrophically undermine it. Killing and detention will always be violently and even non-violently opposed by those who share the policy objectives of the terrorists or insurgents, but this is inherent to all forms of armed conflict. Importantly and explicitly, the aim is to kill and/or capture the rebels, while leaving the civilians unharmed.

Moral and legal objections - the problem with "hearts and minds"

Very few of the often cited objections to killing and capturing terrorists or insurgents are ever supportive of the idea that killing and capturing the enemy does not deliver the policy objective. More often than not the argument does not resides in the issue of killing and capturing insurgents and terrorists itself, but rather in the issue of killing and detaining the wrong people and thus undermining a policy that supposedly relies on the political support of the population. Indeed, the often-used phrase "winning hearts and minds" means nothing more than gaining the political support of the population. This means the population supports the government.

Yet it does not in and of itself deliver the policy. That the population supports the government may be irrelevant. Armed force means that the insurgents can coerce the population and gain support via intimidation. Terrorists may not even require any significant population support at all. Lenin said one man with can gun can control 100 without one. No social program, promise of protection, provision of services or education can deliver 100% of the population, or even 90%. 1 percent of a 3 million population is 30,000 people who could support an insurgency. 0.1 percent is 3,000. That 99.9 percent may support the government is thus irrelevant. Criminal gangs operate in cities all over the worlds using this principle. Indeed, the example of criminal gangs is highly relevant.

Terrorism and insurgency are crimes. Regardless of the specific act, when perpetrated it usually contravenes one or more laws relevant to the time and place of the offence. This is not to make an attempt at defining terrorism or insurgency. The sole point here is that regardless of the political motivation or its justification, the killing and/or destruction inherent to violently furthering a political cause within a state usually breaches existing legislation. Thus, those doing so are criminals in the eyes of the law. No emotional rationalisation can alter this. Therefore inciting or assisting in the performance of these acts should, or usually does, attract legal sanction.

No social program, promise of protection, provision of services or education can deliver 100% of the population, or even 90%.

So how does an insurgency differ from terrorism? The distinctions that exist are essentially arbitrary and not fit for purpose[ii]. Differentiating between terrorism and insurgency is pointless and largely pseudo-intellectual. The idea that "counter-terrorism" is somehow distinct from "counter-insurgency" is an idea not held to rigour; it is extremely subjective, politically motivated and usually self-serving.

Insurgency and terrorism are both forms of armed rebellion, and both are always illegal within the jurisdictions they operate. Both are criminal activities, be it planting a bomb at a bus stop, or conducting an attack on an army base. The armed rebellions that have delivered decisive results have almost always had to employ armed force at a level that requires a military response to counter. However, military action by irregular forces[iii] is almost always illegal in terms of the law of the state within and/or against which they are perpetrated. Regardless of whether the government employs military forces or not, the rule of law is how the authority of the state is expressed. In this respect, the differentiation between "insurgency" and "terrorism" is useless. Both are defeated by the same strategy of attrition, albeit appropriately modified by the context of policy.

Insurgency and terrorism are both forms of armed rebellion, and both are always illegal within the jurisdictions they operate.

Violent challenges to government control, as expressed by the rule of law, cannot be allowed. Nor can the incitement or support of such challenges be allowed to go un-punished. War and rebellion are not legal conditions. They are violent contests for political power. The law is merely an expression of that power. Governments spend a great deal of time crafting legislation. Law is not inherently either just or ethical. It merely "is". Some laws may make it "illegal" to hold a certain faith or to own property if you have a particular ethnic background. That is not the concern here. The issue is that violent opposition to the authority and/or policy of the state can never be tolerated, either internally or from other states or political entities. The counter to such a threat, a state

must seek the destruction of the enemies' armed force. When those armed force are also the source of the violent political discourse that has been set forth to counter state policy, this need is all the greater.

Friction - quantifying tactical objectives for a strategy of attrition

Seeking to destroy the enemy, as an armed force, is a clear strategic objective to deliver the unconditional cessation of armed action by the enemy. Thus the strategy is one of attrition. The actual physical destruction of an entire organisation is usually not possible, or even necessary. You merely have to kill and detain enough of the enemy to break the individual and collective will of their armed wing and/or leadership to persist. No enemy is untameable in terms of attrition or exhaustion. In this respect so-called rebels are no different from regular armies.

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However, unlike regular armies, here the focus of force is usually best realised at the individual level. You can deny ground, and seize objectives. Indeed it may be necessary to do so. Yet it is the tactical objective of the "body count", both living and dead, that delivers strategic success, which in turn serves the policy. Logically, you can kill and capture your way to success, *if* this is done well enough to break their collective will to endure. After all, rebels essentially aim to kill enough people to break the will of a government or population to resist their policy. Therefore, the reverse is also true. This is supported by 3,000 years of political and military history.

While this is logically simple, it is incredibly hard to execute the tactics to deliver such a result. The strategy of killing and capturing to support a policy of "unconditional cessation" requires a very precise execution of tactics, because the levels of force usually have to be restricted to ensure that those not guilty of challenging the authority of the government remain un-harmed. Sometimes they will be, but the percentage of innocent civilians killed as a result of the governments armed action should be kept to a minimum, as a matter of utmost urgency. However, a balance must be struck between rewarding the terrorists' or insurgents' use of the population to restrict the use of armed force, and the effective prosecution of operations. Policy is generally best served by killing those seen to victimise the population, therefore the government should not be part of that victimisation process. In this regard cultural understanding need only extend to being aware of what actions may and may not cause unnecessary offence to civilians.

It would thus seem wise to try and exclude the population from the competition. The population is not the prize. The population is the audience. The prize is the control that the unchallenged rule of law creates. In this competition, you win because the other team are dead or have run away. Support does not create power. Unchallenged power creates support. The population will support the team they know will win. While fighting persists, the winner may not be clear. For the population, the wining team is the team that provides the beneficial rule of law and security. Allowing the population to remain separate from the actual armed struggle may have benefits in this regard.

The population will support the team they know will win.

Identifying and finding the enemy is thus of extremely high importance. Who needs to be killed and/or captured and why, is the domain of the intelligence professional. The population are more likely to provide actionable information to the team they believe will win than the one they think will lose. A substantial intelligence effort must be combined with a clear understanding of what constitutes illegal or unacceptable challenges to government authority. Owning firearms may not be illegal. It may even normal. Thus there must be a sound legal basis for the employment of armed force to kill or capture. This is a requirement that cannot be avoided, as enforcing the law is the expression of government power.

Thus, the body count should reflect both a rigorous and evidence-based approach to determining who you have either detained and/or killed and why. Done badly, by poorly trained soldiers, a body count may be entirely counter-productive. Yet a good army will be able to effectively employ a body count methodology.

In addition, the mechanics of detention must account for both detaining those convicted of crimes and those detained because they were captured during or after armed action. Taking part in illegal armed action should be an offence and attract a considerable sentence. It will also contribute to the denial of manpower to the enemy and the breaking of their will, both individually and collectively.

The military guidelines called "rules of engagement" (ROE) should provide the legal basis for the government's use of violence in support of policy. Policy demands that the enemy unconditionally surrender in the same way that law demands that a murderer does the same. ROE ensure that the tactics do not harm the policy, whilst aiding the government's expression of its power and control. Power and control should be efficient and effective, not clumsy and useless. Populations which are threatened are best secured by killing those who might seek to harm them, or exercise control over them.

Delivering the political objective

The political objective is delivered by the reduction in effective enemy action.

So, the number of dead or detained is the tactical result. It is not an actual measure of success. While the body count should be aimed at accurately accounting for and exploiting who has been killed or captured, it does not

signify the gaining of the political objective. The political objective is delivered by the reduction in effective enemy action. How many armed attacks government forces suffer, and how many casualties they sustain are critical in gauging the progress of your operations. High or rising casualties amongst the government's own forces may bear excessively on policy. This is hardly surprising, as the enemy's main objective is to pressure government policy by causing casualties, both military and civilian. It could also be claimed that normal levels of activity and commerce amongst the civilian population are indicators of progress. This is only true if that activity is widespread, sustained and enduring. Afterall, commercial activity may also thrive in areas under rebel control.

Progress will be indicated in the reduction of violence to a sustainable and acceptable level. If the rebels cannot usefully kill and destroy in the furtherance of their strategy, then they will soon become irrelevant. Irrelevance will usually erode their political will to endure in the conflict. Thus their defeat may often be more a function of exhaustion rather than destruction, but they will only become exhausted due to constant and unrelenting pressure to visit harm upon them. Seeking destruction can and does deliver exhaustion.

The objective is always the securing of the political aim. That political aim is always both legitimate and ethical.

The idea that armed rebellion is best countered by addressing the cause of the rebellion is a diversion. Governments may wish to alter specific policies to address the desires of all or some of their population, but this should only do so once the armed rebellion is defeated. Victory is not achieved when the populace consents to the government's legitimacy and stops actively and passively supporting the insurgency[iv]. Victory is achieved when the insurgency has ceased to conduct violence because those prosecuting it are either dead, detained or hiding in fear of their lives. The aim should be to make the populations' active or passive support of the violence irrelevant. The acknowledged existence of the dead, detained and suppressed should have a deterrent effect on those who may consider using violent means. Indeed, history proves it does.

Additionally, legitimacy is purely subjective. Legitimacy is not, in and of itself a requirement. The objective is always the securing of the political aim. That political aim is always both legitimate and ethical. No nation or political body has ever advanced a policy it believed unethical and/or illegitimate. Policy is, by definition, what people believe to be necessary, and therefore right. Thus, legitimacy is inherent within the given the context of its existence. Conversely, a people under occupation may never believe the occupation to be legitimate. A nation forced to adopt democracy may never believe democracy to be a legitimate form of government, but if another nation believes it should be, then it must be forced upon them and violent opposition skilfully suppressed and destroyed. If armed force is not part of the political debate, then there is simply normal political debate, conducted within legal means. Illegal non-violent means are a strictly political problem, in terms of the action best taken to counter such activity.

Thus, the rule of law is how government control must express itself. Those abusing the rule of law for matters of self-interest are working against the government and should be considered as such and dealt with appropriately. Likewise, the rebels can only seek to set forth their own policy via laws and rules that they are able to enforce. This may appear as a competition between two forms of jurisdiction, thus the false assertion that rebels do not win by outfighting, but "out governing". [v] The dead and detained cannot govern. Killing the enemy leaves the government in control. Once in control, control must be applied or else it will cease to exist. However, gaining control is critical.

Conclusion

Given the logic of the need to destroy the enemy, it could be argued that armies which are not primarily focussed on the destruction of the enemy are those lacking the skill, and/or time, resources and political will to do so. When faced with armed rebellion the policy of forced unconditional and permanent cessation of violence by the enemy is what any government requires before any other policy can be sought. That objective is most likely to be delivered by the physical attrition of the rebel's armed forces while, where possible, reducing any negative effect of armed operations on the governments own population. Armed force must be applied against armed force to ultimately achieve government control, expressed by the rule of law.

Footnotes

[i] The author would like to acknowledge the work of Carl von Clausewitz in the production of this article.

[ii] It is noteworthy that the British in Malaya referred to the enemy as "terrorists," and not Insurgents This was also the case in Northern Ireland, Cyprus, Kenya, Oman and Rhodesia (by the Rhodesians). All may have been "counter-insurgency" campaigns, but that was utterly academic to the men on the ground.

[iii] Irregular forces are defined here as non-state forces, usually lacking documentation, pay, formal training and a declared chain of command.

[iv] FM3-24 Para 1-14

[v] This aphorism is usually attributed to Bernard Fall.

Strategy: Some Notes for a User's Guide

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FEATURED ARTICLE

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[I]t is more important to make correct decisions at the political and strategic level than it is at the operational and tactical level. Mistakes in operations and tactics can be corrected but political and strategic mistakes live forever.

Williamson Murray[i]

Strategy is easy to understand, but hard to do. Long and sometimes frustrating debates with officials, soldiers, and scholars, has caused me to doubt the former claim; the latter comes close to being one of those truths that Americans can hold with confidence to be all but self-evident. To resort to a British term, concepts are part of the 'kit' that people pack when they set forth to do strategy. Action is fuelled by ideas — sound, unsound, and both. Infinity Journal has the mission of improving understanding of strategy, because that is an important way to help improve strategic performance. If people lack a grasp of strategy's meaning, of why and how it should work, they must be unready to cope with practical challenges. Instinct and luck are not to be despised but neither should they be trusted. Some education in strategy must be regarded as prudent insurance.

What is the challenge?

When in doubt, turn to the master. So, what does Clausewitz advise? He says: "The political object – the original motive for the war – will thus determine both the military objectives to be reached and the amount of effort it requires".[ii] Sounds great. The challenge is to serve policy by military behaviour. Unfortunately, while stating the challenge may be important as a step towards meeting it, it does not actually advance you very far.

The challenge is to serve policy by military behaviour.

In historical practice, the neat, tidy, and logical world of the scholar and theorist rapidly is revealed to be substantially illusory. It is sensible to say that policy determines military objectives, but it is necessary also to recognize that there are at least three major practical difficulties with that sound information. First, the "political object" may well not be stable and certain, but rather the fuzzy and shifting outcomes of a continuous (political) process. Second, the often somewhat floating nature of the political products known as policy means that it is difficult for generals to know just what it is that they are required to accomplish in their military efforts to secure strategic effect. Third, even when the political direction is clear and stable, there is always some uncertainty about how much military effort, applied how and at what cost, will be needed. In other words, matching military endeavour to political achievement is a matter of guesswork; educated guesswork, but guesswork all the same. Strategists and their political masters and mistresses should not be confused about this. Matching political objectives with military objectives is an exercise that is both art and science, but principally the former.

The answer in part is strategy.

This has to be true. But the answer is neither merely nor only strategy, it has to be a "right enough" strategy. And until you try, in the field with a command performance, you will not know whether your strategy, *ab initio*, was/is good enough. You only need a "good enough" strategy, it does not need

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to be brilliant – unless you have some major weaknesses for which strategy needs to compensate – or when the enemy has an exceptionally gifted strategist in charge, or you suffer truly bad luck (there is much to go wrong in war). The potential gap between military operational aims and policy goals should be filled by strategy. In fact, without strategy how can you decide on operational military aims? What are you trying to accomplish? How do you know without guidance from the strategy bridge?[iii]

Let us make the heroic assumption that the political process has produced a sensible and stable outcome that can function well enough as policy guidance. In this event it is possible for prudent policy to be subverted, perhaps fatally, by inadequacy in its instruments. It is commonplace to claim that if strategy is absent, weak, or simply wrong, despite the relative high quality of its political direction, tactical excellence will not rescue the project. If one is fighting the wrong war militarily, though not politically, then indeed policy success is likely to prove fatally elusive. However, faulty or at least confused conceptualization is apt to be a guilty party in this case. When strategy is nowhere in sight, let alone plainly effectively in command, it may be that the essential unity of strategy and tactics has not been understood. Strategy and tactics constitute a unity. Strategy is theory (of desired and intended cause and effect) that has to be practiced not only by tactical behaviour, but also as that behaviour. Theory and practice are one.

The proposition that one *has* a strategy, but one *does* tactics is false. When one does tactics, one also behaves tactically for strategic effect, i.e., one behaves strategically (for good or ill). There is need to beware of the confused misconceptions which hold, plausibly but nonetheless wrongly, either (1) that it is easier to correct faulty tactics than faulty strategy, or its logical polar opposite (2) that it is easier to adjust strategy than tactics — the second misconception which would appear to be merely commonsensical on empirical grounds. One can hold a meeting and in a matter of hours shift strategy; whereas major tactical changes may well require the retraining and at least partial reequipping of a whole army. If strategy is understood only to be the direction given to a military instrument, then this logic holds. However, the strategic ways in which military means will be used cannot be separated in practice from what those means can do, behaving tactically as they must. Strategy and tactics are a *gestalt*. Many scholars and not a few practitioners of statecraft and warfare have difficulty grasping this argument. Strategy can only be practiced tactically. All strategy has to be done by tactics, and all tactical effort has some strategic effect, but not all such effort reflects, expresses, and enables purposeful strategy. The operational level of war is a concept and practice that has serious potential to fuel confusion about the essential wholeness of strategy and tactics.[iv]

Strategic sense:

The idea of operational art to direct large military forces in campaigns is only sensible. The problem lurks not in the idea, but rather in the consequences in practice of the idea when very senior command fails to exercise a tight enough strategic grip on tactical behaviour, no matter that it is organized and directed operationally. In his book *The Generals* (about Allied military leadership in the war in Asia, 1941-45), Robert Lyman talks about the need for generals to conduct their operational tasks with "strategic sense".[v] So, the operational level of war ought not to be regarded by its commanding generals as a politics-free or politics-lite zone wherein a professional military can do its thing untroubled by policy considerations. But, if strategy is missing or confused, strategic sense will be hard to demonstrate, because the generals will not know how and why their efforts should contribute to success overall.

The interface between war and peace inherently is almost as challenging to the strategist as is the conduct of war itself.

When political guidance worthy of the name is weak or missing from the action, the strategy bridge cannot function. Strategists need to know the political ends that can be advanced purposefully by the instrumental effect of their tactical enablers. In order to practice strategy, each element of the relevant trinity of ends, ways, and means is essential. Everyone functions in conflict to strategic effect, but such effect is realized both with and without the benefit of strategy. It is tempting to argue that history abhors a vacuum, and that therefore the political ends that strategists require will be provided by someone, whether or not legitimate political authority is up for the duty. Most likely, one can suggest, the senior leadership of the military instrument will step up to attempt to play the policymaker's role, in actuality if not formally. The interface between war and peace inherently is almost as challenging to the strategist as is the conduct of war itself. In 1918, the Allies did not inflict a military defeat fully adequate to match their political ambitions for an orderly and peaceful post-war world. In 1945, the enemy in Europe was beaten soundly enough, unlike 1918, but the Western Allies compromised the post-war order in Europe by not exploiting adequately the military advantages that they enjoyed all too briefly. Both in 1918-19 and 1945-46, the victorious Western military power melted away so rapidly that the desired post-war order was severely compromised.[vi] The statesmen laboured hard, in the face of daunting difficulties, and it is easy to be wise with hindsight. As usual the Owl of Minerva only flies at dusk. Nonetheless, one is obliged to note that strategic sense was seriously lacking when it was needed most. Unlike the situation in 1814-15, in 1919 and 1945 the most successful British, French, and American military commanders made no significant contribution to the shaping of the post-great war political order. Strategic sense would seem to have been exhausted by the effort required for successful war-making.

What is strategy?

There are many definitions, but they all must have at their core the strategy function, which is to provide coherence between ends, ways, and means. My definition of military strategy is: "The direction and use made of force and the threat of force for the purposes of policy as decided by politics". I adjust the wording for grand strategy to substitute "all among the total assets of a security community, including its military instrument", for "force and the threat of

force". Precise wording is less important than is clarity on the essential difference between force and policy. Purpose and instrument must not be confused. Policy, strategy, and tactics are different in nature and they answer different questions. Policy decides why and what; strategy decides how; and tactics do it. When politicians fail to understand this, one is in trouble. To set policy goals has nothing necessarily to do with strategy. Strategy, at best, can be an afterthought! How will we try to do it, whatever "it" may be?

Purpose and instrument must not be confused. Policy, strategy, and tactics are different in nature and they answer different questions.

Political desiderata packaged as policy is not strategy. To identify the former is not to register a strategic achievement. Policy is not usually that hard to decide. The difficulty lies more in finding affordable yet effective ways to pursue the policy goals preferred. The command performance required of a strategist at the highest level is one that truly bridges what can be a yawning gap between political wishes and military, inter alia, capabilities. Political desires and their expression as policy are likely to be mere hopes vanity if they are not disciplined by prudent guesswork about feasibility. But, looking at the other end of the strategic bridge, a military establishment and its professional behaviour as a military instrument that virtuously abjures all intervention in the policy process, which means politics, may well condemn itself to militarily impossible tasks gifted by political guidance naked of strategic understanding.

Understanding the problem

(e.g. how to defeat Germany, transform Iraq, transform Afghanistan). Again, let us turn to the great Prussian. He advises, in much quoted wise words: "The first, the supreme, the most far-reaching act of judgment that the statesman and commander have to make is to establish by that test [fit with policy goals] the kind of war on which they are embarking, neither mistaking it for, nor trying to turn it into, something that is alien to its nature".[vii] In the main this is right, though it is potentially misleading. Unfortunately, our policy goals will not dictate the kind of war on which we embark, because war is a project that we play with others; also, contingency, which is to say chance, rules (or can do so). When you roll the iron dice you are signing on for a mystery tour.[viii] Not all politicians know this (nor all soldiers, apparently). Did our policymakers, or our soldiers, understand the kind of war they were getting into in Iraq and Afghanistan (or in 1914 or 1939)? Are we not usually surprised by what strategic history throws at us?

Where Clausewitz probably errs seriously in the familiar persuasive words quoted above, is in his apparent assumption that a particular war must be one of a distinctive kind that has a fixed character, expressed by him here as "nature". His point is harassed by, if it does not founder on, the historical reality that the belligerents in any war are engaged in a unique dynamic creative act. The war's course and outcome is produced by combined behaviours and its course reflects a single collective net strategic effect. The strategic effort of each combatant combines as both cause and effect for a grand effect that cannot be predicted in detail. In other words, it is not sensible to assume that a possible war has a nature (really meaning character) that can be predicted with confidence. Not only is there policy logic to wars, in addition there is grammar to warfare that is ever ready to show its indifference to politics and policy, and instead encourage its servants to wage more warfare more effectively.

The currency conversion problem:

The basic challenge in (military) strategy is the need to convert military power into political effect (by the agency of strategic effect).[ix] The exchange rate is neither stable nor, as a consequence, reliably predictable. Put directly, "how hard must we fight to achieve the political ends that justify the harm that is the violence?" Politics and military power are different currencies. In 1999 NATO expected that it would need to apply only four days of aerial bombardment against Serbia to coerce Milosevic into compliance. In fact, the air campaign (to dignify what happened) lasted 78 days, and we still are not entirely certain why the Serbs said "we quit". The heart of the challenge with strategy is that it calls for skills that are neither military nor political, but must embrace both (at a minimum). To be a good soldier, or politician, is not necessarily to be a good strategist, because strategy is about neither military effect nor politics, rather is it about the political effect of military use and threat.

Strategy-making:

Strategy should be made by a civilian-military partnership, with the civilians/politicians on top in the "unequal dialogue".[x] Typically it is made, if and when it is, which can be unduly rare, in a committee process and by negotiation. And because policy is also politics, strategy is always liable to alteration, to needful adaptation to often-unanticipated circumstances.

Because strategic history is a creative team project (with enemy participation!) influenced by many factors other than the prior intentions reflected in prepared plans, strategic practice must always be obedient to tactical realities. Tactical success or failure is the arbiter of operational and strategic opportunity. Tactics cannot substitute for strategy, but it must enable it and therefore it shapes it, sometimes profoundly. If the troops cannot or will not do it, strategy will be reshaped. In the words of Charles E. Callwell: "Strategy is not, however, the final arbiter in war. The battlefield decides".[xi] He is not claiming that tactics matter more than strategy, only that the latter is wholly dependent upon the former. This connection, in my opinion, is so intimate and literally essential that one should understand tactics as strategy being practiced. When there is no coherent purposeful strategy informing the fighting, a common enough condition, as argued already the tactical effort must have strategic consequences.

Tactics cannot substitute for strategy, but it must enable it and therefore it shapes it, sometimes profoundly.

Disharmony among levels of behaviour:

One can identify political, strategic, (arguably) operational, and tactical levels of performance. However, there is no natural harmony between their levels of effort.[xii] Each level has a distinctive nature, and the concerns at each level will be unique. Harmony has to be imposed and enforced by strategic command performance, though frequently it is not; as often as not because the political authorities and highest military command will not have decided firmly on what they want to do. If one is undecided – guess what, strategic grasp and grip will be weak. Operational commanders will enjoy great freedom because there will not be much important traffic sent their way across the strategy bridge.The command performance required of senior generals needs to function both upwards and downwards in the chain of command. Military strategists have to strive to discipline the urges and ambitions of their political masters, while simultaneously ensuring that subordinate generalship is conducted with suitable strategic sense.

A belligerent does not require a definite and unified strategy in order to do strategy. As observed earlier, military practice is strategic practice, whether or not one has a clear strategy. In the Asia-Pacific War against Imperial Japan in 1941-45, U.S. military effort was short on strategic grasp and grip. Which of the American threats was the principal *Schwerpunckt*? The truth was that the United States allowed circumstances (contingency), personality, and the relative eventual abundance of its mobilized military assets to determine that it would menace Japan via the Solomon Islands, New Guinea, the Chinese mainland (air threat), and the Central Pacific (with the Marianas as key). Would the Americans by-pass the Philippines, Formosa/Taiwan? Both the Japanese and the Americans indulged in diffusion of effort in posing and defending against threats from many points of the compass. The Principle of War that insists on concentration of effort was plainly mocked. But, the United States could afford multiple threat vectors, while Japan could not. It made some strategic sense to confuse the enemy as to one's principal threat(s). In this major case from World War II it was ironic that a genuine indecision on the American part, had net beneficial strategic consequences. One is reminded of the maxim that quantity has a quality all its own. Also, to coin a maxim by adapting Herman Kahn's advice that "[u]sually the most convincing way to look willing is to be willing", there is some scarcely deserved strategic merit in the thought that "the most effective way to confuse the enemy is to be confused oneself".[xiii] Whether the all too genuine confusion in U.S. strategy that probably proved to be strongly net strategically advantageous was a rare genuine paradox, or merely an irony, is debateable.[xiv]

A belligerent does not require a definite and unified strategy in order to do strategy.

Education in strategy.

It ought to be a good idea to educate the military in strategy, but in practice few soldiers, sailors, and airmen are really thus educable.[xv] Genius as potential can be polished and helped along, but one cannot put in what God and nature have left out.[xvi] One can train for the mastery of operational skills, but the imagination needed for strategy cannot reliably be taught. Still, one should not blame armed services for trying to do the very difficult. A huge problem is that politicians are likely to be even less gifted in aid of an understanding of military strategy than are soldiers. Clausewitz claims that that ought not to matter, because allegedly policymakers can find the military expertise they need, when they need it. Manifestly, this is not the case.

Competence in the design of national grand strategy is a challenge to which few can aspire plausibly,

Strategic competence, if not necessarily excellence, should be widespread. After all, the strategic function captured in the ends-ways-means mantra, is a basic need for human (inter alia) life at all levels of behaviour. Competence in the design of national grand strategy is a challenge to which few can aspire plausibly, but in our day-to-day activities we all need to achieve some match between goals, designs for reaching them, and means. Military officers perform the strategic function at every level of command, from a platoon on upwards. But, what is exceptionally challenging about the strategy function that is of concern to this essay is, to repeat, the requirement to employ force and its threat for its transaction value in political coinage. This is one reason why "business strategy" is not a close fit with military strategy. The strategists that are my subject here know how best to attempt to turn water into wine. Sound, or better, military judgment – even excellent creative imagination – is highly valuable for the strategist. But, as just stated these assets point only to a person who is first-rate at solving military problems. Strategy requires that military problems be solved, or at least effectively bypassed, but also it demands that the military problems and their military solution or alleviation be understood for their political meaning. Strategy needs us to fight well, but it is not *about* our fighting well.

Every war/conflict is different:

Although all wars have the essentials in common (e.g. war's "climate" is enduring), and strategy is eternal and universal, the details are always changing. There are no thoroughly reliable experts on the future. In a vital sense, if and when politicians and soldiers conduct a dialogue about a possible future war, it has to be a case of the blind talking to the poorly sighted. Did the British military understand Iraq and Afghanistan in the 2000s (and do they now)? And the same can also be said of World Wars I and II. Ignorance of what has yet to happen is the normal condition in the interactive project that is future war.

Given that one cannot know, really know, what the costs and benefits of the resort to war will be, is rational policy decision-making possible? If the costs of a future war are unknown, and its benefits similarly must be strictly speculative, how can strategy be a rational project? Since the political ends called policy cannot be metrically valued, not least for the reason that they are not certain, and the price of tactical

success is not established ahead of time, the utility of war plainly requires a high measure of risk tolerance. By analogy, the strategist seeks to purchase a 'good' (strategic effect) of price unknown and unknowable, incurring the uncertain transaction costs inalienable from the employment of a military instrument that has unknown combat prowess. Indeed, it must be said not only that strategy is not a science, but also that its status as a social science has to be judged fragile. The purposes of these sceptical remarks is not to damn the strategy project, but rather to highlight its challenges and perhaps encourage some sympathy for those who strive heroically against the odds to design and practice it competently.[xvii]

Decisions to fight:

In practice it is usual, not extraordinary, for politicians to decide to go to war without examining closely the availability of the military story that they need. Often, the decision to fight is believed/felt to be a political (even a moral or a personal) necessity, leaving the military rationale largely in the realm of hope. Politicians tend to assume that the warfare they are licensing and sponsoring will turn out alright in the event, somehow. More often than not, the military is not asked for its honest opinion about the prospects for victory/success. And bear in mind that all decisions for war are a leap in the dark, which has to mean that even honest military judgments are likely to be wrong ("war is the realm of chance", as the great man wrote).[xviii] It is hard to be expert on future wars, because the future is not foreseeable.

More often than not, the military is not asked for its honest opinion about the prospects for victory/success.

Since strategists are required to prescribe contingently for the use of force in a future that at best can only be anticipated, it follows that their duties oblige them to operate on the basis of assumptions rather than facts. When assumptions are tested in the laboratory of history's actual strategic narrative and are verified adequately by events, they cease to be assumptions and instead are established as facts. Although assumptions necessarily play a critical role in defence planning, as a vital category of working and contingent beliefs they are greatly under-examined and under-theorized. However, it would be a serious mistake to believe that assumptions' fragility can be usefully much reduced by a more rigorous planning methodology. The beginning of wisdom should be frank, if unwelcome, recognition of the fact that by definition assumptions transcend proof; if they did not they would cease to be assumptions. It is easy to understand why strategists typically need the reassurance of a truly unjustifiable faith in their assumptions, in order to cope with the moral and other burdens imposed by objectively irreducible ignorance about the future. Assumption generation is improvable, and testing by a "Red Team" may be heuristically useful, but the strategist leaning forward into the future with assumptions about future war is always going to be leaping in the dark. He cannot know, for example, just how much pain will need to be caused for North Vietnam for it to call off its extant campaign against the South. As much to the point, the American strategist cannot be certain that any level of coercion against North Vietnam that is tolerable to U.S. domestic opinion, would suffice to deliver a fair facsimile of political victory. It is commonplace to refer to the calculations of statesmen and strategists. But, it is a fact that decisions to fight, or to fight harder, cannot be made on the basis of metric calculation. There are and can be no verified numbers that a brilliant methodology could convert into clear answers to such questions as "should we fight?" and "how expensive would victory (defined carefully) be?" Notwithstanding these rather negative thoughts, strategists have to practice strategy, even though their assumptions must leave much to be desired. Ignorance cannot be allowed to promote the paralysis of policy and strategy, when "something has to be done" (e.g. over Iran's nuclear weapons' programme).

Policy is not always rational and reasonable:

Not only is policy the product of politics, also it is the result of personality and the processes of government

Not only is policy the product of politics – meaning the outcome of a balance of power that is ever shifting – also it is the result of personality and the processes of government. Scholars can err in assuming wholly rational decision-makers, just as they err if they assume that military experts will be uniformly expert because they are licensed as such, in the context of any particular war. Each war involves warfare whose character will be in some measure unique. Experience is useful, but generic military expertise needs to be adapted for, and applied sensibly to, the unique case at hand.

It is important to remember three limitations in particular on the expertise of professional military experts. First, the uniqueness of each conflict demands some translation of the expert's general expertise for its better fit with the needs of the local place and current moment. Second, each war is unique not in the sense that "it" is what it is as something different from other wars, but rather that it is ever in the process of being created by the competing strategic endeavours of the belligerents.[xix] The strategic historical entomologist may be able to classify every war by claimed categorization, but the real-time narrative will be one of unpredictable creation. Third, the uniqueness and novelty in the character of each conflict demands that the strategist adapts in the application of his expertise.[xx]

Dilemma of ignorance:

When a war appears not to be progressing well, what does one do? Can one identify the problem? Should we redouble our military effort, try harder with more means, or does that risk the reinforcement of failure? When should we change course strategically? Are we trying to do the wrong things? In which case our strategy is asking too much of our operations, which in turn necessarily asks too much of our tactical effort – all because politics has demanded that policy instructs strategy

to do the impossible. The logic is inexorable, but in historical practice often one cannot follow the logic. For example, the overriding problem in 1914-18 was that policy required the military effort to accomplish military results that literally were beyond its ability. Therefore, the deadly tactical problem of the offence-defence relationship in World War I was really a political problem. Policy did not fit military conditions until the Hundred Days Campaign of August-November 1918. German military manpower and other assets needed to be massively attrited and their morale had to be destroyed. The technical and tactical key to battlefield success was the generation of a battlefield dominance enabled by an unmatchable quantity and quality of precise artillery fire. The underlying problem, of course, is that when one chooses to fight, or even conduct "armed and episodically violent social work", one cannot know just how hard one will have to fight, or for how long. Future warfare is the kingdom of guesswork. Because of the inherent uncertainty about the course and outcome of future warfare, it is a little unsettling to realize that the key factors in decisions to fight or not to fight frequently are not assessments of the believed military balance and suchlike rational matters. Instead, what matters most is the measure of the most influential policymaker's personal tolerance of risk. And an individual's risk tolerance/aversion varies widely, as investment and insurance theory and data tell us. Official processes of policymaking should discipline unduly adventurous policies, but all too obviously frequently they either do not really exist or they simply fail to function as a dampener of unwarranted optimism. Some politician policymakers are highly risk-tolerant; indeed, there are people who derive pleasure from the thrill of danger, physical, political, and moral. Yet others will not be risk-tolerant, but instead will be risk-blind, if not indifferent. Peril will not be recognized, or will be noted but hastily dismissed because its possibility is so unwelcome. One should never discount the sovereign potency of human weakness, folly, incompetence, and sheer ignorance, over a context of strategic decision that must strain the abilities even of those who are sober, capable, and well informed. Because strategists strive to cope well enough with a professional realm wherein chance can rule, even their well-laid plans and sound practice can be undone unfairly by the contingency known simply as bad luck.

Future warfare is the kingdom of guesswork.

It is my hope that these notes will serve as a contribution to an ongoing conversation among the readers of Infinity Journal about the enduring nature and changing character of strategy. The general theory of strategy does not change, but it can and should find some new expression for our times. Also, although there is no new knowledge to be discovered about strategy, old knowledge can be lost.

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[i] Williamson Murray, Military Adaptation in War: With Fear of Change (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p.30. Murray is quoting himself from an article he published in 1988. His important thought must not be permitted to encourage any temptation to understate and undervalue the mutual dependency of strategy and tactics.

[ii] Carl von Clausewitz, On War, tr. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (1832-4; Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), p. 81.

[iii] Colin S. Gray, The Strategy Bridge: Theory for Practice (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

[iv] Justin Kelly and Mike Brennan, Alien: How Operational Art Devoured Strategy (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, September 2009), takes no conceptual prisoners. The argument is probably overstated, but in the main it is plausible.

[v] Robert Lyman, The Generals: From Defeat to Victory, Leadership in Asia, 1941-45 (London: Constable, 2008), p.341.

[vi] Margaret MacMillan, Peacemakers: The Paris Conference of 1919 and Its Attempt to End War (London: John Murray, 2001), would be amusing were it not such a sad tale that it tells in such detail that is appalling. For historical depth, see the case studies that extend from Ancient Greece to the Cold War of the twentieth century, in Williamson Murray and Jim Lacey, eds., The Making of Peace: Rulers, States, and the Aftermath of War (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

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[x] Eliot A. Cohen, Supreme Command: Soldiers, Statesmen, and Leadership in Wartime (New York: The Free Press, 2002).

[xi] Charles E. Callwell, Small Wars: A Tactical Textbook for Imperial Soldiers, 3rd edn. (1906; London: Greenhill Books, 1990), p.90.

[xii] Edward N. Luttwak, Strategy: The Logic of War and Peace, rev. edn. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), p.xii.

[xiii] With apologies to the late Herman Kahn, On Thermonuclear War (1960; New York: The Free Press, 1969), p. 287.

[xiv] Antulio J. Echevarria II, Preparing for One War and Getting Another (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, September 2010), is indispensable as a clarifier of confusion.

[xv] I wrestle with the issues of relevant education in my Schools for Strategy: Teaching Strategy for 21st Century Conflict (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, November 2009).

[xvi] Clausewitz, On War, p.104.

[xvii] Colin S. Gray, "The Strategist as Hero", Joint Force Quarterly, No. 62 (3rd Quarter, July 2011), pp. 37-45.

[xviii] Clausewitz, On War, p.85.

[xix] My confidence in this line of thought has been strengthened helpfully by Patrick Porter, Military Orientalism: Eastern War Through Western Eyes (London: C. Hurst, 2009), esp. pp. 65, 170.

[xx] Murray, Military Adaptation in War, advances our understanding usefully.

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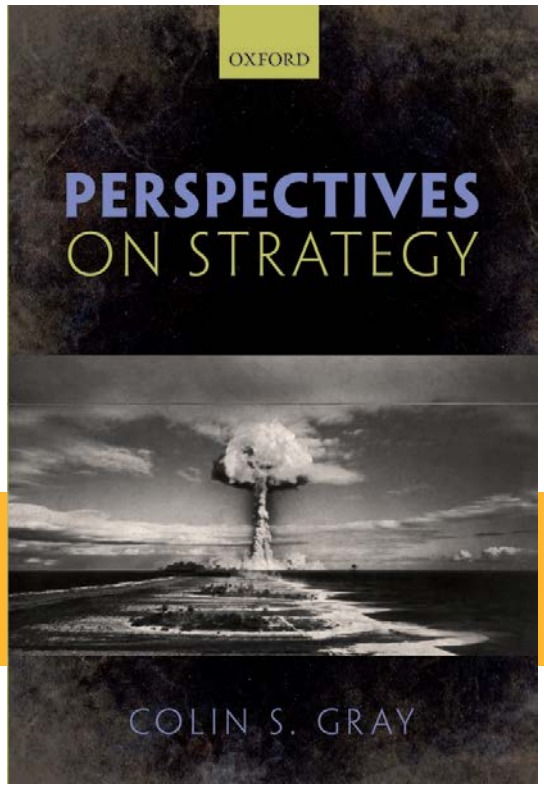

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Explaining Strategic Theory

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The term 'strategy' must be one of the most commonly used terms in public discourse. It is employed to refer to anything from state policy, business plans, to personal choices. Yet few appreciate what this term really means, and what it implies as an approach to the study of social phenomena.

The notion of Strategic Theory as a method of analysis has permeated into the wider domain of International Relations and Political Studies via the work of scholars like Bernard Brodie and Thomas Schelling, and has been increasingly employed as a tool to assist in the comprehension of decision-making, particularly with respect to the use of military power. One of the best statements of the utility of Strategic Theory is provided by Harry Yarger: 'Strategic theory opens the mind to all the possibilities and forces at play, prompting us to consider the costs and risks of our decisions and weigh the consequences of those of our adversaries, allies, and others'. [i]

What, then, is Strategic Theory, and how does it help open the mind? Working from first principles, we aim to provide a concise understanding of what Strategic Theory encompasses in its essentials. As will be shown, to achieve this understanding it is important to appreciate what Strategic Theory is not, as much as what it is. In the process, we hope to show that Strategic Theory is a simple, parsimonious, yet elegant, way of clarifying complexity.

Before proceeding it is necessary to appreciate how the term 'theory' is being used in this context. Plainly, in any study of the infinitely varied scale of human conduct, Strategic Theory cannot aspire to achieve any hard scientific understanding that survives experimental testing under exactly replicable conditions. However, it does constitute a theory, in the broader sense, which advances a set of propositions that, if true, can be held to explain certain facts or phenomena. In this regard, Strategic Theory reveals itself less as a set of hard and fast rules, and more as a series of purposive assumptions, or rules of understanding, that guide analysis; though as we shall endeavour to suggest in the conclusion, these rules do ultimately enable us to posit a plausible, all encompassing, definition of Strategic Theory.

Rules of Understanding: The Key Features of Strategic Theory

1) The study of ends, ways and means

Strategy is concerned with the ways in which available means are employed in order to achieve desired ends. Analysis using Strategic Theory therefore involves the study, in Michael Howard's words, of the 'use of available resources to gain any objective'.[ii] Here, the term 'resources' (the 'means') refers not simply to the tangible elements of power, but also to the many intangible factors that might impose themselves on a decision-maker – most notably the degree of will that an actor can mobilize in the pursuit of its goals.

2) Interdependent decision-making

A second key feature of Strategy Theory is that decision-making is influenced by the existence of a wilful adversary (or adversaries) set on achieving its (or their) own ends. This in turn means that the quality of strategic decision-making must be measured not against any fixed standard of efficacy, but in light of the response it can be expected to elicit from an adversary. It is this feature – along with the uncertainty it engenders – that distinguishes strategy from administrative behaviour, and it is the consideration of how interdependent decisions are reached in a fluid environment that provides Strategic Theory with a great deal of its richness. Many of

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the key insights provided by thinkers like Carl von Clausewitz and Thomas Schelling, for example, are predicated on the proposition that strategic decision-making is dependent on the choices and actions of others in the political system.[iii]

3) The study of the political actor as the central unit of analysis

Principally, strategic theorists concern themselves with the calculations of what are termed 'unitary' political actors, be they states, sub-state entities, or any other social grouping. Strategic Theory analysis is interested in describing the choices available to such actors and evaluating the quality of their decision-making. Thus, strategic theorists will invariably attempt to trace the line of thinking of a particular political entity to comprehend how it seeks to achieve its objectives.

4) Understanding value systems and preferences

Evaluating decisions in light of the responses they elicit from an adversary implies a requirement to understand the relevant actors' value systems and preferences – in the interests of minimizing uncertainty. Strategic theorists are, in other words, concerned with understanding what motivates the actors under consideration. They are concerned with asking how actors construct their interests in light of their ideological motivations, how these interests translate into specific objectives and how they shape the choice of means employed to achieve them.

5) The assumption of rationality

Strategic Theory assumes the existence of rational actors. To be considered rational, actors must exhibit behaviour that is consistent with the attainment of their desired end. The assumption of rationality does not suppose that the actor is functioning with perfect efficiency or that all decisions always produce the 'correct' or maximum outcome for the actor. It is merely a presupposition that an actor's decisions are made after some kind of cost–benefit calculation that results in a decision to employ means so as to optimize a desired end in accordance with an actor's values.[iv] It is in some degree a problematic assumption (how do we know if a cost-benefit calculation has been undertaken for instance?), but Strategic Theory would lack analytical purchase without it.

The assumption of rationality does not suppose that the actor is functioning with perfect efficiency

6) The observance of moral neutrality

Strategic Theory is intellectually disinterested in the moral validity of the means, ways and ends of any actor. Commentary is confined to evaluating how well the chosen means are used to achieve stated ends. This understanding includes and applies to all instrumental acts of violence. This may seem clinical, even cold blooded, but it is a logical concomitant of any dispassionate attempt to understand strategic decisions. As Schelling elucidates, this is for two reasons. First, strategic 'analysis is usually about the situation not the individuals – about the structure of incentives, of information and communication, the choices available, and the tactics that can be employed'.[v] Second, Strategic Theory 'cannot proceed from the point of view of a single favoured participant. It deals with situations in which one party has to think about how the others are going to reach their decisions'.[vi]

The Application of Occam's Razor

These six features comprise the core of Strategic Theory. We contend that it is a precise and economical tool because it applies the principle of Occam's Razor. That is to say, it incorporates as few postulates as possible in its operation.[vii]

Of course, what has been presented so far is only a basic framework. What these key assumptions also provide is a point of entry into many other interesting questions, such as: how is it possible to gain an appreciation of another's value system (through serious historical or anthropological research); and how might we be able to discern when an actor has attained its objectives, or has reached a point where it has maximized its potential with its chosen means (a matter of judgment based on knowledge of the actor's value system)?

With its focus on understanding value systems and their interaction with other actors in the wider environment, Strategic Theory might be considered a form of constructivism *avant la lèttre*. Strategic Theory, however, avoids the problematic nature of constructivist approaches as they have evolved within the field of contemporary International Relations. This latter brand of constructivism tends to come with normative 'bolt-ons' to the effect that, because identities and interests are not permanently fixed, they must be manipulated towards some set of universal humanitarian values. This, we contend, is an unduly ethnocentric enterprise that (for reasons provided earlier) Strategic Theory avoids.

Additionally, Strategic Theory does not fall into the hole that American political scientists often manage to dig for themselves by perceiving a contradiction between the fact that identities and interests may be constructed from contingent historical and social experiences (rather than given by immutable structures in the international system), and the fact that once interests are formed they are often pursued with great realist vigour – particularly on the part of major state actors on the international stage. Strategic Theory perceives no such contradiction.

What Strategic Theory Is Not…

Strategic Theory avoids many of the pitfalls that have afflicted International Relations because, in disciplinary terms, the two are unrelated. Its modern origins derive from public choice economics. It is an analytical tool that is sometimes brought in to investigate issues and problems in the realm of International Relations, but it is not intrinsically *of* International Relations. Unfortunately, some scholars do consider it a branch of International Relations, and this leads to misunderstanding and confusion. Thus it is worth mentioning briefly what Strategic Theory is not. This, in itself, also helps to clarify the nature and value of our approach.

1) Strategic Theory is not just the study of military power

It is true that the term 'strategy' derives from the Greek word *strategos*, meaning the 'art of the general', but the way strategy is defined (the application of means to ends) implies no inherent link with military power and war. The majority of self-described strategic theorists probably do study the use, or threat of use, of armed force in politics. Fundamentally, though, Strategic Theory has universal application across the sphere of human activity as Thomas Schelling, himself a political economist, demonstrated in much of his work.[viii]

2) Strategic Theory is not Strategic Studies

It is important to make a distinction between Strategic Theory and Strategic Studies. Strategic Studies emerged as a field of academic enquiry after World War II. It was concerned with the study of military power in international politics. As such it is unsurprising that Strategic Theory played an important role in shaping the methodological basis of Strategic Studies.[ix] On the other hand, the substantive concerns of Strategic Studies were more historically contingent. The realist focus on states and material power needs to be understood as consequent to the abandonment of interwar idealism, whilst the focus on deterrence arose due to the advent of nuclear weapons. Thus, although the end of the Cold War brought with it new conditions that challenged the relevance of Strategic Studies, the same cannot be said in relation to Strategic Theory with its commitment to more fundamental issues.

3) Strategic Theory is not the same thing as Security Studies

For reasons outlined above, Strategic Studies has become subsumed into a much broader field of academic endeavour since the end of the Cold War. States and nuclear weapons are no longer the only things on the agenda when academics talk of 'security'. Such things remain important, but they now jostle up against a much greater range of concerns embraced by the new Security Studies.[x] Indeed, security – defined in terms of the absence of threats to welfare – is becoming so broad a term that neither of us is really quite sure what its study now amounts to. But this does not worry us over much: just as Strategic Theory is not Strategic Studies, nor is it Security Studies.

Strategic culture is a problematic concept, and is not necessary to sustain coherent strategic analysis.

4) Strategic Theory is not the study of 'strategic culture'

Strategic culture is a problematic concept, and is not necessary to sustain coherent strategic analysis. Strategic Theory, as has been emphasized, routinely involves the study of how value systems shape the character of choices in relation to ends and means. If this is what people mean by the study of 'culture' then Strategic Theory is, *ipso facto*, concerned with the study of cultural variables. Academic notions of strategic culture go back a long way. More recently it has attracted interest amongst constructivist-minded International Relations scholars who are concerned to challenge the dominant Realist paradigm in their field by demonstrating the importance of ideas for explaining the behaviour of political actors.[xi] Realists have succeeded in mounting a spirited counter-offensive.[xii] Nevertheless, the whole debate would hardly have been necessary had greater attention been paid to the insights available from the literature on strategic theory.

5) Strategic Theory is not Game Theory

Just as Strategic Theory has no need to engage with problematic notions of culture, neither does it connote the opposite fallacy of a value-free understanding of rational-actor behaviour as embodied in Game Theory. By no means have all strategic theorists found value in Game Theory. Brodie, for example, did not believe it as directly valuable.[xiii] Schelling did employ it, but the most influential and enduring aspects of his work derive not from his mathematical formulations, but from his profound qualitative understanding of the interdependent character of human relationships.

A Brief Case Study – Using Strategic Theory to Define Terrorism

Now that a set of statements has been advanced about what does, and does not, constitute Strategic Theory, let us turn to the question of what they all add up to. At the beginning of this piece we made the claim that Strategic Theory was a precise and efficient method that can help simplify and clarify social phenomena. Let us provide a brief example that will hopefully elucidate what we mean.

In recent years the term 'terrorism' has vexed International Relations scholars, with one lamenting that over 200 definitions have been put forward. The received wisdom is that terrorism 'is nearly impossible to define',[xv] and that consequently no stable basis for study has been possible.[xvi] With our previous claims in mind, we would want to reject such a view. Indeed, we consider that the term is easy and unproblematic to define. One may employ Occam's Razor. Simply put, terror is an abstract noun that denotes fear, and thus terrorism can be defined quite adequately as the creation of fear for a purpose.[xvii] In this way, terrorism reveals itself as a technique, a tactic. This is a perfectly stable basis for study. If you are seeking to generate fear for instrumental reasons then you are practising terrorism: and you are therefore liable, accurately, to be called a terrorist. If you are not explicitly trying to generate fear, then you are not a terrorist.

The self-inflicted problem for many in International Relations and Political Science is of course that they insist, without any clear reason, in attaching moral valuations to the term terrorism (with people who use terrorism deemed to be bad). Strategic Theory practises intellectual disinterest towards the moral validity of the cause, along with the means, ways and ends of political action. It holds that terrorism, like any tactic, can be used in good or bad ways for either good or bad purposes.[xviii] As a parent, one might consider it appropriate to instil fear (albeit of a mild kind) in one's children for a whole variety of laudable reasons. Sub-state actors sometimes (but not always) employ the tactics of terror to achieve their political goals. The IRA, for example, sometimes resorted to terrorism, but it also applied violence

with other strategic effects in mind.[xix] States, of course, are also perfectly capable of employing terrorist tactics. Although strategic theorists are dedicated to evaluating correlations between ends, ways and means, we make no automatic value assumptions about the intrinsic moral worthiness of the actor or its cause merely on the basis of the tactics it chooses to employ at any one point in a campaign to attain its political purposes.

The point is that deciding what constitutes a morally good or bad purpose is a wholly separate intellectual task from describing and evaluating the utility of a particular tactic. Mixing up an attempt at description with a moral judgment is what philosophers of language call a category mistake.[xx] To give an example, the much-quoted phrase 'one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter' is a classic category mistake. For a strategic theorist, one part of the phrase – 'terrorist' – alludes to the description of a tactic (someone who seeks to create fear for a purpose), whilst the other – 'freedom fighter' – is a positively loaded moral judgment. To fuse together these different intellectual standpoints is illogical. Strategic Theory thus succeeds in revealing that the slogan 'one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter' is meaningless, not least because if one thinks about it, one can, depending on how the contingent moral environment is evaluated, be considered to be both at the same time.[xxi]

Conclusion

Strategic Theory offers a concise and coherent basis for investigating the social behaviour associated with conflict, that is, in situations where actors are endeavouring to secure their interests and values against the interests of other political actors. It routinely reaches out to other areas of academic endeavour, but it is not intrinsically *of* any other area. Its fundamental concerns are not indissolubly linked to a particular historical, ethical or other context. On the contrary, it is defined in such a manner as to help the theorist to extricate him or herself from situational bias.

In outlining these crucial elements it is finally possible to posit a concise definition of Strategic Theory: in its irreducible essence, Strategic Theory is the theory of interdependent decision-making under conditions of uncertainty. As such, it possesses considerable advantages for the analyst, facilitating, as it does, the disentangling of efforts to evaluate instrumental behaviour from efforts to impose arbitrary moral valuations on it. In this manner, Strategic Theory facilitates clarity of understanding. Strategic Theory is, thereby, mind opening and intellectually liberating.

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The Policy-Strategy Distinction: Clausewitz and The Chimera of Modern Strategic Thought

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The policy-strategy distinction is one of the most important issues in the neo-Clausewitzian canon.[i] "The political object is the goal," Clausewitz notes, and "war is the means of reaching it."[ii] Clausewitz further notes that strategy is the "the use of engagement for the purpose of the war."[iii] This essay explains policy and strategy and argues for the importance of a sound understanding of their complex relationship in modern strategic thought and practice.

While this debate is primarily intellectual, it also has manifold policy implications. Tactics and strategy are frequently mistaken for policy, and policy mistaken for the strategies needed to execute them. Widespread ignorance of policy-strategy in, among others, America holds back a sound analysis of modern security threats and retards the development of intellectual tools needed to cope with them.

Widespread ignorance of policy-strategy holds back a sound analysis of modern security threats

Policy and Strategy 101

To put it simply, policy is a condition or behavior. Strategy, in turn, is an instrumental device that is given meaning by the policy. Policy is that which a government decrees, and strategy is a highly technical set of steps to accomplish it. Operations and tactics are the building blocks of strategy, the process by which lofty strategic dreams become reality. While politics and policy sit on top of a military hierarchy, the relationship between these various components should be understood as dynamic and nonlinear. A strategy cannot be executed without tactics and operations. Bad strategy can lose a war even if the policy is sound. The idea that "amateurs study strategy, while professionals study logistics" is not helpful, since while logistics enables strategy, logistics loses all meaning without a strategic aim.[iv]

A government or *governing* entity formulates policy through an often-fractious political process and then seeks to institute it over another entity. Policy can be the superb distillation of a guiding statesman's strategic insight, a messy cobbled-together compromise brokered between competing domestic political elites, or both. Moreover, while Clausewitz is clear that the political object is what determines the military objectives and the methods by which they are reached, the object cannot be used as a sole standard of measurement to evaluate a war's progress. War is not an abstraction, and the political object can only be used as measurement in the context of two mutually opposed forces at war with each other.[v]

A government or *governing* entity formulates policy through an often-fractious political process and then seeks to institute it over another entity.

While this sounds simple enough, it is significantly more difficult in practice. Take, for example, the case of the "AF-PAK" conflict. It is the policy of the United States that terrorism against its citizens must be prevented. In Afghanistan and Pakistan, this ostensibly translates into a strategy (mislabeled as a policy) to "disrupt, dismantle, and defeat" al-Qaeda.

Notice, however, that the actual focus of American tactics and operations in the region has been to build the authority of Hamid Karzai in Afghanistan — which does not necessarily relate to the expressed policy aim. These divergent tactics can be explained by the adoption of a different policy and corresponding strategy. While Gian P. Gentile has written soundly on counterinsurgency's "strategy of tactics," it may be said that there actually *was* a strategy in Afghanistan. This strategy served a policy aim of building a pro-Western,

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democratic, and stable state.[vi] The same political process that produced the initial AF-PAK policy aim generated a different policy, and thus a different strategy. As the previous example indicates, those seeking to understand the neo-Clausewitzian paradigm should not expect that policy is rational, or that strategy will always serve the policy. Policy is the product of a political process, the fractiousness of which can vary by political culture. However, one should not assume that the policies of authoritarian nations are more coherent than democracies. Authoritarian governments merely bring the endemic domestic political battles of democracies within the Politburo, substituting the covert sniping of courtiers and bureaucrats for multi-party electoral conflict.

Clausewitz, perhaps because of the difficult translation of *politik* from the original German, does *not* argue that war is an abstract expression of direct policy. Rather, he states the obvious: war is an outgrowth of existing political dynamics that manifest themselves in purposeful violence. And just because a given policy goal has been determined does not mean that the task of the strategist is easy — the strategist faces enormous difficulties in coping with fog, friction, and the purposeful actions of the enemy.[vii]

Second, it is important to qualify what policy and strategy are *not*. Strategy is not another word for a military doctrine or activity. There is no such thing as a distinct counterinsurgency "strategy" because there is also no such thing as a counter-sniper or anti-aircraft strategy. Strategy is also not an aspiration or an idea, as recent grand strategy debates suggest. Without a policy, there can be no strategy. A strategy only has meaning within the context of policy. Without policy, strategy is simply the political-military equivalent of a vestigial organ. Similarly, strategy is often mistaken for policy. There is no such thing as a policy of using unmanned aerial vehicles to attack terrorist militants, although different military engagements can form the core of a strategy that accomplishes a policy.[viii]

Strategy is not another word for a military doctrine or activity.

Perhaps the most important lesson of the policy-strategy nexus is that impeccable strategy can still fail to realize a delusional policy. When the Pentagon screened the film *The Battle of Algiers* after the September 11, 2001 attacks, they curiously missed the film's central point. The policy of the French government was that Algeria would continue to remain a French possession. But it is difficult to see how better strategy would have dealt with the political problems inherent in the policy: a sizable chunk of Algerian citizens did not wish to be part of an inequitable colonial system. Any strategy that accomplished such a policy would inevitably rely on overwhelming force, and such force proved so disruptive to French domestic politics that Charles DeGaulle eventually chose to let Algeria go in order to save France. Unfortunately, the lesson that some took from this experience was that a better counterinsurgency strategy that avoided the use of torture could have compensated for a poor policy.

From Semantic to Strategic Confusion

Examples of confusion about policy and strategy are commonplace in modern strategic thought and discourse. Much as barbed wire trapped World War I soldiers seeking to climb over trenches and evade deadly fire, confusion over policy and strategy holds back strategists and policymakers seeking to provide solutions to security problems. Without clear definitions of policy and strategy – which Clausewitz did provide – it is difficult to make accurate critiques of current security problems or think rigorously about future policies, strategies and operations.

Grand strategies are the creations of historians, analytical devices useful only in retrospect for thinking about an accumulation of best practices over an extended period of time.

Take Frederick Kagan's description of grand strategy, for example: "Grand strategy is the use of all of a state's resources to achieve all of its objectives. It is not a plan, but a process of evaluating the global situation; developing clear objectives; understanding available resources; recognizing enemies, threats, and challenges; and then putting resources against tasks in an iterative fashion, adjusting objectives, approaches, and resource allocation as appropriate to the changing situation." What Kagan describes is a mishmash of policy (the "why") and strategy (the "how). It is also something essentially impossible for any one government to actually formulate, which at least partially explains the spate of articles decrying the lack of grand strategy since the Cold War.[ix] Grand strategies are the creations of historians, analytical devices useful only in retrospect for thinking about an accumulation of best practices over an extended period of time. Strategy does not have meaning without policy, making grand strategy an artful exercise in constructing a bridge to nowhere. Certainly, strategy on a large scale can be "grand," but this is distinct from the ideational — sometimes wholly ideological — way grand strategy is described in strategic debate.

But confusion is unfortunately not limited to the writings of grand strategists, as evidenced by the perennial issues surrounding formal American national security strategies (NSS). The NSS is rarely ever a "strategy" in that it makes choices about the allocation of resources or matches them with capabilities. Is it policy, then? Unfortunately the document is more a reflection of the political *process* than a clear or useful statement of policy priority. The NSS is an extended campaign speech — in reality the budget is truly policy.[x] Semantic quibbling? Given that all defense planning documents flow from the guidance set by the NSS, imprecision has actual operational costs.

When it comes to counterinsurgency, policy-strategy confusion is truly endemic. Admiral Mike Mullen's comments that the US could not "kill [its] way to victory" in counterinsurgency operations defies strategic logic on multiple levels.[xi] If the United States, like France in Algeria, could not use force to achieve a policy goal, then the policy goal itself should

have been questioned. Armed forces exist primarily to fight. Instead of re-examining the policy goal, Mullen's comments implied that the US would still pursue the same unachievable goal, except this time substituting development projects and other forms of political engagement for the M4 rifle and the precision-guided bomb.

When it comes to counterinsurgency, policy-strategy confusion is truly endemic.

David Galula's favorable quotation of Mao Zedong that a revolutionary war is 80% political and 20% military also misunderstands the meaning of the "political." Both Vladimir Lenin and Carl Schmitt, though diametrically opposed in ideology, inverted Clausewitz by claiming that war is not political intercourse with the addition of violence, but politics itself. Mao was essentially expressing an ideal of all-out warfare that fused ideas, organizations, and weapons together into an organic and lethal assemblage. Had Galula better understood the policy-strategy distinction, he might have understood the problems with this ideal. The phrase is both banal — war, revolutionary or not, always privileges the political — and dangerous in its paradoxical acceptance of ontology rooted in a doctrine of ideological total war.[xii]

We similarly find confusion when thinking about Israel's so-called "policy" of targeted killing. As A.E. Stahl and William F. Owen have observed, a policy cannot be an action. Israel has a policy of continued national existence, which implies the defense of its citizens from terrorists. Israel has a strategy of targeted killings to accomplish this aim. Similarly, given the United States has a *policy* that terrorism against its citizens not be tolerated. Targeted killings by drone, manned aircraft, or a team of Special Forces is a strategy designed to accomplish this policy aim.[xiii]

By mistaking strategy for policy, critics of targeted killings make the error of assuming that the means are indistinguishable from the policies that give them purpose.

By mistaking strategy for policy, critics of targeted killings make the error of assuming that the means are indistinguishable from the policies that give them purpose. Given that the respective policy goals — the existence of Israel and the continued safety of American citizens — are universally agreed upon — the debate is precisely over the strategies used to achieve them. As Dan Trombly argues, the unfortunate fact that Yemen's government uses American counterterrorism to benefit itself does not invalidate the use of force against al-Qaeda terrorists in Yemen. A different strategy, which bypasses the Yemeni government to independently develop targeting information, may achieve the same aims.[xiv]

It matters little whether counterterrorism or counterinsurgency is an intrinsically better suite of tactics and operations. Rather, the question is whether the tactic, operation, or strategy accomplished the *policy*. Many, for example, failed to understand the point of William F. Owen's piece "Killing Your Way to Control," because they mistook his *strategy* and *tactics* of using force to quell insurgencies for a *policy* of Roman annihilation. The difference is not trivial — a correct understanding of Owen's writing reveals he is talking about using lawful force against opponents to support a (presumably correct) policy. With an incorrect policy, force is an empty device. Understood wrongly as policy, the article was cast as a retrograde relic of an era before the new science of using force in the new "complex adaptive" era of military operations.[xv]

Sometimes the consequences of ignoring the policy-strategy distinction can prove fatal. The Prusso-Germans, who believed war to be truly autonomous from policy, eventually subjugated the entirety of the state to the purpose of the war. War must serve war, Field Marshall Erich Ludendorff decreed. German strategy in the age of machine warfare not only killed millions, but also perpetrated the harmful *dolchstoss* mythology of military victory and political betrayal.[xvi] The result? A divided Germany, millions dead, and a ruined Europe.

Towards a Better Understanding

The strategist, unfortunately, cannot control how language evolves. Policy and strategy have different meanings to different professional communities. Colloquial meanings also increasingly abound. There may be even aspects of external strategic thought that military-strategic thinkers may find cause to emulate and ponder, as the influence of business strategy on the discipline of Net Assessment attests. However, it is vitally important to have a clear understanding of policy and strategy in war.

The pedant, unfortunately, must be given his due. When even informed commentators mistake tactics or strategies for policy, both discussion and practice of national security revolves around an endless discussion of technical ways and means to accomplish objectives rather than the objectives themselves. Likewise, when policies or aspirations are mistaken for strategies, documents are produced in which strategic goals are proclaimed with little of the "how" needed to actually turn them into reality. Endless calls for new strategies are issued, without deep thought about whether or not the policies they support are fundamentally realizable.

Ignoring the significance of the distinction robs military analysts of the ability to tell tactics, strategy, and policy apart

The policy-strategy distinction deserves the attention lavished on other neo-Clausewitzian dualisms such as war's grammar and logic. Ignoring the significance of the distinction or dismissing it as a semantic issue robs military analysts of the ability to tell tactics, strategy, and policy apart. Clausewitz is remarkably clear on the difference between

the political object and the violence needed to institute it upon an unwilling opponent, but strategically incoherent military concepts and government documents reject this admirable simplicity. While Clausewitz cannot cure all of the 21st century's "wicked" problems, his elegant depiction of the complex relationship between policy, strategy, and tactics can help future strategists overcome the conceptual confusion that currently characterizes modern strategy.

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The Mythology of Grand Strategy

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Grand strategy means different things to different people. Its meanings range from Robert Art's restricted definition that "a grand strategy tells a nation's leaders what goals they should aim for and how best they can use their country's military power to attain these goals," [i] to most major foreign policy analysts' view "that 'grand strategy' and 'foreign policy' are not synonymous. Grand strategy, the conceptual framework, is necessarily broader than foreign policy, the political actions of the state in international relations." [ii] As one astute observer noted,

> *[g]rand strategy, it turns out, is one of the most slippery and widely abused terms in the foreign policy lexicon. The concept is often invoked but less often defined, and those who do define the phrase do so in a variety of different, and often contradictory, ways. The result is that discussions of grand strategy are often confused or superficial. Too frequently, they muddle or obscure more than they illuminate. [iii]*

Most definitions, however, hold to a particular shared set of myths about grand strategy. These misconceptions are generally either factually incorrect or distinctly arguable, yet they are largely taken on faith by today's grand strategic literature.

Most definitions, however, hold to a particular shared set of myths about grand strategy.

Two particular misconceptions will be treated herein. The first is merely factual, reflecting a relative lack of historical awareness within a segment of the literature. The second concerns the value of the trajectory of the evolution of grand strategic thought and thus, being subjective, may be argued either way. The first misconception is the common idea that Basil Liddell Hart invented the concept of grand strategy. The second *subjective* myth is that the post-WWI and especially post-Cold War expansion in the meaning of grand strategy benefits strategic studies or international relations, in theory or in practice. The aim of this article is not to establish a proper meaning for grand strategy, nor to condemn the existence of the idea as unnecessary or counterproductive to theory, or practice, but rather to indicate that the grand strategic literature lacks appreciation of its own history, of how the concept has developed over time. Any serious attempt to define grand strategy within, or remove it from, wider strategic theory must be founded upon a full understanding of its evolution first and foremost.

The Liddell Hart Myth

The notion that Liddell Hart introduced the concept of grand strategy to strategic studies is prevalent. [iv] Liddell Hart first mentioned grand strategy in his 1925 pamphlet *Paris, or the Future of War*, by suggesting that "the function of grand strategy [is] to discover and exploit the Achilles' heel of the enemy nation; to strike not against its strongest bulwark but against its most vulnerable spot." [v] This initial formulation was swiftly followed by a more familiar one:

> *As tactics is an application of strategy on a lower plane, so strategy is an application on a lower plane of 'grand strategy.' If practically synonymous with the policy which governs the conduct of war, as distinct from the permanent policy which formulates its object, the term 'grand strategy' serves to bring out the sense of 'policy in execution.' For the role of grand strategy is to co-ordinate and direct all the resources of a nation towards*

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> *the attainment of the political object of the war—the goal defined by national policy…Furthermore, while the horizon of strategy is bounded by the war, grand strategy looks beyond the war to the subsequent peace. It should not only combine the various instruments, but so regulate their use as to avoid damage to the future state of peacefulness, secure and prosperous. Little wonder that, unlike strategy, the realm of grand strategy is for the most part terra incognita![vi]*

Yet, this elucidation is where Liddell Hart's development of grand strategic theory ends. His paragraphs concerning grand strategy are repeated nearly unchanged through numerous publications, even to the third edition of his magnum opus, *Strategy*. In 1967, 28 years later, "the realm of grand strategy is for the most part *terra incognita*—still awaiting exploration, and understanding." [vii]

The sudden lurch in Liddell Hart's definition of grand strategy between 1925 and 1929 notwithstanding, he never developed any momentum for exploring grand strategy, which itself raises questions as to whether he truly did introduce the concept to strategic studies. He confidently maintained that grand strategy was largely unexplored, without ever pushing the further boundaries of understanding himself. This is not the behavior of a theorist eager to impress upon his audience the worth of an important idea. "Liddell Hart was a corsair… He did not sift evidence discriminately to see what would turn up; he ransacked it thievishly and bagged what he could find." [viii]

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Throughout the 1920s, Liddell Hart had a close working relationship with an older military theorist, John Frederick Charles Fuller, who overawed even Liddell Hart at first. Indeed, it has been suggested that "[s]o profoundly impressed was he [Liddell Hart] with the book [Fuller's *The Reformation of War*] that he simply plagiarized it almost lock, stock, and barrel in his own first important book, *Paris, or the Future of War* (1925)." [ix] As a corsair, Liddell Hart may simply have stolen the idea of grand strategy from Fuller, who had actually been using the term with familiarity during the First World War, not bothering to define it even in a 1917 report to his superiors entitled "Projected Bases for the Tactical Employment of Tanks in 1918" as if it already had some sort of currency with practitioners at the time. [x]

The notion that Liddell Hart introduced the idea of grand strategy being thus disproven, the task yet remains to indicate just how old the usage of 'grand strategy' is. "The earliest citation to *strategy* in the second edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary* is from 1810." [xi] The first identified use of the term grand strategy to date follows surprisingly soon thereafter. The term was used with familiarity as early as 1834, [xii] but the lack of an explicit definition may imply an even older usage and currency. The development of such a term and attendant concept was probably inevitable. Bernard Brodie noted that "[s]o dynamic and pregnant a word [as strategy] was bound to be applied also to numerous other kinds of competitive situations". [xiii] That it happened so quickly is noteworthy, even though the actual earliest origins of the term remain obscure. The real origins may be important to the history of grand strategic thought, to why a separate form of strategy developed, or they may not be. Without knowing, the importance of the ultimate origin is impossible to gauge.

Whether or not the actual meaning of grand strategy, so early in Anglophone strategic theory is recognizably grand strategic today is not only immaterial, but indeed leads directly to the second misconception. This misconception is that there is a single proper meaning to grand strategy, or at least that it rightly belongs to a certain family of concepts – foreign policy – rather than to strategic studies.

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The Trajectory of Grand Strategy

The mythologized history of grand strategic thought as framing foreign policy is a conflicted one, torn between two competing interpretations. One interpretation states that "[t]he concept of grand strategy has recently regained prominence among international and diplomatic historians. It evolved from the study of military strategy and history, where the idea has an old pedigree…But the term itself, as employed today by international historians, is a recent invention. It has been broadened to encompass a country's foreign-policy outlook in war and peace." Yet this very same exposition also reveals the second interpretation of the mythology, for "[c]lassical realists – intellectually closer to political philosophy and history – understood the value of the concept of grand strategy to the study of foreign policy." There indeed was an allegedly "classical concept of grand strategy in international relations", despite its "recent invention" by certain luminaries in the field. The conflicting interpretation concerns the history of grand strategic thought, of how and when the prevailing modern concept originated. Within the space of three pages, this source promotes both of these conflicting interpretations.

This conflict reveals a segment of the relevant scholarship that appears insecure with itself. The broadened interpretation of grand strategy, as a framework for foreign policy, is eminently arguable: was it necessary or appropriate, is it actually strategy, and so on. The new breadth was never really justified as filling any appropriate need in the field, whether the field be strategic studies or international relations. Thus on the one hand, scholars wish to recognize their contemporaries who have contributed significantly to the modern development of grand strategic thought, to those who have defined the direction it has taken in the past twenty years. On the other, the advocates of grand strategy as foreign policy framework have attempted, deliberately or not, to legitimize their novel use of the term by placing it within a mythologized continuity of meaning.

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To examine the second trend first, one may often see assertions of the timelessness of the foreign policy framework interpretation of grand strategy. "We don't have, per se, a grand strategy in the sense that we don't have what people historically mean by grand strategy," followed by allusions to diplomats such as Talleyrand and Bismarck as having had proper grand strategies.[xv] To unpack this tendency, to reach so far back into history to legitimize modern conceptions of grand strategy, one must appreciate how the Cold War influenced the form of grand strategic thought.

The United States and the West had a constancy of purpose for nearly fifty years, i.e. containing the Soviet Union. The policy of containment arched over all other, less important, US foreign policies and, as necessary, over the developed, implemented grand strategies for war. Ever since the end of the Cold War; however, the United States has been putatively adrift, unsure of what to do and what to strive for in the world. Since then many have proposed grand strategies for interacting with the world, including neo-isolationism, selective engagement, cooperative security, and primacy.[xvi] Yet, interpreting grand strategy in this manner reveals a fundamental misreading of the character of Cold War containment. Containment was never a generic policy for interacting with the rest of the world. Rather, it always had a very specific end, the internal collapse of the Soviet Union, and so was a specific policy to achieve that specific end, which only happened to accrue global dimensions because it was a policy concerning how one global superpower interacted with another.

By advocating particular manners of interacting with the rest of the world, advocates of any form of grand strategy are conflating ends with ways. One does not act in a particular manner merely for its own sake–and a country should do so even less –but because it is anticipated to contribute toward the achievement of a particular desired outcome. Given a particular end to achieve, ways can be discussed meaningfully, but without a given end, merely become hollow exchanges among various ideologies. Some international relations theorists have recognized this, noting that "[g]rand strategies are not nearly as important as grand strategists like to think, because countries tend to be judged by their actions, not their words".[xvii] The idea of grand strategy throughout its use has moved continuously away from strategy in its classical sense, reaching the stage where it is frequently not even associated with purposeful action at all, but merely with the expression of purpose or posture. The current understanding of grand strategy, as framing foreign policy has but weak foundations, necessitating a long, legitimizing history to shore it up.

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Besides occasionally pointing to notable and successful practitioners of diplomacy, such as Talleyrand and Bismarck, the mythology also emphasizes particular theorists whose writings may be construed to contribute to the expansion and separation of the term from its military past. Two theorists in particular have eminent places in the mythology of grand strategic thought. The first and preeminent is its erstwhile originator, Liddell Hart, who is given pride of place due to his contribution as the supposed originator of the term. The second theorist is less recognized, and more frequently by Americans than by others: Edward Mead Earle. Despite this possible neglect, one scholar asserts his importance by suggesting that "[i]n the twentieth century, the subject of grand strategy as a topic for rigorous historical examination first appears in serious form in Edward Meade Earle's classic, *Makers of Modern Strategy*".[xviii] Paul Kennedy has attempted to define both men's places in the history of grand strategic thought, suggesting that

> *if Liddell Hart's ideas about British strategy remain debatable, his contribution to the study and understanding of grand strategy as a whole was very important. What he and, slightly later, Earle were arguing for was a substantial broadening of the definition of the term, to show what a complex and multilayered thing proper grand strategy had to be—and thus to distinguish it very firmly from the strictly operational strategy of winning a particular battle or campaign.* [xix]

This is debatable. Liddell Hart's definition of grand strategy was hardly as broad as has been implied. He equated grand strategy with the policy governing the conduct of the war, and particularly with its actual implementation. "While practically synonymous with the policy which guides the conduct of war, as distinct from the more fundamental policy which should govern its object, the term `grand strategy' serves to bring out the sense of `policy in execution'."[xx] By tying war policy to the condition of the subsequent peace, Liddell Hart was only emphasizing the continuity of politics from peace to war to peace. He merely reiterated and extended Clausewitz's position that "war is not merely an act of policy but a true political instrument, a continuation of political intercourse, carried on with other means."[xxi]

Edward Mead Earle argued in 1942 that "[t]he highest type of strategy—sometimes called grand strategy—is that which so integrates the policies and armaments of the nation that the resort to war is either rendered unnecessary or is undertaken with the maximum chance of victory."[xxii] This definition *does* broaden grand strategy, but primarily only within the mythology of grand strategic thought, made possible by ignoring the writings of JFC Fuller. Fuller had suggested as

early as 1923 that grand strategy was primarily a peacetime activity. "Paradoxical as it may seem, the resting time of the grand strategist is during war, for it is during peace that he works and labors. During peace time he not only calculates the resources in men, supplies and moral forces of all possible enemies, but, having weighed them, he, unsuspected by the enemy, undermines them by a plan." [xxiii]

No writer on grand strategy has ever justified his own definition.

Interpreting these explications as supporting a broader definition of grand strategy lacks the one crucial element that would confirm the broader definition. No writer on grand strategy has ever justified his own definition. Rather, all the early writers who employed the idea of grand strategy–including Julian Corbett, Fuller, Liddell Hart, and Earle–merely assert their individual definitions of grand strategy. There was no attempt by any of them to compare his concept of grand strategy against any other, even to those of contemporaries or close associates, nor to discuss the merits of his own interpretation. Definitions of grand strategy to date have always been arbitrary, starting points for analysis rather than the result of reasoned examination. The reason Liddell Hart and Earle are remembered, but Corbett and Fuller frequently are not, let alone the usage of grand strategy dating from the 19th century, is because of the state of grand strategic thought today. As Brodie noted, "[i]t is characteristic of our convictions, in strategy as in all affairs of life, that we tend to regard them as natural and inevitable." [xxiv] The mythology of grand strategy is a form of historical cherry picking which conforms to the current structure of grand strategic thought by imposing an ahistorical, relatively unchanging meaning onto the term 'grand strategy.'

There never was a golden age of grand strategic thought, one when consensus on its meaning existed. Consensus still does not exist today. It did not exist between the wars. At about the same time that Earle's *Makers of Modern Strategy* was published, so too were two other books. *A Study of War* by Quincy Wright defined grand strategy as "[t]he management of operations so as to determine the times, areas, and results of campaigns in order to win the war". [xxv] *Grand Strategy*, by Henry Antony Sargeaunt and Geoffrey West, by contrast, defined the role of grand strategy as dealing "with the connections between war and the rest of the society or civilization in which war occurs." [xxvi] During the 19th century, grand strategy was frequently worse, even more ill-defined, if defined at all, and in some cases there appears to be little difference between it and strategy. Grand Strategy secures those combinations, which will assure the highest possible advantage in the employment of military force. It deals with the theatre of war, its character, resources, topographical features, inter-communication, and all substantial difficulties to be overcome in the way of success.'" [xxvii] Moreover, as with strategy itself, grand strategy swiftly found application beyond the fields of strategic studies and even of international relations. [xxviii]

Conclusion

How, then, does one attempt to understand grand strategy fully and conscientiously? The answer is: historically, first and foremost. Brodie's comment on our human tendency to consider our own convictions natural and inevitable continues:

> *However, if we examine the history of ideas contained in these convictions, we usually find they have evolved in a definitely traceable way, often as the result of the contributions of gifted persons who addressed themselves to the needs of their own times on the basis of the experience available to them. Our own needs and experience being different, we are enabled by our study to glimpse the arbitrariness of views which we previously regarded as laws of nature and our freedom to alter our thinking is thereby expanded. Where new circumstances require fundamental adjustments to our thinking, such aids to adjustment may be useful.[xxix]*

Grand strategy must be treated historically. Indeed, the history of grand strategy as an idea must be delineated and explored: how the idea evolved; what the strategic and geopolitical circumstances were which led to its evolution; how it fits in with other ideas; how it came to be differentiated from military strategy; and so on.

Establishing grand strategy within broader strategic history, and within the history of ideas, will require jettisoning cherished myths. Observing the changes in the meaning of grand strategy, in their historical context, not only will allow one to ascribe purpose to each step in a messy succession of ideas but also to fit it within wider strategic theory. This will allow measurement of the utility of the successive and parallel ideas of grand strategy, both in theory and to the particular strategic contexts in which they were born. A mature understanding of the history of the concept is the first step to a mature understanding of the idea itself–of what it should comprise, of what questions it should seek to answer and what issues it should strive to address, and even whether the concept itself is necessary at all, or whether it merely distracts attention from or dilutes more useful concepts. Once strategic studies has an understanding of how and why individual ideas on grand strategy as theory were developed, it may then proceed to develop the next iteration of the concept, or to excise the idea entirely.

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Strategic Culture: More Problems than Prospects

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The idea of strategic culture is in need of another more critical examination

The concept of strategic culture has grown more popular of late than its problematic origins and dubious attempts at application warrant. Once described as having undergone three generational shifts, the concept is now in at least its fourth generation, and is no better for any of them. Over the span of more than four decades, the theory's diachronic and synchronic tensions have resisted resolution. The concept fails, in other words, to account for change *over* time as well as commonality *in* time. It attempts to privilege continuity over change in the former sense, and uniqueness over similarity in the latter sense. Its empirical base, moreover, has not gone beyond broad generalizations that do little more than reaffirm national and cultural stereotypes. The idea of strategic culture is, therefore, in need of another more critical examination. Such a re-examination can only lead to the conclusion that, on the whole, the concept's problems far outweigh its prospects. No doubt this condition will continue to attract scholarly interest in the hopes of resolving these tensions. However, for policymakers and strategists, the concept is best avoided, at least for another generation or two. There are enough tautologies involved in formulating policy and strategy already. It is not clear that the credibility of the process can withstand another one.

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Problems with Theory

The theory of strategic culture was originally advanced by Jack Snyder in a monograph entitled, *Soviet Strategic Culture*, published in 1977.[i] Snyder used the concept to challenge the core assumption underpinning US policy regarding "limited nuclear options," namely if deterrence failed, both sides would still act with restraint by selecting targets and weapons that would minimize damage. As a counter to that assumption, Snyder argued that the Soviets "may be more favorably inclined toward unilateral damage limitation strategies than toward cooperative ones." American and Soviet strategic thinking he said "had developed in different organizational, historical, and political contexts, and in response to different situational and technological constraints." Mirror-imaging, in other words, was risky. It is worth noting that Snyder's monograph was published by RAND; and as was typical of its products at the time (and still is), his piece addressed a specific policy issue—in this case, potential vulnerabilities in US nuclear flexibility doctrine. It is also worth noting that an underlying theme in Snyder's study was the credibility of "game theory," a widespread but controversial analytical approach that tended to represent opponents as "generic strategists", who were "culture-free and preconception free." Snyder's concept of strategic culture was one way of highlighting the vulnerability of that theory. In his view, Soviet responses might well surprise American strategists because the two sides could be thinking along different lines, or from within different belief structures. Moreover, these differences could possess a quality of "semipermanence" that placed them on the level of "'culture' rather than mere 'policy.'" [ii]

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All told, Snyder's theory was more useful not as a separate field of study, which it eventually became, but as a means to expose the limitations of mirror-imaging in strategic analyses. The tone of his monograph is tentative: it discusses strategic culture as a theoretical counterweight, rather than as an established fact. The theory itself was based on two broad, but ultimately indefensible assumptions. The first of these was that historical circumstances and experiences are by definition unique; and they thus lead to distinct concepts or ways of thinking. However, this assumption overlooks the fact that many historical experiences are shared, such as wars fought by alliances against common enemies, or intellectual movements such as the Enlightenment, or economic and technological transformations such as the Industrial Revolution. To be sure, shared experiences would have to pass through separate cultural filters; but those filters also expand in the light of shared experiences. In contrast, Snyder's assumption of cultural uniqueness inclined too far in the direction of impermeability or insularity. While all cultures are surely unique in some respects, the historical record shows that their modes of thinking are not necessarily insular. Russian and Western cultures, for instance, interacted over many centuries, and influenced each other in various ways.[iii] As a result of this interaction, they have developed methods of understanding each other, however imperfect. A search for cultural differences, in other words, will yield cultural differences.

A search for cultural differences, in other words, will yield cultural differences.

Snyder's second assumption was that substantial continuity persists despite significant change. Indeed, the essence of strategic culture is that a "large residual degree of continuity" remains, despite changes in "objective conditions." Snyder's term for this was "semipermanence" (a neologism). However, "semipermanence" does not describe a real condition. A thing can either be temporary or permanent: not both. To use this term is to set aside or eliminate the impact of change rather than taking it into account. Once change is so removed, the influence of so-called constants, such as geography or climate, is left unchallenged. Ignoring the tension between change and continuity, thus leads to a different kind of distorted picture. It is one thing to search for unique and enduring attitudes or values: it is another thing to create them.

Snyder's theory of strategic culture not only rested on dubious assumptions, it also suffered from the definitional vagueness and tautological snares that have plagued the general concept of culture. He defined culture as: "the sum total of ideas, conditioned emotional responses, and patterns of habitual behavior that members of a national community have acquired through instruction or imitation and share with each other."[iv] According to the wording here, without knowledge of the "sum total", it is not possible to talk about culture. Moreover, the sum total, if such a thing exists or can be known, would be impossible to represent. In addition, Snyder's definition contains terms, such as "conditioned emotional responses" and "habitual behavior," which convey a sense that culture both defines behavior and determines it. Snyder's tendency toward inclusion rather than exclusion is not unusual among definitions of culture. One example of such a definition appears in one of the official publications of the US military, which refers to culture as the: "distinctive and deeply rooted beliefs, values, ideology, historic traditions, social forms, and behavioral patterns of a group, organization, or society."[v] It should not be surprising then, that we find the same tendency carried over to definitions of strategic culture, which one scholar recently defined as: "a nation's traditions, values, attitudes, patterns of behavior, habits, customs, achievements and particular ways of adapting to the environment and solving problems with respect to the threat or use of force."[vii] Similarly, any number of variables are said to constitute strategic culture: geography, climate, natural resources, organization, traditions, historical practices, political structures, ideology, myths, symbols, generational change, and technology.[vii] Such broad definitions and limitless variables make it impossible to determine what strategic culture is.

While scholars have long admitted defining culture (or strategic culture) is difficult, they have not entirely acknowledged the implications of what they admit.

While scholars have long admitted defining culture (or strategic culture) is difficult, they have not entirely acknowledged the implications of what they admit. Clearly, such definitions are tautological; but circular reasoning is more than an intellectual embarrassment or a minor inconvenience for the discipline. If an object of study cannot be defined and isolated, then genuine scientific analysis cannot begin, and defensible conclusions cannot be drawn. Precise definitions are also a safeguard against determinism, which makes an idea both a cause and an effect. To be sure, some definitions of strategic culture are more selective. However, one cannot compare Soviet strategic culture to American strategic culture unless they are defined in the same way. Otherwise, the concept is useless to policymakers and strategists. Nor can one compare an approach defining strategic culture as the "context" within which strategic debate and formulation take place to one that defines it as the way in which "members of a military or political elite approach the problem of winning."[viii] Drawing general conclusions from such approaches is not possible, and the field of study cannot advance, despite its popularity. Ironically, neither of these approaches needs the label of strategic culture. It adds nothing to their efforts. Definitions of strategic culture have, thus, not only confounded the study of it, they have diverted worthy endeavors from other topics.

Problems in Application

The theory's flaws notwithstanding, it was enthusiastically embraced, and too hastily applied. The literature concerning the concept's use describes it in terms of three waves or generational shifts.[ix] These follow a loose thesis-antithesis-synthesis progression, which is reason enough to arouse our suspicion. Not surprisingly, none of the shifts resolved the underlying tensions in the theory. Leaving our suspicions

aside for the moment, it can be said that a fourth shift has emerged, not mentioned in the literature.

The first wave (or thesis) began in the early 1980s as scholars picked up Snyder's original concept, and applied it in a search for other "distinctly national" approaches to strategy and their core determinants.[x] To be sure, it is reasonable to expect that Russians, Americans, Chinese, and others would think differently about strategy. However, as discussed earlier, the search for uniqueness—for "distinct modes of strategic thinking"—went too far.[xi] Also, removing change from the search for core determinants meant that strategic culture was seen as predictive.

the search for uniqueness went too far

The second shift, or antithesis, began in the early 1990s, with Snyder's criticism of the manner in which his initial theory was being applied.[xiii] Rather than serving as an alternative to rational-actor models, as he had intended, it was being used to predict strategic behavior and to justify specific defense policies precisely because, as previously noted, Snyder's theory and the pictures it created facilitated such use. Snyder was joined in his criticisms by a number of other scholars, who also added that strategic cultures were rarely as unique as assumed, and that many were, in fact, subjectively constructed.[xiv] The concept was not abandoned; however, nor did its growing popularity appear to have suffered in any way.

The third shift began in the late 1990s in response to the criticisms offered by Snyder and others. In essence, it was an attempted synthesis that re-cast strategic culture as an explanatory "context," rather than the determinant, of strategic behavior.[xv] The synthesis did not succeed entirely because contextual factors which explain, must also to some degree determine, otherwise they lack explanatory power. Despite Snyder's denials, his original concept did have deterministic elements in it. To be valid, any theory of strategic culture would have to be able to do both, explain and predict, at least broadly. Yet none has.[xvi] Constructivism has also been part of the synthesis, as recent studies of British, Chinese, Japanese, and Israeli strategic cultures show.[xvii] Ironically, in many ways the constructivist turn has merely taken anthropological studies back to their classic frames of reference, which describe culture as the product of dynamic social processes.

The fourth shift is characterized by the concept's politicization, and its subsequent use in the public sphere. An example is how prominent political figures, such as Javier Solana, have publically used "strategic culture" to make policy announcements and to create or manage expectations.[xviii] Solana announced that the European Union had embraced a "strategic culture that fosters early, rapid, and when necessary, robust intervention."[xix] In this case, the term signified a seemingly broad agreement to put in place mechanisms that would facilitate certain kinds of strategic interventions, while also reaffirming some of the EU's collective values. Another example is found in Robert Kagan's provocative assertion that: "Americans are from Mars and Europeans are from Venus."[xx] Kagan essentially claimed that the United States and Europe had developed diverging strategic cultures. Americans, in his view, were more comfortable using hard power, or military force, to extend the reach of policy; Europeans, in contrast, saw the reliance on military force as crude and naïve, and instead preferred diplomatic measures marked by "subtlety and indirection."[xxi] His subsequent elaboration of the argument in *Paradise and Power* (2003) revealed that, as with the American way of war, the phrase "American strategic culture" had become an extension of politics by rhetorical means.

What emerged was little more than a one-dimensional representation

Kagan's *Paradise and Power* presumed to speak for American strategic culture, and his rendition of it promoted his world view as broadly representative. Absent from his discussion were the dialectical tensions that have defined American politics and strategy from the start. What emerged was little more than a one-dimensional representation; a caricature of the American world view that was perhaps true of the administration of George W. Bush; but not of the administrations immediately before or after it. The fact that the concept of strategic culture facilitates such facile representations is another of its major flaws. Snyder's attempt to distinguish between "mere policy" and strategic culture only begs the question as to whether the latter is not better thought of as a form of grand or *meta*-policy, since it lacks particulars as well as the durability to span different administrations.

Kagan's assertions regarding the celestial origins of Americans and Europeans also show that the boundaries between waves or generational shifts are not rigid. The search for distinctly national approaches to strategy often went hand in hand with the politicization of the concept. Perceived differences between American and European political perspectives shaped the concept of strategic culture. Those applications, in turn, influenced what the major differences were perceived to be, and subsequently what American strategic culture was, and was not. As the campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan wore on, the question of what American strategic culture was became increasingly associated and intertwined with identifying what was wrong with it.

it overlooked the influence of shared experiences, the impact of change, and the dialectical tensions of politics

In sum, although Snyder's concept of strategic culture provided a thoughtful counterweight to the self-reflexive sterility of rational-actor models, its dubious assumptions kept it from being more than that. It provided a viable rationale for acknowledging asymmetry in strategic thinking. However, because it overlooked the influence of shared experiences, the impact of change, and the dialectical tensions of politics, it never adequately described individual strategic cultures. After four generations of effort, it could manage little more than one-sided assertions grounded in vague generalities, stereotypes, and caricatures. In short, it has succumbed to a certain cultural determinism brought on by the concept's

basic definitional vagaries and unresolved tensions. Ironically, while the concept may remain intriguing to academics for that very reason, its problems and flaws make it too risky for policymakers and strategists.

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'Cyberwar' is not coming

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The term cyberspace was coined by the science-fiction writer William Gibson in the 1982 short story 'Burning Chrome'. Of his creation, Gibson later said "it seemed like an effective buzzword ... evocative and essentially meaningless. It was suggestive but had no real semantic meaning, even for me."[i] No one now would deny its buzzy qualities; even in an era of increasing fiscal austerity, attaching the prefix cyber to this or that policy or threat has the power of opening the public purse like no other. For instance, in the recent UK defence review cybersecurity was one of the few areas where increased funding was announced (the other, not coincidentally, was intelligence); in practically every other area of defence the funding arrows pointed sharply downward.

The title and foreword of Britain's new National Security Strategy, *A Strong Britain in an Age of Uncertainty*, provides a perfect example of a paradoxical perception of physical security being matched by a sense of unconventional insecurity:

> *Britain today is both more secure and more vulnerable than in most of her long history. More secure, in the sense that we do not currently face, as we have so often in our past, a conventional threat of attack on our territory by a hostile power. But more vulnerable, because we are one of the most open societies, in a world that is more networked than ever before.[ii]*

Nor is Britain peculiar in this sense; the same sentiment pervades American strategic writings such as the latest *Quadrennial Defense Review* and, no doubt, of most other major countries.[iii]

what does it actually mean for strategists concerned with the balancing of ends, ways and means in conflict today?

The word 'cyberwar' (or two words, 'cyber war', it depends who you ask) is evocative, to be sure, but what does it actually mean for strategists concerned with the balancing of ends, ways and means in conflict today? Not much. In fact, it is not just a meaningless neologism, but strategically a distracting and nonsensical one. Contemporary strategists who reckon that 'cyberwar' is a decisive new form of conflict are wrong.

The apprehension about cyber is natural and predictable. In the late 1960s Marshall McLuhan, drawing on Søren Kierkegaard's 1844 book *The Concept of Dread*, observed that "wherever a new environment goes around an old one there is always new terror." It is not hard to find evidence today of a 'new terror'.[iv] It is splashed across the pages of newspapers and the covers of popular books where all manner of cyber-prefixed threats from 'cyberespionage' and 'cyberterror' to 'cyberwar' and even 'cybergeddon' are proclaimed; and these in turn engender other cyber-prefixed neologisms such as 'cybersecurity', 'cyberpower' and 'cyberstrategy' in response. Most of these neologisms need to die and none sooner than cyberwar. As strategists we should be demanding that our colleagues be more disciplined in their declaration of new prefixed war types.

Haven't I seen you here before?

The present is always shaped by many forces, often deep historical processes — political, social, economic, demographic, climatic and so on; but there can be little doubt

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that this particular moment is powerfully affected by a recent and radical change in the modality of communications which many regard as the dawning of an 'Information Age'. "The Web is shifting power in ways that we could never have imagined", claimed a recent BBC television documentary on cyberspace called *The Virtual Revolution*:

> *With two billion people online the Web is holding governments to account, uncovering injustices, and accelerating globalisation. It's providing us with new allegiances but it's also reinventing warfare.[v]*

the prophets of airpower made exactly the same claim

Leave aside whether this is true — we shall come back to it — and wonder, haven't we heard this before? Of course, repeatedly throughout the 20th century (especially in the first decades but actually still occasionally even today) the prophets of airpower made exactly the same claim. As Michael Sherry commented on early speculations about the "age of flight" in his masterful history *The Rise of American Air Power*:

> *Because prophecy necessarily leaped ahead of technology, it often read like fanciful or bloodless abstractions, as if designed, like science fiction, less to depict future dangers than to express current anxieties. [vi]*

Writing in the shadow of the Great War's ghastly yet indecisive slaughters, strategists such as J.F.C Fuller convinced themselves of the power of aerial warfare to deliver big results fast. In *The Reformation of War* he invited his readers to consider the consequences of a massive aerial attack:

> *London for several days will be one vast raving Bedlam… the government… will be swept away by an avalanche of terror… Thus may a war be fought in forty-eight hours and the losses of the winning side may be actually nil![vii]*

Fuller's imaginings succeeded in capturing brain-space amongst the most senior policy-makers. "The bomber will always get through…", warned Stanley Baldwin in a famous House of Commons speech in November 1932 entitled 'A Fear for the Future'.[viii] Thus twinned can be seen the belief not only in airpower's puissance but an equally acute sense of the fragility of modern society and its vulnerability to attack. As the other great interwar British strategist Basil Liddell-Hart put it, air power enabled strikes to be conducted over top of a nation's surface fortifications:

> *A nation's nerve system, no longer covered by the flesh of its troops is now laid bare to attack, and, like the human nerves, the progress of civilization has rendered it far more sensitive than in earlier and more primitive times.[ix]*

This is not to beg the question that airpower and 'cyberpower' are necessarily the same or equivalent things; rather it is to suggest we must walk a fine line between justified concern and interest-driven alarmism when it comes to the strategic evaluation of the cyber threat, and that this might be helped by observing some lessons from the stultifying 100-year debate over airpower.

The most pertinent of these is the fact that airpower never lived up to the dreams of its most enthusiastic boosters. No one would deny its enormous importance in modern warfare — indeed it is not far-fetched to say that "death from above" is practically the signature of the contemporary Western way of war; but what has never come to pass is the *independent* war-winning quality which the prophets of airpower claimed for the new means of war.

Almost as pertinent is the need to be cautious of generals whose expert claims for the new means must be regarded in light of their speakers' needs for advantages in internal bureaucratic positioning vis-à-vis other services. For instance, in 1908 the science fiction author H.G. Wells in his book *The War in the Air* described the strategic impact of airpower essentially ambivalently: just five years after the first flight of the Wright brothers he already concluded that aerial warfare would be "at once enormously destructive and entirely indecisive."[x] Contrast this with the utopian conclusion of William 'Billy' Mitchell, father of the United States Air Force (with the benefit of another two decades of study) that airpower was "a distinct move for the betterment of civilization, because wars will be decided quickly and not drag on for years."[xi] Who was the clearer thinker?

Another wise thing would be to bear in mind Eliot Cohen's sage observation that "air power is an unusually seductive form of military strength, in part because, like modern courtship, it appears to offer gratification without commitment."[xii]

Would you like to come up and see my etchings?[xiii]

In fact, cyberpower is even sexier because it appears to offer something which airpower does not: *anonymity*, which is a function of the identity-obscuring architecture of cyberspace.[xiv] Undoubtedly this has scary implications; it is the key factor underpinning the hyperbolic 'cyber-doomsday' scenarios, which are scaring the wallets out of politicians' pockets.

For instance, in Richard Clarke's recent book *Cyberwar* he describes a cyberattack on the United States, which is utterly devastating 'without a single terrorist or soldier ever appearing in this country.'[xv] Then in a further twist he adds the kicker, because of the inherent identity-obscuring effect of the Web "…we may never even know what hit us."[xvi] Indubitably, this is a scary scenario. "Cyberspace is [the] nervous system—the control system of our country," it says

Maybe what was untrue of airpower before may be true of cyberpower now

in American strategy.[xvii] If they screw with that we're *really* screwed. However, is that not also the same thing that Liddell-Hart said about airpower?

Maybe what was untrue of airpower before may be true of

cyberpower now; there is no sense in being Luddite about the effects of technology, but it is important, as strategists, not to fool ourselves with it either — which is what we are doing with the 'attribution problem'. Not only is it scary it is also tempting, because it *appears* to solve an even more vexatious problem of war which has bothered generations of strategists beyond the ones today trying to make sense of information technology: escalation. The implicit logic goes as follows:

1. The identity of a cyber-attacker can be technically very difficult to ascertain;

2. retaliation, therefore, is complicated; and,

3. as a result, the inherent escalatory effect of war that has largely held back *major* war since 1945 might not be engaged.

The obvious way in which deterrence rapidly comes into question has occasionally fuelled comparison of cyberattacks to nuclear ones which are absurd; for as Martin Libicki points out the two are as different as 'fire' and 'snowflakes' — the former destroys cities and kills people whereas the latter merely disrupts and inconveniences them to a greater or lesser degree.[xviii] The appropriate comparison is to airpower. Cyberpower, however, is even more seductive than airpower, in part because, as the sex lives of countless online masturbators will attest, it offers gratification without physical connection of any sort, let alone commitment.

This is delusion — though it is not to diminish the 'attribution problem', which is quite obviously exploited by hackers and criminals who amaze with their speed in the technology race. Rather, it is to say that it is really something which pertains to those activities and not to war, unless one can conceive of one state using cyberpower alone to bend another to its will without declaring what it is. It may come afterwards, it may be implied or delivered secretly rather than openly but anonymity is as much a problem for the aggressor as it is the defender: one's enemy needs to know whose thumb they are under so that they may surrender or render 'cash payment' in return, as Clausewitz put it.

This date will be more expensive than you thought

The ubiquity of digital networks and the prevalence of cheap consumer electronics are thought to be another strategic challenge of cyberspace. As it was put in a recent article in *Joint Forces Quarterly*,

this is a very reasonable fear but it needs to be kept in perspective

> *One reason for the imminent and broad-based nature of the cyberspace challenge is the low buy-in cost compared to the vastly more complex and expensive appurtenances of air and space warfare…[xix]*

Thus exposed is the characteristic fear of our age: pick your metaphor, Goliath versus David or Gulliver against the Lilliputians — our power may not avail us against a sneaky new type of kick in the balls. Actually, this is a very reasonable fear but it needs to be kept in perspective. Outside of Bible stories, God tends to favour the side with the bigger battalions, as Napoleon once wryly observed.

To be sure, the physical instruments of 'cyberwar' are dirt cheap. *Stuxnet* which targeted the Iranian nuclear programme accomplished relatively cleanly what a powerful air force might have struggled to do messily — and it fit that comfortably on to a thumb drive; but this intangibility belies its size and sophistication. *Stuxnet* is the Zeppelin bomber of today — complex and costly in its own right, but more important as a harbinger of greater complexity and cost to come. Its design required a large amount of very high-grade intelligence about its intended target in order to work. It was not, according to experts who have analysed it, the work of hackers on the cheap:

> *It had to be the work of someone who knew his way around the specific quirks of the Siemens controllers and had an intimate understanding of exactly how the Iranians had designed their enrichment operations. In fact, the Americans and the Israelis had a pretty good idea.[xx]*

In short, as with all other weapons systems (with the exception of the hydrogen bomb, arguably) it required the combination of significant other resources in order to achieve strategic effect and for that effect to be sustained. Far from demonstrating a smoothing of the existing asymmetry of power amongst states it actually shows a reinforcement of that asymmetry: cyberpower rewards already powerful states with even more capability and, when push comes to shove, it would appear that Western powers have thought hard about cyberattack and are pretty good at it.

Again, a comparison to airpower is apt. Certainly, virtually unchallenged air supremacy and air-ground coordination has become more or less the sine qua non of the Western 'way of war'; or what in his book *Military Power* Stephen Biddle described, in slightly different terms, as the 'modern system' of warfare—a system which, not incidentally, he claims was born in the tactical conditions of the First World War.[xxi]

Armies which are able to defend their networks will accrue distinct advantages from 'network-enabling' them

The advent of the 'modern system' caused a bifurcation of military power between armies that 'got it' and armies that did not — with the latter being soundly thrashed by the former even when they possessed the same, or similar, weapons and numerical superiority.

A similar thing is likely with respect to cyberpower. Armies which are able to defend their networks will accrue distinct advantages from 'network-enabling' them, while armies that do not possess such ability will not enjoy any such advantage — and they will be punished harshly for trying to 'network-

enable' practically anything. It is worth recalling that the seminal 1993 article by John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt, `Cyberwar is Coming!' which set off this debate, in contrast with the extant literature on cyberwar, was essentially tactical in orientation:

> *Small numbers of your light, highly mobile forces defeat and compel the surrender of large masses of heavily armed, dug-in enemy forces, with little loss of life on either side. Your forces can do this because they are well prepared, make room for manoeuvre, concentrate their firepower rapidly in unexpected places, and have superior command, control, and information systems that are decentralized to allow tactical initiatives, yet provide the central commanders with unparalleled intelligence and 'topsight' for strategic purposes.[xxii]*

The focus of strategy must be on understanding the human ends to which technological means are applied in ever-shifting shifting ways.

It was a vision about moving and shooting more adroitly than your opponent through the employment of better information systems — knowledge as power in a very literal and immediate sense. The literature on cyberwar would not lose much by rewinding to this initial conception and starting over. Military cyberpower is a real and important compliment to other military capabilities — it does not, as airpower did not, obviate those capabilities or change the objective nature of war. It is possible that we are as a species *near* to a genuine discontinuity, which some scientists have described as `The Singularity' — the point at which human intelligence is surpassed by machine intelligence.[xxiii] After that happens, whether we merge with our digital offspring, are massacred by them, or kept as reverend ancestors, or much-loved pets, there is no point speculating about war (or anything else); until then, however, war will remain as it ever was — the collective action of one group of people to impose their will against the resistance of another. The focus of strategy must, therefore, be on understanding the human ends to which technological means are applied in ever-shifting shifting ways. Prefixed war types, which shift that focus onto the technology itself, are to be rejected.

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Air-Sea Battle as a Military Contribution to Strategy Development

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[S]trategies are developed in an ongoing process of negotiation and dialogue among potent stakeholders, civilian and military.

Colin S. Gray[i]

As the United States continues to shift its political focus away from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the importance of a rising China and the Asia-Pacific states to international stability continues to garner attention. A portion of this attention includes the military threats that are present and possible capabilities necessary to ensure stability and access to that area of the globe today and into the future.

For the U.S. military a set of concepts that are colloquially merged in the media under the phrase "Air-Sea Battle" are being developed to address these access threats and the possible military response to their use. While many, particularly in the world of political and military analytic punditry, continually conflate the concepts tied to Air-Sea Battle with strategy, they are in reality a military's contribution to strategy development.

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While strategy is the identification of a desired political effect and the means that are to be used to attain it while balancing the inherent risks, Air-Sea Battle is merely a starting point for the negotiation that ultimately leads to a strategy. These sets of concepts are designed to identify the operational access-related challenges created by other actors, the capabilities required to overcome those challenges, and possible operational means for employing those capabilities to achieve military success – regardless of the political effect desired. This paper is intended to assist in separating the issues that swirl around the Air-Sea Battle concepts, while also pointing out deficiencies in our common conceptions of strategy highlighted by these debates.

Air-Sea Battle: A Short History

As Secretary of Defense Robert Gates recognized as far back as 2009, the ability of the U.S. to ensure access to a theater of operations had become an afterthought due to the last decade's use of the established and secure logistical hubs in the Middle East to safely move personnel and materiel into military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. However, as the U.S. looked beyond these wars to other threats in the world, the proliferation of modern anti-access and area-denial technologies, particularly in places like the Asian mainland, inhibited the access required by military forces in the event of conflict.

To address the growing challenges created by anti-access and area-denial threats, Secretary Gates directed the two services most likely to encounter access challenges based on military threats - the U.S. Navy and the Air Force - to develop approaches to address them.[ii] While some elements of access challenges can be addressed within the realm of diplomatic and political channels, the Department of Defense was concerned with employing forces into a contested theater and acquiring the freedom of maneuver required to achieve military objectives. The result of their efforts, particularly to address anti-access threats, became known as Air-Sea Battle.

While many are likely aware of Air-Sea Battle, most are familiar with the concept only through the confused information conveyed by articles and reports written in reaction to its initial and continued opaque development. As a recent article in

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the Washington Post noted, "Even as it has embraced Air-Sea Battle, the Pentagon has struggled to explain it without inflaming already tense relations with China. The result has been an information vacuum that has sown confusion and controversy."[iii] To make matters worse, what in reporting is frequently called Air-Sea Battle has been conflated with multiple military concepts developed in reference to anti-access and area-denial threats. These include the *Joint Operational Access Concept* (JOAC)[iv], of which the U.S. Air Force and Navy's *Air-Sea Battle* provides the air and naval aspects, and the U.S. Army and Marine Corps' *Gain and Maintain Operational Access Concept*[v] provides the land component.

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These facts are largely peripheral to those interested in strategy. Air-Sea Battle is not the early 21st century silver bullet that will guarantee success in the next conventional conflict (despite Wired's description of it as "a help desk for 21st Century warfare" [vi]). Air-Sea Battle's true nature is to serve as part of the negotiation pursuant to strategy development. Air-Sea Battle does not identify the ends desired and risks inherent in a specific strategy, but it does identify many of the military resources and operational means necessary to enter a theater contested by anti-access capabilities. The Joint Operational Access and Gain and Maintain Operational Access concepts similarly address the resources and operational means needed to address area-denial technologies.

Strategy as a Negotiation

As those frequenting the pages of this journal are likely aware, one way to describe the development of strategy is as a negotiation between all organizations and personalities that have a stake in the execution of policy.[vii] In the case of employing coercive force to create a political effect, and thereby achieve a desired policy (e.g. using cyber attacks and targeted air strikes to degrade an adversary's nuclear capability in order to decrease that nation's ability to threaten international stability), those stakeholders include the military as a whole, as well as the individual services that each speak for their aspect of military force.

The military services are not chartered to develop the political effects the nation as a whole is trying to achieve, typically referred to as the "ends". This function is the domain of the nation's politics and should be encapsulated by the policies the executive branch provides as a guide and specific objectives to be attained. Instead, the military's role in this negotiation is to provide the specific capabilities, or the "means" available for employment and the "ways" in which they are used to achieve a favorable condition, all within acceptable ranges of potential attrition and opportunity cost.

In reality, politics determine the policy prescribed, which may or may not be articulated clearly. This policy shapes the negotiation between the stakeholders responsible for their execution, leading to how each organization will achieve that policy and with what resources at their disposal and the risks inherent to their given approach. When these ends, ways, means, and risk are consolidated into actionable behavior they become a strategy. For the military, the difficult part is ensuring their behavior serves that policy.[viii] Concepts like Air-Sea Battle are merely one element of the U.S. military's contribution to that negotiation.

For the military, the difficult part is ensuring their behavior serves that policy.

The fact that strategy development can be concisely summed up in a few short paragraphs belies its true nature, which as an inherently human endeavor is complex. In the words of Colin S. Gray, in the development of strategy, "the quality of strategy…is driven by the character of key unique people's performance both as individuals and as members of a group."[ix] Personalities, organizational structures, procedures and cultures, competing priorities and budgetary demands and straightforward disagreements on possible solutions all create friction within the system. This friction must be accounted for during the strategy development negotiation.

Getting to Right: Operational Access and U.S. Military Concepts

As a part of the military element of the negotiation toward a strategy to overcome adversaries that possess advanced anti-access and area-denial capabilities, Air-Sea Battle and its associated concepts have helped generate the conversation on what resources and means are required to meet the challenges of the future. They are initial organizational documents that were compiled for use as a framework for further discussion, and have effectively begun the conversation on what resources and means are required. As such, we should carefully consider each of the three base documents that comprise Air-Sea Battle to understand this framework.

First, the parent concept written to describe operational access, anti-access, and area-denial (as well as to pull the previously developed Air-Sea Battle Concept into a fully joint context) is the *Joint Operational Access Concept*. This document primarily provides an operational context in which military forces find themselves when confronting an adversary that possesses anti-access and area-denial capabilities. The key point made by the document is that the U.S. military forces must more effectively employ and integrate complementary capabilities across all domains; land, air, sea, space, and cyber. Finally, this concept identifies operational capabilities that military forces will need to develop in order to be successful in anti-access and area-denial scenarios.

Air-Sea Battle itself was the initial concept developed to address anti-access threats, and though the initial idea was developed before the strategic pivot, it has greatly

influenced strategy development in the Asia-Pacific.[x] Air-Sea Battle as a written concept has remained classified and can only be inferred from the original Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments report, various official statements made by those within the Air Force and Navy, and reporting by defense news analysts. These various sources have created confusion. Some have defined Air-Sea Battle narrowly as an operational concept focused on overcoming China's anti-access capabilities should that be desired by the U.S. government, while other sources, including official statements from Department of Defense senior leaders and Air-Sea Battle proponents, are more expansive in describing it as "agnostic" toward regions of the world and strategic interests based upon the relatively easy proliferation of these technologies.[xi] This latter camp focuses less on what needs to be accomplished in any given theater and more on defeating capabilities to provide access to U.S. forces, while the former focuses on a specific threat and the desired capabilities to address it.

Finally, the *Gaining and Maintaining Access: An Army-Marine Corps Concept* is the land power addition to what was developed in the Joint Operational Access Concept and Air-Sea Battle concepts. It does this by describing how land forces would conduct operations to counter area-denial threats once in theater and support defeating remaining anti-access threats. Under this concept the main focus of land power would be to support the air and maritime forces efforts to expand access as they enter the littorals and – more importantly – create secure areas from which to expand ground presence. Once on the ground, land forces maneuver against land-based anti-access and area-denial capabilities to secure greater access for follow-on forces.

Together, these three concepts address the land, air, and sea domains of operational access and integrate operations among the military services and the capabilities they must bring to bear on anti-access and area-denial threats. None of these concepts – even when used in conjunction with the others – was developed to do anything more than describe the context of a military problem and the capabilities required to address it in the absence of any specific context. They begin the process of strategic negotiation by identifying the resources needed and likely operational means required to achieve access. Operating outside of any political context, without also considering a desired political effect or awareness of risks inherent in any given approach, these concepts do not constitute strategy on their own.

Operating outside of any political context these concepts do not constitute strategy on their own

Not Quite There: Issues Identified in Operational Access Concepts

Viewing Air-Sea Battle and its associated concepts as only one element of the negotiation that is strategy development clears up many of the criticisms seen in and out of the defense sector, but not all. There are still significant issues that the overall discussion of Air-Sea Battle has created:

- its potential use as a tool for the bureaucratic knife-fighting that is inevitably tied to the defense budget[xii]
- its use as a catch-all solution for varied operations such as amphibious operations conducted on the Asian mainland, the integration of Services on cyber issues, and medical support to areas affected by natural disasters, and responses to climate change[xiii]
- its development as a concept based around the use of technology instead of defeating a thinking enemy.[xiv]

Strategy is inherently a human endeavor that incurs personal and organizational loyalties and priorities

The first two points are almost inevitable in any bureaucratic and political process, but particularly in one that involves an organization as large as the U.S. Department of Defense. Leveraging concepts that are tailored to legislative and executive priorities in order to fund weapons systems and other military programs is merely a part of procurement programs that provide the materiel for operational strategies and overall strategy development as a whole. Strategy is inherently a human endeavor that incurs personal and organizational loyalties and priorities – such cognitive biases and local influences are unavoidable aspects of any human process. But in the process of competing demands and narratives, a balance should be struck to flesh out exactly how available capabilities are used to create the desired political effect.

Of paramount concern to strategists is the final point regarding capability-based vice threat-based planning. By focusing merely on capabilities divorced of any desired political effect, we not only set ourselves up for failure against a thinking adversary, but also fall prey to wishful thinking and strategies that will most likely result in failure. As Colin S. Gray has noted in respect to over-attention on our own problems versus a constant attention to an adversary in strategy development,

> *When politicians and military commanders focus unduly, even exclusively, upon their own problems at the expense of appreciation of the enemy's difficulties, their strategic performance is certain to be impaired. However, when it comes to problems, enemy behaviour must be a principal worry; indeed, as a general rule it should be the major concern.[xv]*

Instead of focusing on the threats created by anti-access and area-denial technologies and the capabilities we must develop to overcome them, we should focus more on the human dimension with the support of current and on-the-horizon technologies, including "ideas tailored to the potential in combined arms prowess of new technology [as the] major engine of radical military and strategic development."[xvi] The *Joint Operational Access Concept* trended toward this by directing the integration of capabilities across domains and functions, but more work remains to be done. Above all, our military concepts and our diplomatic pressure must mitigate against an imbalance caused by basic human misunderstanding; throughout history there has been a fine

line between preparedness and provocation.[xvii] Only when a thinking adversary is considered, and political ends are articulated can the Air-Sea Battle and associated concepts be used to best effect in strategy development.

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Improving Our Tools for Strategy Development

While many have taken to the airwaves and blogosphere to criticize Air-Sea Battle and its associated concepts, few are viewing them in appropriate context: as the military contribution to the negotiation that is strategy development, which happens simultaneously in many different political environments. As a part of this process we must ensure that when we use Air-Sea Battle and associated concepts to develop a national strategy that takes into account both the usefulness in these documents and their limitations. This includes the limitation that these concepts are merely a starting point for negotiation, not an answer to all operational access-related problems. The true usefulness of Air-Sea Battle and its associated concepts is that they will force the U.S. military and other stakeholders to develop the tools – physical, bureaucratic/organizational, programmatic, and mental – to create adaptive and specific strategies when required and in conjunction with all elements of national power; all while, as quoted at the beginning of the article, acting as part of the process of negotiation and dialogue that is strategy development.

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[xv] Bernard Finel, "Capabilities-Based Planning Comes Home to Roost", BernardFinel.com, http://www.bernardfinel.com/?p=2058, accessed on 20 August 2012. While Bernard Finel discusses capabilities-based planning/programming and its failures, he does not directly tie to Air-Sea Battle and its associated concepts. Rather, he addresses the inherent danger of planning for technological capabilities instead of a thinking enemy: "But the problem is that none of these capabilities make sense in the abstract. They all require a specific adversary with specific capabilities in specific scenarios to do a cost and benefit analysis of any given system. Capabilities-based planning unmoors defense programs from any solid analytical foundation."

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