

Because strategy never stops...

Infinity Journal



IN THIS EDITION

Colin S. Gray | Edward N. Luttwak | Kobi Michael
Frank G. Hoffman | Gur Laish | M.L.R. Smith | John Stone

Infinity Journal
ISSN 2312-5888
All Rights Reserved ©

The IJ Infinity Group, Ltd.

Company number: 514895630

Ha'Neviim 26
Number 11
64071
Tel Aviv, Israel

Website: <http://www.infinityjournal.com>
Email: info@infinityjournalv.com

Publisher **A. E. Stahl**
aestahl@infinityjournal.com

Editor **William F. Owen**
william@infinityjournal.com

Contributor **Colin S. Gray**

Contributor **Antulio J. Echevarria II**

Contributor **Kobi Michael**

Contributor **Ron Tira**

Contributor **Eitan Shamir**

Contributor **Patrick Porter**

Contributor **Jonathan Dowdall**

Subscribe For Free

Infinity Journal is distributed via our
website <http://www.infinityjournal.com>

Additional Information

If you'd like to contact an editor regarding submission of articles or Letters to the Editor, see our **contact page**.

If you're interested in advertising with Infinity Journal, email us at: **adverts@infinityjournal.com**

If you are experiencing any technical issues, contact technical support: **tech@infinityjournal.com**

If you'd like to submit a comment or question or any other query, send an email to customer service: **cs@infinityjournal.com**

Infinity Journal (IJ) is a privately funded strategy journalzine,
founded in London and based out of Tel Aviv, Israel. If you have
any questions regarding IJ, please contact us at:
info@infinityjournal.com

Infinity Journal is solely distributed through its official website. It may not be shared through other websites, by email or by other means, as a whole or in any part. Please refrain from sharing this document directly and instead recommend that your friends and colleagues subscribe for free at InfinityJournal.com. This is integral to maintaining Infinity Journal as a free journalzine.

Additionally, if quoting from an article in Infinity Journal, please ensure that Infinity Journal is properly sourced.

Any publication included in Infinity Journal and/or opinions expressed therein do not necessarily reflect the views of Infinity Journal or the IJ Group. Such publications and all information within the publications (e.g. titles, dates, statistics, conclusions, sources, opinions, etc) are solely the responsibility of the author of the article, not Infinity Journal or the IJ Group.

A Note From The Editor

Dear IJ Subscribers,

Welcome to Issue No. 4 of Infinity Journal (IJ).

In some of the strategic discussions surrounding the recent events in Libya, this editor has to admit that he has had to relearn a few hard facts about strategy. "Doing strategy" is not the same as "doing good strategy." Doing bad strategy or just lucky and 'not too bad' strategy, all still qualify as strategy.

Using military force to remove a dictator is not hard when the dictator is unloved by his people and possesses numerous but poorly equipped armed forces, which are unable to fight or operate effectively. The rebel forces, almost entirely enabled by NATO air power ensured that the dictator was removed and at no cost to NATO as concerns NATO casualties. It may well be that the policy of removing Gaddafi was not worth the life of a single NATO soldier in the eyes of the civilian populations of NATO countries. As concerns air operations, or any military means, nothing new was learnt. By any standards, this was well-trodden ground, even given the necessary restrictions on force. In fact "could do better," may well be the case, but credit should be given where credit is due.

As to strategy, "anyone but Gaddafi" is a policy. It's not a very good policy but it was the only one at hand at the time, when the opportunity arose. Instruments of power, underpinned by military force, actually removed Gaddafi for very little cost. How is this not good?

Well it is good... potentially. The "Allies" may have gained something for the cost of almost nothing. That "something" would be a pro-western Libyan government that would support US and NATO policy in the Middle East, and provide economic and trade benefits to those countries that assisted in the overthrow of the dictator. This is no different from the logical requirement to install pro-western governments in Iraq and Afghanistan. The "almost nothing" is not the same as nothing not all, as there is the not-so-insubstantial amount of dollars spent on conducting air-operations; but to date, no NATO blood was spilt.

In terms of a "gamble" it looks like a possibly good outcome, for probably no actual cost in terms of casualties. The point to ponder is that winning — as in removing Gaddafi — was never in doubt. It was just a matter of cost, and for almost no cost, we might ask if we really care about the outcome. Any outcome may be "good enough." If we got something for free, do we care what it is?

William F. Owen
Editor, Infinity Journal

Letter To The Editor

Dear IJ Editor,

I applaud your initiative in publishing *Infinity Journal*. I am impressed by the content and I have recommended it to colleagues.

But one plea and that is for simplicity and clarity.

When I joined the Royal Air Force (RAF) decades ago, I was taught that *strategy* was a plan for the longer-term future.

Tactics was how the strategic plan was to be implemented in the short-term.

The misunderstanding and misuse of these terms by politicians and the marketing community, in particular, (often substituting 'strategy' to mean immediate action) causes confusion.

I'm sure you and your contributors will not add to that confusion.

Good luck for the future.

Yours,

Glenmore Trenear-Harvey
Intelligence Analyst
United Kingdom



Infinity Journal

Contents

Another Bloody Century?

4

Colin S. Gray

In this article, Colin S. Gray 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.

Why China Will Not Become the Next Global Power... But It Could

8

Edward N. Luttwak

In this article, Edward N. Luttwak argues that China's advance towards becoming the next global power is doubtful, though not impossible. Despite its attempts at military advancement and its increasing economic power, China's provocative transition from "rule-taking" to "rule-making", among a slew of other issues, hinders the country's rise to great power status.

Limitations of Strategic Maneuver: The Israeli Case

12

Kobi Michael

In this strategic analysis, Kobi Michael examines the difficulties that Israel's political echelon faces in complex strategic situations by exercising the paradoxical logic of strategy. Adding to that difficulty is the complex and turbulent environment in which Israel operates, where it faces a fundamental clash between military strategy and political logic.

Future Threats and Strategic Thinking

17

Frank G. Hoffman

Frank G. Hoffman extends his own interpretation of the hybrid threat construct, and examines its strategic utility and implications in the context of four contending schools inside the U.S. defense establishment, which are competing in the post-Operation Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom environment.

The Second Lebanon War – A Strategic Reappraisal

22

Gur Laish

In this article, Gur Laish argues that a strategic assessment of the 2006 Lebanon War should begin with an understanding the two sides' strategies. Although at times obscure and not predetermined, Israeli strategy proved stronger and prevailed through many tactical shortcomings, resulting in years of quiet along Israel's northern border.

Explaining Strategic Theory

27

M.L.R. Smith

John Stone

The word strategy is an over-used and much misunderstood term. M.L.R. Smith and John Stone show how strategic theory should be conceived as an analytical method. In the process they demonstrate how strategic theory offers a mind-opening and intellectually liberating path that is able to clarify complexity.



Another Bloody Century?

Colin S. Gray

University of Reading
United Kingdom

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,

To cite this Article: Gray, Colin S., "Another Bloody Century", *Infinity Journal*, Issue No. 4, Fall 2011, pages 4-7.

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, uninterrupted 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 eternity 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 not 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,



Why China Will Not Become the Next Global Power... But It Could

Edward N. Luttwak

Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS)
Washington D.C.

Dr. Edward N. Luttwak, is a world-renowned strategist and historian, a senior associate at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), a government contractor, and the Chairman of the Board of AP Fleet. Luttwak has served as a consultant to the U.S. National Security Council, the U.S. Office of the Secretary of Defense, the U.S. Department of State, the U.S. Armed Forces, and to various allied governments. He has lectured at universities and military colleges and has testified before congressional committees and presidential commissions. Luttwak is the author of, among numerous others, *Strategy: The Logic of War and Peace*, *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire*, *The Grand Strategy of the Byzantine Empire*, and *Coup d'etat*.

Paradox

Each country and historical period is different at invalidating most analogies, but the paradoxical logic of strategy is always the same — hence the identical prescriptions of Carl von Clausewitz and Sūnzǐ 孫子, greatly separated though they were by time, distance and cultural context. Under this logic, because of the increased resistance evoked by its rising power China could even become weaker at the level of grand strategy because of its own rising strength, a truly paradoxical outcome. That result could at least be moderated if not undone, if China's rising strength were offset by increasingly conciliatory and unassertive foreign policies. The paradoxical logic thus runs counter to common sense and ordinary human instincts, because there is nothing natural about becoming more humble because one's power is increasing. Nor is it at all natural to de-militarize, because with rising wealth military growth becomes easier. Hence the paradoxical and unnatural logic of strategy is more often ignored than obeyed — and that is one large reason why history is to such a large extent the record of the crimes and follies of mankind.

there is nothing natural about becoming more humble as one's power is increasing

Until 2008, however, the external conduct of the People's Republic of China largely conformed to the "unnatural" rules of the paradoxical logic, as it has been shown in precise detail in the case of territorial disputes[i]. In the years 1960-1965, border treaties were signed with Burma, Nepal, North Korea, Mongolia, and Afghanistan, after the Chinese side conceded 82%, 94%, 60% 65% and 100% respectively of the disputed areas. In 1998, when China was in a far better condition, it conceded 76% of the disputed area to conclude a treaty with Laos, and 50% in a treaty with Vietnam. Boundary agreements were also signed with Kazakhstan in 1994 (with 66% conceded) Kyrgyzstan in 1996 (68%), Vietnam in 1999 (50%) and Tajikistan in 1999 (96%).

It was almost as if China's readiness to compromise increased with its relative power. By contrast, at sea where China is less favored than on land, the disputes over the Paracels and Spratlys remain unresolved till this day. With India, rival claims were not settled either, but agreements were signed in 1993 and 1996 to set aside those differences to pursue cooperation in other spheres; tacitly, the same was true of the maritime dispute with Japan, in line with China's overall "Peaceful Rise" 中国和平崛起 grand strategy[ii] (later relabeled with the more emollient "Peaceful Development" 中国和平发展) whose obvious aim was to dissuade resistance, and any coalescence of adversaries.

From 2008, however, there was a drastic change. Perhaps it was caused by the abrupt elevation of China's relative standing in the world caused by the Western economic crisis, which seemingly validated Chinese practices (The "Beijing Consensus") while badly eroding the prestige of Western-style Democratic Capitalism. Or perhaps the cause or causes were more complicated than a simple outbreak of hubris, but in any case the consequences were not complicated at all: confident assertions, ironical dismissals, and sharp warnings became more common in the language of Chinese officials commenting on international issues, with much talk of China's shift from reaction to action, from "rule taking" to "rule-

To cite this Article: Luttwak, Edward N., "Why China Will Not Become the Next Global Power...But It Could", *Infinity Journal*, Issue No. 4, Fall 2011, pages 8-11.

making". Most publicly, when top Foreign Ministry officials addressed unofficial international conferences, arrogant condescension or outright triumphalism increasingly became their prevalent tone.

More important, China's long-dormant territorial disputes with India and Japan, were abruptly revived, in addition to the already active maritime disputes with Malaysia, the Philippines and Vietnam above all. On territorial questions, Chinese diplomacy definitely became more active, and in the case of Japan there was even a dramatic incident at sea that ended with Japan's humiliating retreat—whose effects on Japanese opinion were magnified by the Chinese Foreign Ministry's subsequent demand for an apology and compensation. It is as if, contrary to all historical experience, it was believed that such conduct would have no lasting consequences that such incidents would simply be forgotten, and that strong-arm tactics one day could be followed by a nice summit meeting on the next that would expunge their effects. That is delusional.

On territorial questions, Chinese diplomacy definitely became more active

As for the historical and legal rights and wrongs of these quarrels, they are of course entirely irrelevant in this context. Only the strategic outcome matters: as of now, January 2011, wide segments of public opinion in the countries at the other end of each of these disputes no longer view China's rise with equanimity but instead with concern, anxiety or even alarm. The governments of India, Japan, South Korea, Singapore and Vietnam are more watchful than before, more focused on security rather than trade and some, howsoever tentatively, are beginning to coalesce against China.

That India, Japan and Vietnam in combination exceed China in total population, total economic capacity, and total technological advancement is not strategically significant in itself because nothing resembling a triple alliance is in sight, nor is it politically plausible.

But then again, no such alliance is necessary. Not coincidentally, each of the three countries has improved its own relations with the United States of late, and the one American talent that cannot be gainsaid is in the careful construction, patient maintenance, and gentle leadership of multi-lateral alliances year after year, decade after decade. The North Atlantic Alliance (b. 1949) is certainly the longest-lived multi-lateral alliance in history, and is served operationally by a standing military command organization (NATO). No similar Asian organization is likely to emerge, nor indeed any kind of formal multi-lateral alliance, but again neither is needed or even desirable. Purely bilateral arrangements would be perfectly sufficient, and would allow others to join in, starting with South Korea.

Moreover, unlike the British who had to make important colonial concessions to construct their 1904 "Entente Cordiale" alliance with France, the United States would not have to sacrifice anything to effortlessly assume the informal leadership of an eventual (and of course wholly undeclared)

anti-China coalition, in which its historic "Anglo-Saxon" allies and certainly Australia are also likely to join.

Against such a very broad coalition that need not be cohesive to be capable — a most unusual virtue in any alliance — China has only one certain ally: Pakistan, from whose nationality is as separable as those of Austria-Hungary, Cuba, Bolivia, Ecuador, Venezuela, and Iran — if still under their present governments — are also likely to rally to China's side purely in the name of anti-Americanism, but among them only Ecuador is a Pacific power, and not one of the greatest.

China has only one certain ally: Pakistan whose nationalities are as separable as those of Austria-Hungary

Only the addition of the Russian Federation to the Chinese side would have true strategic significance. Accordingly, if China's conduct persists on its post-2008 path inevitably evoking a coalition against it, Moscow will emerge as the true focus and prize of global diplomacy — even more so because the Russian Federation would bring with it its Central Asian allies.

So long as the West continues to badger the Russian government for being a Russian and not a Scandinavian or American government, China will have a fair chance of success in this contest, even though the Russians too have become its weary and watchful neighbors. For the other side, India may hold the key to success because its successive governments have wisely and very persistently refused to accompany their opening to the United States with the abandonment of long-standing connections with Russia and its military and aviation industries. To the contrary, even as India started to buy US military equipment, adding one more supplier to the fading Europeans and interactive Israelis, it has actually expanded its dealings with Russia's military aviation industries. India is allocating important sums for this purpose, an excellent investment strategically, because co-produced systems, starting with the successor to the versatile Sukhoi heavyweight fighter, cannot be offered to third parties without the consent of each side.

It is only as a theoretical end-point of military force-planning that war remains a valid concept within the circle of the greater powers

To be sure, the very meaning of any Great Power strategic alliance is now far different from its 1914 predecessors. Those were veritable military pacts, mutual undertakings to mobilize and deploy combat forces for war. Their purely mechanical interaction could notoriously overcome whatever prudent statecraft remained to stop the path to war. In 2011, prudence is not more abundant, but nuclear deterrence is the sturdy obstacle to any war between nuclear powers,

indeed any combat that ranks above a mere incident. It is only as a theoretical end-point of military force-planning that war remains a valid concept within the circle of the greater powers — not as a realistic prospect.

Hence, these days, the defining function of alliances is not to combine combat forces and concert plans to prepare for war, but to the contrary, to dissuade war more broadly, by extending the reach of deterrence from ally to ally. This would also mean, however, that any bilateral crisis with China on one side, would become multi-lateral on the other, expanding the dimension of the crisis and its consequences on broader relations between all concerned. Thus even if war is simply ruled out or, much less realistically, crises are treated as inconsequential incidents, China's leaders would still have excellent reasons to be greatly concerned by the emergence of any coalition engendered by their own over-assertive behavior and excessively rapid military growth. Strategic alliances of course influence non-military relations as well, including international trade if only in subtle ways. If rival blocs emerge, restrictions on inter-bloc trade would be inevitable if only for dual-use equipment, and technologies, and that is only a start: as of now Chinese-made civilian telecommunications is sometimes rejected for security reasons. Even outright embargos more or less multi-lateral (there are always trade defectors) are a possibility in the event of descents into overt confrontations, as "cold war" substitutes for the impossibility of real war.

Beyond any material consequences, the purely attitudinal effects of worsening strategic relations would be very costly in themselves for the peoples on both sides. Communication and cooperation in all spheres of life would be diminished and deformed in all sorts of ways, atrophying the myriad of individual, familial, institutional, societal and national relationships that have flourished since China rejoined the world after 1976. Thus even the lesser evils of the present drifting to a multi-lateral struggle would be amply damaging for the world as a whole, but more so for a still rising China.

It follows that unless the Chinese government can somehow find ways to assemble an overwhelmingly powerful global coalition on its side, its best option at the highest level of Grand Strategy must now be to de-construct its assertive diplomatic stance over territorial disputes and much else, and decisively decelerate the pace of its military growth.

The latter has become an increasing problem in itself, not so much because of the actual, material, build-up of military strength whose dimensions are not especially immoderate, but because of accompanying displays that are highly provocative. One that preceded the 2008 turning point was the January 19, 2007 destruction of a Chinese satellite in orbit by a ballistic missile. That was not a new capability by any means, but there were no intercepts in space because of their alarming effects on all satellite-using countries, and the noxious scattering of debris in space. The very latest display seems calculated to alarm China's neighbors: the leaked photos of the J-20 fighter-bomber, whose ultra-modern appearance implies "stealth capabilities", and whose vast size significantly exceeds that of its largest US counterpart, the F-22 (whose production was stopped because it was

"too powerful"), implying a large internal bomb-bay for strike missions. It may be that many years will pass before the J-20 acquires efficient engines and advanced electronics to make it useful for combat, but by parking the aircraft in a Chengdu airfield unscreened from photography, one result has already been achieved: China's neighbors have one more reason to fear its military growth, one more reason to coalesce against it. Why that should be seen as favorable to China's overall interests is a mystery.

Perhaps it is delusional to believe that the Chinese leadership can resist powerful emotional impulses and determined institutional interests to instead subject its policies to the iron logic of strategy, with its paradoxical and "unnatural" prescriptions. The rewards would be very great — just as great as China's comparative advantage in most peaceful pursuits — but there is nothing easy about valid strategic conduct, indeed very hard things would have to be done. In China's case at this juncture, new declaratory stances with the softest and nicest words in place of arrogance would help, but could not be enough to stop the coalescence of adversarial reactions that is already underway. Nor can disputes be solved by ordinary diplomatic negotiations premised in the

In China's case the softest and nicest words in place of arrogance would help, but could not suffice enough to stop the coalescence of adversarial reactions

usual way on reciprocity and conditionality—to do so would merely open new venues for contention. The only option would be to set aside all disputes that cannot be ended by Chinese concessions (as in the past), or else to give them up to binding international arbitration. The Chinese government might itself assume the highly conducive task of initiating the establishment of an effective arbitration venue, and its modalities, in a very non-provocative transition from "rule-taking" to "rule-making". This would also be a good opportunity to diffuse the notion of *rén* (仁).

Most difficult of all perhaps, would be to adopt unilaterally a severe form of self-imposed arms limitation, to retain the nuclear deterrent and "defensive primacy" forces for territorial security, while allowing more offensive capabilities to atrophy, even those that are only offensive operationally, and not strategically. Militarily that would be a retrograde step, it would be unfair, and it would certainly disappoint perfectly understandable and not especially unreasonable military ambitions. But only a recessive military policy, along with an emotionally very unsatisfying emollient diplomacy, could balance the unprecedented magnitude of China's economic growth and technological advancement, keeping the whole within systemically acceptable limits. The more conventional course of continuing to forge ahead in all directions, hoping that all will turn out well after all, is certainly more natural, and politically infinitely easier. But the logic of strategy is not only paradoxical; it is also cruel to those who hope for the best instead of averting the worst.

References

[i] M. Taylor Fravel *Strong Borders Secure Nation: cooperation and conflict in China's territorial disputes*. Princeton University Press 2008. Passim; and summary : Table 1.3 pp.46-47

[ii] First enunciated by Zheng Bijan in 2004 at the Bo'ao Forum and more fully explained in *Foreign Affairs* (Sept./Oct. 2005) as "China's Peaceful Rise to Great-Power Status"

Subscribe For Free

Infinity Journal is available for free exclusively at InfinityJournal.com.

By subscribing you will get the following:

- A simple, non-intrusive email informing you of each new issue or article.
- A pdf version of each new issue, so that you can read Infinity Journal on all your devices, from your computer to your cell phone.
- An enhanced digital edition that provides the best reading experience and features. Now compatible with iPhone, iPad & Android.
- Access to every issue of Infinity Journal and Infinity Journal *Exclusive* articles.
- Global networking to connect anyone interested in strategy.
- No cost, no hassles, nothing hidden.

It really is that simple.

Subscribe Now: InfinityJournal.com

Infinity Journal is a free publication that is only available online.



Limitations of Strategic Maneuver: The Israeli Case

Kobi Michael

Office of the Prime Minister – Ministry of Strategic Affairs
Jerusalem, Israel

Dr. Kobi Michael is Deputy Director General of the Ministry of Strategic Affairs at the Office of the Prime Minister (Israel). Dr. Michael is also a professor of conflict resolution and strategy at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev and Senior Research Fellow at the Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies (JIIS). Dr. Michael has previously served as a senior advisor on the Israeli National Security Council and 23 years as a senior officer in IDF Intelligence. He was among the founders and the commanders of the Israeli-Palestinian security coordination apparatuses in the Gaza Strip and West Bank, following the "Oslo" Agreement.

The state of Israel – since its independence in 1948 – continues to exist in a hostile environment. Such an environment has led Israel through years of strengthening military capabilities and consistently improving military might, thought and strategy. Political thought adjusted itself to military paradigms and the military establishment became the most appreciated and respected institute in Israel (Michael, 2007). There is doubt that the hegemony and supremacy of military thought narrowed the maneuver and flexibility spaces of the political echelon and it is reasonable to assume that the State of Israel missed some political and strategic opportunities that may have improved its geostrategic position. However, on the other hand, there is no doubt that the State of Israel has succeeded to flourish in its perilous neighborhood and has succeeded to tackle many strategic challenges in ways that continue to encourage its liberal and democratic characteristics and remain a part of the free world and one of the leading nations. If this is the reality, then what, precisely, are the problems? Is there a real strategic problem in a situation where military thought is the main emphasis? If it is a problem, how (and why) should it be dealt with? This article attempts to elaborate on these questions and to analyze the difficulties that the Israeli political echelon faces whenever it has to deal with complex strategic situations by exercising the paradoxical logic of strategy. The paradoxical logic of strategy and the difficulties to explain its logic to the public in order to gain public support and consensus that are required

for major strategic moves in a democratic society continue to represent serious obstacles.

Israel has succeeded to tackle many strategic challenges in ways that continue to encourage its liberal and democratic characteristics

Obstacles Created by Prioritizing Military Thought as Supreme

The complexity of the geopolitical environment and the characteristics of the prolonged confrontation with the Palestinians create a constant perception of security threats within Israeli leadership and serve to rank military thinking above political thinking. The unique characteristics of military thinking lead to a unique framing of the characteristics of threats, and this framing in turn shapes patterns of response and action. This framing of the threat's characteristics became a primary layer of the collective psychological foundation and fixes the conceptualization of the conflict as uncontrollable and ongoing (Michael, 2009). History demonstrates that under the circumstances in which Israel operates, Israeli leadership finds it difficult to update its strategic paradigm. The reason is that adjusting the paradigm requires disengagement from the military thinking that amplifies the sense of threat and leads to preference for military power as a means of solving political problems. The strategic paradigm is, in essence, security-based and military in nature, but this does not necessarily mean that the political sector has not willingly adopted it. Moreover, there were cases in which the military sector pointed out limitations of the paradigm, but the political sector continued to adhere to it nevertheless.

During Operation "Cast Lead" (January 2009), the Israeli pattern of action in the Gaza Strip was based on the logic of military thought and reflected the security discourse that prefers the use of force as a solution to political problems. The political discourse refrained almost completely from consideration of other political options, such as negotiations with Hamas, whether directly or indirectly.

The political sector chose to frame the complicated reality through the traditional military perception along the lines of

what may be termed "political militarism." A salient example of this phenomenon is the position of the military, headed by Chief of Staff Gabi Ashkenazi and Minister of Defense Ehud Barak, who realized the limitations of military power after a few days of fighting during Operation "Cast Lead." They even advised the political sector to terminate the operation after approximately a week, but Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni pressed for continuation of military action, and indeed it continued for another month.

Chief of Staff Gabi Ashkenazi and Minister of Defense Ehud Barak realized the limitations of military power after a few days of fighting during Operation "Cast Lead."

Israel exists within a complex reality because, among a multitude of other reasons, the awareness of threat and the sense of insecurity amplify awareness of the tension around security issues and create a reality of "neither peace nor war." In such circumstances, the complexity of strategy becomes a real challenge requiring particularly developed and sophisticated strategic skills. Such a complex mix of circumstances requires strategic acrobatics capable of creating tricky, paradoxical synergies out of opposites and contrasts, such as fighting Hamas and simultaneously providing the local population with daily requirements, including "luxury" items.

Given that in Israel "there is no conception of security that can serve as an organizing conceptual framework for politicians and soldiers, [and] Israeli governments have not developed the relevant know-how to address foreseeable crises and security matters," (Tamari, 2007: 30-31) the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is typically assessed in the context of a security policy that is not current, not adequately developed, and not totally relevant. Rather, it is, at times, detached from the broader contexts of national, regional, and international security and their methods of management. Israel tends not to trust the international community and carries in her ethos a bloody history. Therefore, Israel often makes mountains out of molehills and regards every threat as an existential danger. Thus, the burden of confronting threatening situations becomes heavier and more complicated.

Developing the skills to deal with strategic complexity under the structural and cognitive conditions described here requires significant enhancement of learning processes in a way that would enable the political echelon to develop a relevant, coherent, and effective national security perspective, in turn allowing the development of processes and formation of political and public legitimacy for complex, ground-breaking measures.

The Geopolitical Environment, Negative Influence, and Israeli Leaders

The complexity of Israel's strategic environment, which has been described as a "meeting of opposites" (Luttwak, 2002: 77), requires complex learning processes that would enable political leaders to cope with a dynamic reality in

an intelligent and critical way. "Learning" for our purposes is what Tetlock (1999) described as a change in the cognitive structure of the image of the individual in relation to the international environment...in the direction of greater complexity and willingness to be self-critical. The significance of this form of coping is the guarantee of relevance of the cognitive structures – the system of beliefs and perceptions that serves the purposes of interpretation and understanding of the same reality and of developing methods of coping with substantive challenges – by, among other means, reframing the perceived threats. The relationship between the cognitive structure and the content and beliefs, however, is fairly complicated and has the potential to overflow the value complexity barrier (Bar-Siman-Tov, 1996). Players prefer to assimilate new information into thought frameworks that already exist, which is likely to prevent a change in beliefs (Levy, J., 1994).

In many cases decision-makers aspire to avoid past failures, while the generals are fighting the previous war. Jack Levy (1994) has suggested that lessons from the past and their accompanying myths can affect policy more than standard perception. Rather than systematically learning from historical experience, it is possible to use history selectively and instrumentally by choosing examples that most support preexisting policy preferences. Israeli experience fuels the Israeli narrative and maintains the perception of threat and danger in a way that makes it difficult to change the strategic paradigm by accepting and processing new or alternative information.

Israeli experience fuels the Israeli narrative and maintains the perception of threat and danger in a way that makes it difficult to change the strategic paradigm

Decision-making processes – particularly those of governments subject to complex and conflict-riddled circumstances – reflect the manner by which various alternatives are examined through "cultural filters." Historical analogies, as well as precedents and metaphors, guide the process of selection among various alternatives, while "cultural filters" simplify reality but reduce the range of selection. These filters in fact determine what is considered obvious and what is subject to debate or reexamination. This process generates the array of scenarios to be developed by the government and affects the shape of patterns of operation and reaction (Levy, Y., 2009). In the case of Israel, the military filter almost always serves the political sector as well, and thus it influences the learning processes, design of alternatives, and policy choices, which in turn lead to a marked preference for use of military power to resolve political problems. The Second Lebanon War and Operation "Cast Lead" are clear examples of this process.

Israel's Complex Strategic Environment

The complex strategic environment in which Israel operates and the paradoxical principles on which this environment is based make it difficult to market and explain it, both to

coalition partners and to the general public. The complexity of the strategy and its underlying paradoxical logic require the creation of a balance based on *complementary opposition* – military strategy (force) balanced by a soft political-diplomatic strategy, and vice versa. For example, a severe military blow to Hamas could serve as the basis for talks and the adoption of a policy of negotiation with Hamas or supporting the local population. Conversely, it is possible to strike a blow to Hamas without damaging its ruling power ("home address") and principal assets because that would be the only way to deter it militarily in the future. That is, unless it has some standing and assets, Hamas cannot be deterred.

This process is based on paradoxical logic and on complementary opposition, making it very difficult to attract support among the Jewish public in Israel. That conclusion is reinforced by the findings of the Peace Index of February 2009, which indicate that a third of the Israeli public was disappointed by the outcome of Operation "Cast Lead" and less than a third was satisfied with the outcome. The more significant finding, however, was that 66% of the Jewish public think that the military operation should have continued until Hamas completely surrendered (Peace Index, Steinmetz Center, Tel Aviv University, February 2009). The December 2008 Peace Index showed that 90% of the Jewish public in Israel already believed that the operation should continue until Hamas surrendered.

The democratization of war makes it impossible for Israel's leaders not to consider public opinion and the power of the media, compelling them to act quickly, before the media can influence public opinion and planned actions. But it is precisely in these circumstances that the political echelon needs to have acquired complex learning processes requiring strategic skills and staff-work that do not exist in most of the Israeli ministries. In the absence of these tools, the resulting vacuum draws on military experience, knowledge, and thinking, and from that moment onwards, the military sector begins influencing decision-making processes and policymaking, primarily as a result of its structural and traditional advantages rather than its own free will. When the political sector is unable to internalize and operationalize complex-learning processes efficiently and relatively quickly, it then loses maneuverability and flexibility. In such circumstances it has difficulty setting new and relevant policy, and it is compelled to operate under the influence of public and media pressure and against a problematic reality of a gap of legitimacies on the part of the public – the gap between the legitimacy for using force vs. the absence of legitimacy for scarifying (Michael, 2008, Michael, 2007b; Michael, 2011).

The democratization of war makes it impossible for Israel's leaders not to consider public opinion and the power of the media,

Even in cases where the national leadership has undergone a learning process that led to change of positions and priorities, these changes must pass the political and public legitimacy test because the leaders of democratic states – specifically the State of Israel – must earn political approval

(in the governmental and coalition contexts) as well as public approval for the implementation of policy, all the more so when novel, ground-breaking policy is involved (Bar-Siman-Tov, 1996). But sometimes the public cannot absorb paradoxical opposites and synergies of opposites and contradictions. These are key strategic elements of Israel's complex operational environment but are very hard to market and explain because, for these purposes, the public would also have to undergo a complex social learning process (Bar-Siman-Tov, 1996).

Despite the range of possible strategies, Israeli leaders have not always succeeded in establishing legitimacy for the policies they sought to implement, and the most salient cases actually turned out to be in the Palestinian context (Bar-Siman-Tov, 1996). This difficulty can be explained through the unique and complex characteristics of the operating environment in which, paradoxically, a sterile and prolonged political process is taking place against the background of a violent confrontation (with the Gaza Strip) and a continuing focused effort to eliminate terrorist threats (from the West Bank).

The lack of congruence between Israeli military powers and political powers creates a need for a unique leadership capable of developing a strategy for overcoming the obstacle described above, which is sometimes a stumbling block in the complex circumstances in which Israel must operate.

Israeli Leadership and the Incongruence Between Military and Political Power

The complex operating environment of the Israeli-Palestinian arena in which Israel is situated is characterized by sudden transitions from calmness to violent confrontation and sometimes also by a political process taking place in parallel to violent confrontation. Operating in such an environment requires a uniquely strategic leadership capable of influencing the public and leading it through complex and controversial processes. In democratic countries, however, leaders must act on the basis of political agreement and broad public consensus grounded in linear logic. The difficulty lies in resolving the contradiction between the accepted linear logic (common sense) and the paradoxical logic of the strategy. History has shown that only rarely have leaders been gifted with a strategic ability that applies to the reality of war as well as the reality of peace. Even rarer is the skill to deal with a complex, dynamic reality involving a sense of existential threat and "neither peace nor war."

Political leadership should also be intellectual leadership that is capable of combining military strategy with political understanding and formulating a grand strategy in the broadest, most inclusive, and most comprehensive sense of the term (Michael, 2007). The challenge becomes more difficult within the complex environment in which Israel operates, where reality embodies a fundamental clash between military strategy and political logic (balancing between "ways" and "means" in a turbulent environment towards the "ends"). Military strategy dictates striking, defeating, capturing territory, and achieving the best possible military outcome. Political logic requires achievement of the

best possible negotiating outcome. This is why almost all military personnel believe that almost all politicians are either too daring or too cowardly. The military leader will always try for the best possible outcome, even if this is less than total victory; the statesman will try to achieve his objectives through negotiations; the potential clash between them is understandable and insoluble (Luttwak, 2002:194).

Another contradiction between the strategies is reflected in the difference between the diplomacy of peace – the purpose of which is to minimize a threat – and deterrence by means of armed persuasion – the purpose of which is to prevent actualization of a threat. The very need to use armed persuasion undercuts the ability to persuade through the diplomacy of peace. The diplomacy of peace, however, could create a problematic reality for Israel, where she would have difficulty deterring her opponent through armed persuasion.

Israel exists in a reality of incongruence between notable military power and notable diplomatic power. Luttwak found that in cases of incongruence between these powers, the strategic range of operation decreases. In the Israeli case, though, it appears that the lack of decisive diplomatic superiority creates incongruence in relation to military power. Not only is there a strong need for strategy, but strong strategic leadership is also necessary.

The key to intelligent handling of the incongruence between these powers lies in a strategic leadership that will strike the right balance between the horizontal and vertical dimensions of strategy. Such leadership would define consistent and non-conflicting goals, set priorities, and coordinate the various sectors: military, diplomatic, social, and economic. This requires an acrobatic combination of paradoxes and contradictions because a tough military policy needs to be balanced with a soft foreign policy, and vice versa. But such acrobatics put the political sector – in Israel specifically and in democratic countries generally – in a very difficult position: decision makers might be (mistakenly) perceived as adopting incoherent and contradictory policies. Ironically, it is much easier for dictatorships to implement such policies because dictators do not have to explain their policies and do not need agreement (Luttwak, 2002: 326).

An excellent example of such acrobatic skill demonstrated in political leadership can be seen in the aftermath of the terrorist attack near Eilat (18 August 2011), which left eight dead. Despite public pressure to aggressively strike Hamas in Gaza, the political leadership chose to respond in a calm and considered way, which takes into account a variety

of considerations. They decided to act in a measured and balanced manner, so as not to lead to further escalation, to preserve deterrence, to contain Egyptian anger and, keeping the fragile agreement and security cooperation while building the infrastructure of international legitimacy for the next strike that might be needed. It was well expressed by Israeli MK Dan Meridor, as he explained the paradoxical reality imposed on Israel when Israel has to slap Hamas on the face in order to encourage and enable it to suppress and prevent terrorism emanating from the Gaza Strip. This example demonstrates the learning process of the political leadership and significant improvement in the ability to act strategically in the spirit of the paradoxical principle.

Despite public pressure, the political leadership decided to act in a measured and balanced manner, so as not to lead to further escalation

Summary and Conclusions

Characterizing and analyzing the complex environment in which Israel operates poses a significant barrier to implementation of strategic goals. This strategic barrier creates real difficulties vis-à-vis the learning processes necessary to bring about change. It also poses a series of obstacles that make it difficult for Israeli leadership to identify or create opportunities; to plan and take complex strategic steps; and to achieve meaningful political breakthroughs that serve the strategic needs.

Significant change of the characteristics of this complex operating environment can occur as a result of the redefinition of the space in a way that generates a sense of security within Israel that it is wanted and accepted in the region and grants its complete legitimacy as the state of the Jewish People. The political sector in Israel will be required to demonstrate clear strategic leadership; to develop learning processes that will lead to a knowledge base, and the strategic skills to reshape the contours of the security discourse; transform the “truth regime”; reduce the consciousness of threat; and enable the necessary social and political acquiescence. Under such circumstances there would be a reasonable likelihood of exchanging the existing security paradigm for a new paradigm, which in turn would lead to a new political reality. It seems that the way the Israeli government chose to act after the bloody event in Eilat demonstrates that such change is possible.

References

- Bar-Siman-Tov, Yaacov. "Dialectics Between Stable Peace and Reconciliation," *Politika*, 9, 2002, pp. 59-75 (Hebrew).
- Bar-Siman-Tov, Yaacov. "Adaptation and Learning in Conflict Management, Reduction and Resolution," Davis Occasional Papers, no. 90 (Jerusalem: The Leonard Davis Institute, 2001).
- Bar-Siman-Tov, Yaacov. "Peace Policy as Domestic and as Foreign Policy: The Israeli Case," in *Peacemaking in a Divided Society: Israel After Rabin* (ed.), Sasson Sofer (London: Frank Cass, 2001), pp. 27-54.
- Bar-Siman-Tov, Yaacov. "Uncertainty and Risk-Taking in Peacemaking: The Israeli Experience," *Politika*, 6, December 2000, pp. 29-44 (Hebrew).
- Bar-Siman-Tov, Yaacov. *The Transition from War to Peace: The Complexity of Decisionmaking - The Israeli Case*, Tel Aviv: Steinmetz Center, 1996.
- Bar-Tal, Daniel. *Living with the Conflict: Socio-Psychological Analysis of the Israeli-Jewish Society*, Jerusalem: Carmel Publishing House, 2007 (Hebrew).
- Ben-Eliezer, Uri. *Through the Sight: The Making of Israeli Militarism, 1936-1956*, Dvir Publishing, 1995 (Hebrew).
- Berghahn, R Volker. *MILITARISM The History of an International Debate*, Cambridge University Press, 1981.
- Foucault, Michel. "Prison Talk," in C. Gordon (ed.), *Power/Knowledge* (Brighton: Harvester, 1980), 147-65.
- Kacowicz, A. et al. (eds.) (2000). *Stable Peace Among Nations*, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Kahneman, Daniel and Tversky, Amos. "Conflict Resolution: A Cognitive Perspective," in Kenneth Arrow, et.al., *Barriers to Conflict Resolution* (New York: Norton, 1995), pp. 44-60.
- Levy, S. Jack. "Learning and Foreign Policy: Sweeping a Conceptual Minefield," *International Organization*, vol. 48 (1994), pp. 279-312.
- Levy, Yagil. "An Unbearable Price: War Casualties and Warring Democracies *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, Vol. 22, Issue, 1, (2009), 69-82.
- Levy, Yagil. "The Second Lebanon War: Coping with the Gap of Legitimacies Syndrome," *Israel Studies Forum*, Vol. 24, Issue 1, (Spring 2009), pp. 3-24.
- Luttwak, Edward. *Strategy: The Logic of War and Peace*, Belknap Press, 1987.
- Michael, Kobi. "Militarily Statesmanship or Political Militarism — Who Really Shapes the National Security Strategy in Israel?" *The Public Sphere*, Vol. 4, pp. 110-130, Tel-Aviv University, (2011).
- Michael, Kobi. "Who Really Dictates What an Existential Threat Is?" *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 32, Issue 5, (2009), pp. 687-713.
- Michael, Kobi. "The Second Lebanon War in the Mirror of Weak Civilian Control and Strategic-Intellectual Leadership," *Politika* 17, Winter 2008, pp. 131-154.
- Michael, Kobi. "The Dilemma Behind the Classical Dilemma of Civil-Military Relations: The 'Discourse Space' Model and the Israeli Case During the Oslo Process," *Armed Forces & Society*, Vol. 33, No. 4 (2007c): 518- 46.
- Michael, Kobi. "The Israel Defense Forces as an Epistemic Authority: An Intellectual Challenge in the Reality of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict," *The Journal of Strategic Studies* Vol. 30, no. 3 (2007b): 421- 46.
- Mills, Sara, Michel Foucault, trans. Ohad Zehavi, ed. by Libido Translation Series, Tel Aviv: RESLING Publishing, 2005 (Hebrew).
- Mnookin, H. Rober and Ross, Lee. "Introduction," in Kenneth Arrow, et.al., *Barriers to Conflict Resolution* (New York: Norton, 1995), pp. 2-24.
- Peace Index, edited by Prof. Tamar Hermann and Prof. Eppie Yaar, Steinmetz Center for Peace Research and the Evans Program for Conflict Resolution, Tel Aviv University (Hebrew).
- Shavit, Ari. Interview with National Security Advisor Uzi Arad, Haaretz, 9 July 2009.
- Tamari, Dov. "Can the IDF Change After the Second Lebanon War?" *Ma'arachot*, Issue No. 415, November 2007, pp. 26-41.

IJ Exclusives

Strategic Perspectives on Current Events

IJ Exclusives are peer-reviewed articles that focus on strategic issues in current events that are published between each quarterly issue of IJ.

Be sure to read IJ Exclusives, only available at InfinityJournal.com

Read Them Now at
InfinityJournal.com



Future Threats and Strategic Thinking

Frank G. Hoffman

Institute for National Strategic Studies
National Defense University, Washington D.C.

Frank Hoffman is currently a Senior Research Fellow at the Institute for National Strategic Studies and Director, National Defense University Press.

This article explores the strategic utility of the hybrid threat construct. The original exploration of hybrid threats was developed after 9/11 by Marines at Quantico, Virginia, to examine how the character of conflict was evolving. It was designed to update the mid-1990's concept of "Chaos in the Littorals" and the prediction by General Charles C. Krulak that future wars would resemble the "Stepchild of Chechnya", instead of more conventional *Desert Storm*-style campaigns. The official tasking was to define with some granularity just how the character of conflict was evolving, and what the implications of that evolution would be to the Marines at the operational and tactical level.

the hybrid threat construct serves a number of useful purposes

Overall, the hybrid threat construct serves a number of useful purposes. At the strategic level, its most significant value is to raise awareness of potential risks and opportunity costs presented by the various options in the ongoing threat/force posture debate in Europe and the United States.[i]

Defining a Hybrid Threat

A number of analysts have suggested that future conflict will be *multi-modal* or *multi-variant* rather than a simple black or white characterization of one form of warfare. These scholars, soldiers and analysts (including Mike Evans, Max Boot, John Arquilla, Colin Gray, William Nemeth of the Marine Corps, Generals Casey and Dempsey from the US Army, and CENTCOM's General James Mattis) conclude that there will be more blurring and the blending of war forms

in combinations of increasing frequency and lethality. This construct is most frequently described as "hybrid warfare."

A number of analysts have suggested that future conflict will be *multi-modal* or *multi-variant* most frequently described as "hybrid warfare"

This concept builds upon other noteworthy conceptions about conflict including compound, combinational and 4GW theory.[ii] This theory *does not* contend that it is either original or historically unique, or that hybrid threats are ten feet tall. Quite the contrary, the historical hybrid threats case studies show that properly trained, conventional forces employing combined arms usually win: see for instance the 2nd Anglo-Boer War, Chechnya in the 1990s, and Hezbollah vs. the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). However, they also tend to do so with far greater losses than expected; and by applying techniques and firepower that are anathema to today's casualty-sensitive Post-Heroic Warfare advocates and COIN proponents.[iii]

Hybrid threats incorporate a full-range of different modes of warfare including conventional capabilities, irregular tactics and formations; terrorist acts including indiscriminate violence and coercion, and criminal disorder. In my interpretation, hybrid wars can be conducted by separate units or kinds of forces - or even by the same unit - but are generally operationally and tactically directed and coordinated simultaneously within the main battlespace to achieve synergistic effects in the physical and psychological dimensions of conflict.

My own definition emphasizes *modes* of conflict in terms of capabilities and tactics, and incorporates criminality, which many military cultures do not define as a mode of conflict. My interest is in the adversary's doctrine or theory of victory, which must be understood. The U.S. Army, in its recent adoption of the term in its doctrine emphasizes the character of the forces (traditional combat forces, irregular forces and criminal elements) working together for mutual benefit. This definition emphasizes actors themselves, over their modes of operation. It also has a strong historical basis, and discounts

To cite this Article: Hoffman, Frank G., "Future Threats and Strategic Thinking", *Infinity Journal*, Issue No. 4, Fall 2011, pages 17-21.

the idea that a single force might be able to apply multiple modes.

This is not an abstract exercise. Given the looming global economic crisis and the need to carefully husband defense resources in the next decade, it is important that the senior policymakers and strategists grasp the numerous modes of warfare that we face and explore a broader spectrum of options. Western governments, especially the United States, must carefully invest very scarce resources, avoid strategic overstretch in risky adventure; and make difficult decisions about where to prudently balance risk in the future.[iv] In a perfect world, our military forces would be robustly sized and we would build distinctive forces for discernably different missions along the entire conflict spectrum. We would have separate counter-terrorism forces, a corps of trainers/advisors for foreign internal defense, a larger Special Operations Force, a force for protracted counterinsurgencies, highly-ready expeditionary forces, more robust homeland security means, a new cyber force with battalions of cyber warriors; and heavy conventional forces for those rare but existential interstate conflagrations.

**it is important that the senior
policymakers and strategists grasp
the numerous modes of warfare
that we face and explore a broader
spectrum of options**

In a perfect world, the training and equipping of these forces would be well matched to their expected operating environments and threats. But we do not live in such a world. In fact, we are preparing for a future of great uncertainty with fewer resources than previously held. The post-9/11 funding spigot is about to be turned off, forcing military establishments in general - and the Pentagon in particular - to rethink priorities and make hard calls. We no longer have the resources to simply buy everything and eliminate every risk (if we ever did). The time for thinking anew and acting strategically has arrived.[v]

Alternative Schools of Thinking

Propelled by the combined effect of a severe fiscal crisis and an impatient if not war weary populace, America's post-Afghanistan strategy, budget and forces debate is in full throttle inside the Pentagon.[vi] This debate is informed not only by current conflicts, but by projections of future challenges. There are a variety of schools on how to address this force posture problem. Other nations may have the same choices or face unique options, but the following categories are relevant to the United States and its political culture and defence posture.

The Counterinsurgents

This school challenges the narrow orientation of traditionally-focused forces and argues for a transformation based on today's fights. The advocates here believe that Iraq and Afghanistan represent far more than a passing blip in the

evolution of conflict. They contend that massed formations comprised of traditional arms and large-scale conflict between conventional powers is not a realistic planning scenario or the focal point for shaping tomorrow's military. They assess that the most likely challenges and greatest risks are posed by failing states, ungoverned territories, transnational threats and radical versions of Islam.

This school argues that irregular warfare is not only different and of greater priority, it cannot be successfully conducted by general purpose forces who only marginally prepare for it. Instead, they argue for a greater emphasis on 'Wars Amongst the People', and a force particularly shaped for sustained irregular warfare. The latest proponents of this school include Dr. Roy Godson from Georgetown and Richard Schultz from the Fletcher School, Tufts University.[vii] They assert that OSD is failing to plan for the most likely scenarios and committing a serious strategic error.

The Counterinsurgent school focuses on today's fights and what could be tomorrow's, but fails to acknowledge the sub-optimal importance of today's conflicts in global strategic terms. Under their advice, the U.S. military could markedly improve readiness for stability operations and COIN tasks by improving individual cultural and language skills, small unit tactics and training/advisory missions. Yet at the same time, this focus would leave the United States less prepared for rare but demanding conventional or higher end conflicts. It would also leave the force sub-optimally ready for hybrid threats that would severely maul light forces unprepared for the ferocity of hybrid scenarios in failed state scenarios with large urban centers.

**The Counterinsurgent school focuses
on today's fights and what could be
tomorrow's, but fails to acknowledge
the sub-optimal importance of
today's conflicts in global
strategic terms.**

The Traditionalists

The Traditionalists sit at the opposing end of the spectrum of conflict. This school seeks to re-establish the conventional focus of the armed forces on "fighting and winning the Nation's wars." They focus on major, high-intensity interstate wars. They advocate against reorienting forces - especially ground forces - away from this conventional focus, viewing it as a distraction inconsistent with American culture, interests and requirements.

Traditionalists want to retain the Pentagon's current procurement profile and its emphasis on "the Big Guns" for a future they predict will be conventional in nature, and for which a large military is strategically necessary.[viii]

This camp wishes to preserve today's competitive advantages in large-scale conflicts, and avoids entanglements in messy protracted stability operations. They focus on traditional large-scale wars against nation states and abhor messy,

ambiguous conflicts that do not fit the proverbial American Way of War. This school would concur with a key assessment in Joint Forces Command's *Joint Operating Environment* that concludes "Competition and conflict among conventional powers will continue to be the primary strategic and operational context for the Joint Force over the next 25 years." [ix] Clearly, this debate is inherently mixed with the strategic lessons of Iraq and Afghanistan. To the Traditionalists our experiences in Iraq suggest that protracted COIN missions are not just expensive and manpower intensive: they are in fact an astrategic waste of resources that neither serve U.S. interests. Nor do they match up well with U.S. culture or priorities. Scholars, especially Professor Colin S. Gray, conclude that global security is better served by the United States serving as a Reluctant Sheriff focused on the preservation of the international system.

Utility Infielders

The third school, most prevalent among American ground force commanders, is the Utility Infielder school. This school recognizes the need to adequately deal with both strictly conventional tasks and irregular threats. Proponents seek to cover just about the entire spectrum of conflict, and avoid the risk of being optimized at either extreme. Flexibility and adaptability are the watch words for this approach, which manages risk across the range of military operations by investing in quality forces, educating its officers for complex problems and employing tough training programs.

The Utility Infielders school recognizes the need to adequately deal with both strictly conventional tasks and irregular threats.

The Utility Infielders school is officially represented in the Army's new doctrinal manual FM 3-0, which declares that "Stability operations are a core U.S. military mission that must be given priority comparable to that of combat (offensive and defensive) operations." This school is similarly reflected in the Marine Corps' long-range vision and that extols the versatility of "multi-capable" Marine Air Ground Task Forces across the full range of military operations. [x]

The difficulty of this approach is the extensive risk being taken with the initial readiness of ground forces for so many tasks. Some challenge the ability of ground forces to execute Full Spectrum Operations with a general purpose force, given the widely varied conditions that the force might face. Additionally, this posture may assume that force size and resources will remain high, which is questionable.

Division of Labor

Finally, there are strategists and analysts who reject the fundamental premise of the Utility Infielders school. They argue that irregular and conventional warfare are markedly different modes of conflict that require distinctive forces with different training, equipment and force designs. They worry that too wide a range of skills will dilute readiness - especially

for ground forces - and produce "jacks of all trades, masters of none." As this school prioritizes, divides, and specializes roles and missions between the Services, it can be labeled the "division of labor" option.

A RAND study has recommended that the Pentagon consider focusing a much larger proportion of U.S. ground forces on stability operations, and "accept the risk of shifting some of the burden for deferring and defeating large-scale aggression to air and naval forces." [xi] This study rationalizes roles and missions, and offers a means of guiding future defence investments. Its conclusion is that the most plausible regional wars that U.S. forces might be called on to fight — involving Iran, China (over Taiwan), and North Korea — call for heavy commitments of air and naval forces and fewer U.S. ground forces.

The Division of Labor school offers dedicated and separate forces or Services for discrete missions.

The Division of Labor school offers dedicated and separate forces or Services for discrete missions. Ground force investment would be reduced in this option, since ground forces are required principally for stability functions and one possible warfighting scenario. This approach exposes the United States to some risk, as U.S. forces would lack of depth/ capacity for long-duration scenarios requiring ground forces prepared for combat conditions. As the specific options described above represent the two extremes of the conflict spectrum, this posture option produces forces sub-optimized for hybrid threats. This of course presents risks. The degree of risk depends on one's assessment of the prevalence of stability operations, protracted or sharp clashes against hybrids, or major conventional operations.

This school realizes that the Services do not have to receive fixed shares of the budget, or that each Service plays equally in all modes of war. However, a critical strategic question is whether U.S. force planners agree with the Division of Labor's strategic assumptions about the character of future conflict, and whether or not its emphasis on precision attack and missiles offers a decisive solution in future contests.

Assessment – A Question of Risk

Which school of thinking dominates the debate today? How should we think about these schools and assess them? Perhaps the best way would be to approach each in terms of what the American Joint Staff calls "operational risk." Operational risk is a function of the combination of the frequency or probability of an event occurring — and its consequences. This risk is represented by the greater intensity of conflict and the greater frequency of occurrence, compared to the required resource commitment — or demand. (See Figure 1 below)

Part of the underlying argument about hybrid threats is the conclusion that the frequency of conflict will be increased, as well as its lethality, as non-state actors acquire the kind of capabilities previously monopolized by states. As

presented in Figure 1, the convergence of the fervor and fanaticism of so-called irregular threats with the increased killing power of conventional capabilities combine to create demand scenarios in the middle of the conflict spectrum. Joint expeditionary forces will thus have to respond to this demand. This would seem to indicate that the character of these threats and attendant Western interests will require robust ground forces in order to achieve order and assigned political objectives.

Part of the underlying argument about hybrid threats is the conclusion that the frequency of conflict will be increased as non-state actors acquire the kind of capabilities previously monopolized by states.

Yet this approach is in direct contrast to the approach taken in the 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR), where the US Department of Defence suggests diverging threats and at the lower and upper end of the spectrum. This reflects the underlying strategy emphasis on preventive efforts: such as building up partnership capacity via security force assistance at the lower end of the conflict spectrum, and the rise of High-End Asymmetric Threats (HEAT) at the other end. The HEAT construct offers justification for intensive investments in cyber warfare, missile defence, and prompt global strike assets by the U.S. military. This perspective reflects a growing consensus in the U.S. policy community, which notes significant increases in capabilities posed by possible Asian challengers.

insurgencies. The Utility Infielders would also reject the HEAT perspective to a degree, but particularly find the Division of Labor argument risky, as they perceive the current era as one of persistent conflict with the potential for extensive applications of ground forces.

If ground forces were particularly postured for hybrid threats the Full Spectrum school holds particular merit

Clearly, a "Full Spectrum" option, by hedging against a wide array of scenarios and threats, begins to appear attractive in this formulation. If ground forces were particularly postured for hybrid threats (in terms of force protection and preparation for complex urban contingencies) the Full Spectrum school holds particular merit over the other investment and readiness options.

The Division of Labor school also reflects a divergence of threats into high and low-intensity scenarios, and favors investment in the technology and capital-intensive combat arms, especially air and space power. Yet if one accepts the rising salience and prevalence of the hybrid threat construct, the Division of Labor school offers the starkest options and the greatest risks. If, however, one needs to ensure that emerging challengers do not leap ahead of the United States in new technological areas such as cyberwarfare, the Division of Labor school has key points. This school offers the most strategic orientation, attempting to create priorities and hard tradeoffs, but its reliance on technological solutions and airpower could be contested.[xii]

As Colin Gray has frequently reminded us, strategic force planning has two cardinal rules: prudence and adaptability. Viewed through the lens of the hybrid threat construct, the Full Spectrum Operations school postures forces prudently for likely and messy challenges of the 21st century. However, the costs of sustaining large ground forces — which I define in today's terms a force of about 18 U.S. Army and Guard divisions and 4 Marine divisions — and providing them the necessary training time and equipment to be proficient across the full spectrum of conflict is a daunting challenge.

At the end of the day, this is about war and its chameleon-like character. Over the long term, I would contend we must maintain the ability to wage successful campaigns against both large conventionally-armed states and their militaries and against widely dispersed terrorists — and against *everything in between*. Advocates of the rising salience of hybrid threats suggest that we will see more of the multi-modal approach rather than classical armed rebellions or HEAT cases. I concur with that view and the conclusion that the hybrid threat is a good focal point for designing/training expeditionary forces for the 21st century. This focal point is especially relevant for our ground forces, as it will minimize risks and maximize readiness demands within constrained resources. It also serves as a valuable justification for SOF forces, which are critical to reducing the hybrid threat's command networks and key leadership infrastructure.

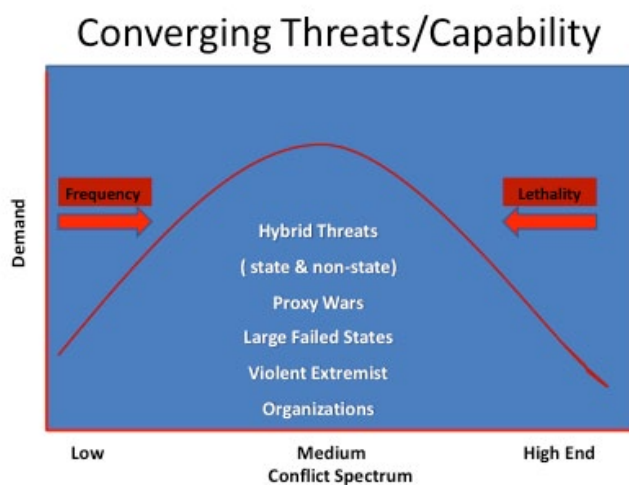


Figure 1

Viewed through the lens of the major force design schools in the United States, these threat/scenario options present radically different risks and priorities. The "Counterinsurgent" school believes that threats are predominately irregular at the lower end of the conflict spectrum, and they would argue against the HEAT perspective and the investment in air and naval forces over ground forces adapted for persistent

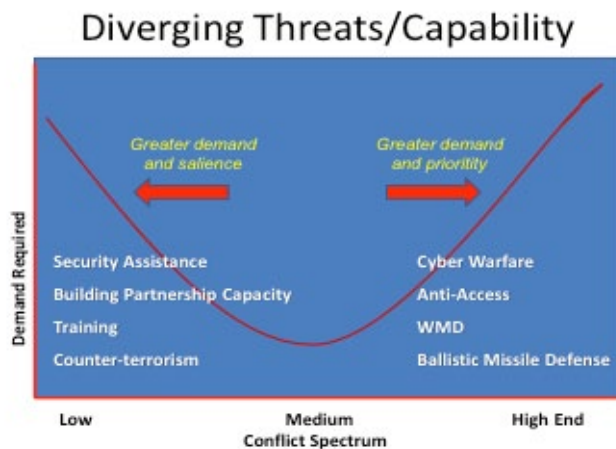


Figure 2

Conclusion

Strategy is about making choices and creating coherence between policy ends, ways and means. Making wise choices require us to think prudently about the future and the past. Policy makers and strategists need to define their assumptions about frequency, consequences, and risk far more carefully and analytically. Since we have fewer resources available, these decisions will pose more critical distinctions and possibly greater risk for our societies without analytical rigor. The hybrid threat construct, and its theoretical adversary doctrine, suggests that the choices are more complicated than some schools of thought are considering. The choice is

not simply one of preparing for long-term Stability Operations or high-intensity conflict. We must be able to do *both* and do them simultaneously against enemies far more ruthless than today's, as predicted more than 15 years ago by General Krulak.

Strategy is about making choices and creating coherence between policy ends, ways and means.

Accordingly, force planners must be smart about future decisions regarding force design and lean towards agile, rigorously trained, multi-purpose forces capable of being adaptive in approach to the unique conditions each conflict poses. This posture is best suited for the increased risk produced by the convergence in the battlespace (See Figure 1 above), a battlespace that will entail intimate contact with both adversaries and noncombatants. Thus, with respect to ground forces, this author is in the Utility Infielders camp. Some degree of specialization might be necessary. Some forces *should* be postured for just one end of the spectrum or the other. Surely we need some training and advisors, just as much as we need the vaunted F-22 to slice through the defences of a modern anti-access system.

Yet the cardinal principles of prudence and adaptability strongly suggest that Western military forces that must deploy globally for expeditionary missions should be postured for the greater lethality and complexity of hybrid threats in urban terrain and complex operating environments in order to be successful.[xiii]

References

- [i] This article builds on an earlier effort presented at a Joint Forces Command-sponsored conference conducted by the Institute for National Strategic Studies, Fort McNair, Washington, DC in 2009. See Frank G. Hoffman, "Hybrid Threats: Reconceptualizing the Evolving Character of Modern Conflict," Strategic Forum 240, April 2009.
- [ii] Thomas Huber, ed., *Compound Wars: The Fatal Knot*, Fort Leavenworth, KS: Command and General Staff College, 1996; T. X. Hammes, "Insurgency: Modern Warfare Evolves Into a Fourth Generation," Strategic Forum No. 214, January, 2005.
- [iii] The Viet Minh against France might be the exception.
- [iv] Michele A. Flournoy and Shawn Brimley, "The Defense Inheritance: Challenges and Choices for the Next Pentagon Team," Washington Quarterly, Summer 2008.
- [v] For additional insights, see Michael Aaronson, Sverre Diessen, Yves de Kermabon and Mary Beth Long, "NATO Countering the Hybrid Threat," Prism, Vol. 2, No. 4, 2011 (forthcoming).
- [vi] An example of the debate can be found in Dr. John A. Nagl, "Let's Win the Wars We're In," Joint Force Quarterly, 1st Quarter 2009, pp. 20-33; Gian Gentile, "Let's Build An Army to Win All Wars," Joint Force Quarterly, 1st Quarter 2009, pp. 20-33.
- [vii] Roy Godson and Richard Schultz, "Pentagon Fails to Plan for Most Likely Scenarios," Joint Force Quarterly, Oct. 2010.
- [viii] Retired Major General Charles A. Dunlap, "We Still Need the Big Guns," New York Times, Jan 9, 2008 accessed at <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/09/opinion/09dunlap.html>.
- [ix] James N. Mattis, Joint Operating Environment, Norfolk, VA: U.S. Joint Forces Command, Dec. 2008, p. 23.
- [x] James Conway, Marine Corps Vision and Strategy 2025, Quantico, VA, June 2008.
- [xi] Andrew R. Hoehn, et al, A New Division of Labor: Meeting America's Security Challenges Beyond Iraq, Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2007, p. 75.
- [xii] Martin van Creveld, "The Rise and Fall of Air Power," RUSI Journal, June/July 2011, Vol. 156, No. 3, pp. 48-55.
- [xiii] I am indebted to Professor Colin Gray on this point.



The Second Lebanon War – A Strategic Reappraisal

Gur Laish

National Security Council, Office of the Prime Minister
Israel

Gur Laish is a retired Israel Air Force (IAF) Colonel. Gur has served as, among others, the head of the IAF Warfare Planning Department and he has been involved in strategic planning for both the IAF and the Israel Defense Force. Gur has recently been appointed to Israel's National Security Council.

Note: this article was written prior to Laish's appointment to the Israeli National Security Council.

In an article that appeared in Volume 1, Issue No. 3 of *Infinity Journal*, Martin van Creveld analyzes the Second Lebanon War (2006) five years after the war's end. The analysis focuses on the tactical and operational level without going into the strategic debate.[i] However, he reaches the interesting conclusion that despite the tactical failures of the IDF in the war, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert has succeeded in achieving unprecedented quiet on the northern border, mainly as a result of his resolve to persist with the war (which as stated, suffered from serious tactical problems). This is, apparently, a strange situation where a lack of strategy and a tactical failure led to retrospective success. Sun Tzu must be turning in his grave. Can this really be the case?

Was Olmert's success really fortuitous, resulting from his persistence, or did he choose the correct strategy and win? In order to answer this question it is necessary to analyze the Second Lebanon War at the strategic level.

However, there is a problem in evaluating Israeli strategy and the extent of its success in the war, since there has been a long-standing problem in Israel with management at the strategic level. No basic documents can be found that define Israel's military strategy in general, and especially those that defined the strategy for the 2006 war in Lebanon. Furthermore, over the years Israeli governments have been harshly criticized for coming up short in the field of strategic planning.

We will thus attempt to make a strategic assessment of the Second Lebanon War in a different way. First, we will make an informed guess as to the hypothetical "Israeli" strategy and then evaluate the activities of the IDF against this hypothetical strategy and see what we can learn from it.

What was the strategy of the two sides?

I have chosen to analyze the strategies of the sides using a reverse engineering method; based on their actions and not on their public declarations, which frequently fail to present the strategic truth.

Hizballah's strategy was derived from the organization's objectives at the Lebanese and Islamic levels *vis-à-vis* Israel. We will concentrate on the ultimate objective of Hizballah *vis-à-vis* Israel, which is to be an element of defiance that confronts Israel. In my opinion, the objectives indicated by van Creveld (Shabaa, prisoners, etc.) are not Hizballah's objectives but the means used by it to justify its resistance to Israel.

Hizballah's strategy, therefore, in the context of its confrontation with Israel, was one of resistance. During the period preceding the Second Lebanon War, Hizballah attempted to retain its operational freedom to act from time to time against Israel in a way that would justify its military existence and present itself as the "Shield of Lebanon". This operational activity included high trajectory fire and isolated ground actions, mainly near the border. Hizballah relied on both the firepower in its possession and Israel's reluctance to return to Lebanon after the withdrawal — so as to create deterrence against too-strong an Israeli response to its activities.

Hizballah's strategy in the context of its confrontation with Israel, was one of resistance.

Thus, Hizballah does not have an objective of high intensity confrontation. It regards such a situation as a risk that it is prepared to take, but it is not one of Hizballah's objectives and consequently it wishes to terminate such actions as soon as possible, provided that it can return to its strategy of resistance thereafter.

To cite this Article: Laish, Gur, "The Second Lebanon War – A Strategic Reappraisal", *Infinity Journal*, Issue No. 4, Fall 2011, pages 22-25.

In the event of a broader confrontation, Hizballah's strategy includes considerable and varied firepower that can hit the whole of northern Israel, and guerrilla forces that can demand a price for any maneuver by the IDF inside Southern Lebanon. Hizballah employed the 'spider web approach', according to which the Israeli home front cannot withstand a broad attack and take casualties.

Furthermore, as appropriate to an asymmetric strategy, Hizballah had neither the intention nor the capability of preventing penetration of Lebanon by the IDF. It thus relied on the fact that the IDF would, as far as possible, avoid attacking the civilian population in the south if it re-occupied territories in Lebanon. In other words, Hizballah's strategy did not include a defense of Southern Lebanon in the classical meaning of the term. Such defense was left to the responsibility of Israel and the international community.

Israel's objective against Hizballah is to minimize friction on the border for as long a period as possible. This (hypothetical) Israeli strategy attempted to minimize the activities of Hizballah near the border by means of deterrence, protection of IDF forces on the border, and reduction of the daily friction with Hizballah. Israeli strategy in the past had relied on using Syria as a means of restraining Hizballah. This strategy became invalid after the Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon in the year preceding the Second Lebanon War, and the IDF was in the process of constructing an alternative, a process that was not completed prior to the war. As ruled by the Winograd Committee, Israel lacked a coherent strategy for the situation of broad confrontation with Hizballah, and consequently the Winograd Committee criticized the hasty decision to go to war without a clear strategy as to how it should be managed.

In the light of the IDF's military actions in the war, I propose that the Israel's actual strategy was as follows: a heavy assault against Hizballah — its military assets, the center of the government and its deployment in Beirut, and its communal infrastructure in Southern Lebanon. Such a strategy intended to demonstrate the Israeli determination to act against Hizballah, including by ground actions, while absorbing hits from Hizballah fire, and resistance that would refute Nasrallah's spider web approach. In this way, at the end of the confrontation Hizballah would be beaten, deterred, and have little legitimacy for the continuance of its military activities against Israel. As we have said, such a definition of Israeli strategy is derived from an a posteriori analysis of its activities, and I do not claim that such a strategic definition existed before the war.

How did each side implement its strategy?

Hizballah did indeed act as it had planned. It carried out limited operations in the border region that peaked in attempts at kidnapping - which generally failed - until it achieved success on July 12, 2006. It was deployed in Southern Lebanon in such a way permitting it to carry out massive firing against northern Israel, as well as guerrilla warfare against Israeli ground actions. In addition, Hizballah was engaged in a massive program (that has continued without let-up until the present) for re-equipping with medium-range rockets produced in Iran and Syria.

Hizballah was engaged in a massive program for re-equipping with medium-range rockets produced in Iran and Syria

However, Hizballah ran into a number of surprises when the war started. First, it lost its long-range firing capability to attacks by the air force, and later discovered that its medium-range launchers were destroyed immediately after firing. (Incidentally, van Creveld is in error on this point when he presents the achievements of the air force against the rockets as having taken place during the first two days of the war only. This was an impressive tactical success that continued during the entire war.) However, it later compensated for this loss by firing short-range rockets.

Hizballah was also surprised by the IDF's determination to act on the ground in Lebanon. Hizballah lost hundreds of combatants in battles that developed, while failing to kidnap soldiers or bodies of dead IDF soldiers, and it took a low toll (as they saw it) as a result of the ground maneuver.

Hizballah was also surprised by the intensity of the attack and the destruction caused to the Dahiya neighborhood in Beirut, and the destruction of infrastructure, mainly in Southern Lebanon. Hizballah's efforts at re-equipping during hostilities did not influence the fighting, and did not permit it to change its nature. Nasrallah did attempt to deter Israel from continuing attacks on Beirut by threatening to attack "beyond Haifa", but Israel did not cease its attacks. On the other hand, Hizballah did not fall apart but rather maintained the organized character of its activities. Over almost the entire length of the war, Hizballah was ready to halt firing in return for an Israeli withdrawal, provided that it could continue to present its very survival and the damage to Israel as a "victory".

Nasrallah did attempt to deter Israel, but Israel did not cease its attacks

In other words, Hizballah acted in accordance with the strategy that it had prepared. However this could provide no answer to the excessive force applied against Hizballah by Israel. Further, the price paid by the organization and by the population of Southern Lebanon far exceeded the price that Nasrallah was prepared to pay when he ordered the kidnapping of soldiers.

In contrast, the IDF did not act in accordance with a coherent strategy. It began with a massive and successful air attack and subsequent ground actions near the border, but no direct connection between its activities and the achievement of the termination of the hostilities can be discerned. Although the IDF succeeded in attacking Hizballah's combatants, it certainly did not succeed in halting the firing of rockets on northern Israel.

Did the IDF really attempt to halt the firing? The IDF did not act directly and effectively against the firing, and it may be seen from this that it had no real intention of directly halting it. It can also be assumed that the IDF hoped that the pressure

applied to Hizballah and the fear that the operations would be intensified, would cause the organization to stop firing.

The Winograd Committee addressed this anomaly indirectly, when it harshly criticized “the period of treading water” prior to the decision to carry out an extensive land operation. The committee correctly stated that Israel should have decided whether hostilities would be terminated after the first days and an attempt made to reach international agreements (as occurred in the end), or whether the pressure on Hizballah, Southern Lebanon, and the state of Lebanon should be intensified in order to arrive at better terms in the agreements. Either way, it is not clear how the continuation of the military operations during the period of treading water, which included attacks from the air and limited ground actions, were supposed to cause Hizballah to halt the firing of rockets.

As I understand it, the IDF did not attempt to directly achieve a cessation of rocket fire and therefore did not fail to do so. The feeling of failure regarding a cessation of the firing of rockets by Hizballah resulted from a lack of strategic understanding.

Did the Israeli home front withstand Hizballah's attacks?

Nasrallah felt sufficiently confident to take military action against Israel, because he estimated that Israel was as weak as a “spider's web” and that Israeli society would not withstand the losses of a wide-scale war. Nasrallah made a serious mistake. Despite the considerable criticism of the results of the war in Israel, and of the way it was conducted, the Israeli home front contended with the challenges of the war successfully. (One should not infer from this that the systems functioned properly – quite the contrary.) Despite the inefficient operation of the systems on the home front during the hostilities, there were few casualties, the physical damage was repaired within a few weeks after the war, and the economic damage was largely reversible, without seriously harming the Israeli economy.

Van Creveld argues that this was not an Israeli success but resulted from the inaccuracy of the weapons in Hizballah's possession. However, Nasrallah should have been familiar with the capabilities of the weapons at his disposal, and he even relied on their low accuracy in order to justify massive firing at civilians. It can be seen therefore that Nasrallah erred at the strategic level when he underestimated the capability of Israeli society to meet defensive challenges.

This assessment is supported by an examination of the efforts made by Hizballah after the war to greatly expand its firing capabilities, even as this endangered its allies, Iran and Syria, who became increasingly regarded as supporters of terrorism following these efforts at re-equipping.

Did the Israeli strategy of attacking Hizballah and Southern Lebanon achieve its objectives? As van Creveld testifies, the northern border has never been quieter. In other words, Israeli strategy succeeded. It is important to emphasize that, without doubt, Hizballah sustained a defeat regarding its objective of resistance. Its attempt to present its actual survival as an organization, and the damage it caused to Israel as a victory, is a clear act of deception.

Its attempt to present its actual survival as an organization, and the damage it caused to Israel as a victory, is a clear act of deception.

In this context we do not need to wait for the jury to give its verdict, as van Creveld proposes, since it is clear that following the war Hizballah changed its modus operandi against Israel and not of its own volition. In contrast, the degree of deterrence applied by the sides following the war will change over the course of time, and it is likely that Hizballah will again feel capable of action in the future. However, this does not change the strategic appraisal of the war.

Therefore, we have seen that assuming the hypothetical strategy we have proposed, at the strategic level, the Second Lebanon War reflects an Israeli success compared to Hizballah's failure. I find no support for the argument presented by van Creveld that Olmert's determination to continue with a long war led to the success. On the contrary, I support the conclusion of the Winograd Committee that it might have been possible to reach the same achievements by reducing the period of treading water.

How was the strategic debate conducted on the Israeli side?

The major problem in the analysis we have made is that there was no clear Israeli strategy. The hypothetical strategy was tailored to fit the activities of the IDF, but it is quite uncertain that there existed such a strategy directing IDF operations. This may be seen in a multitude of ways, but we will give two important examples:

1. The period of treading water – As stated, the major criticism by the Winograd Committee regarding the strategic management of the war was directed at the long period of time between the opening of the war and the decision to carry out an extensive ground action. If there had been a clear strategy during the war it would have been clear to the leaders that they must decide on a cessation of the hostilities or its intensification, since, obviously, the military activities during the period of treading water had no chance of causing a cessation of the firing of rockets.
2. If the hypothetical strategy had been accepted in advance, it would have been clear that in order to reach the military achievements and improve the situation in Lebanon, a political effort was required in parallel with the military one. In fact, the political effort started late and was not coordinated with the military activities. Indeed, the lack of coordination peaked with the commencement of the large-scale ground operation at the end of the war.

The inability to define a strategy, to discuss it in real-time and, mainly, to make the appropriate military and political efforts during the war, is a very serious structural problem in Israel. It is probable that the solution to this problem has begun to emerge with the enactment of the National Security Council

Law in 2008, but the onus of proof still lies with it and with the executive bodies. Without doubt, at the strategic level this is the most important lesson to emerge from the Second Lebanon War.

Re-assessment of the tactical failures of the IDF:

The strategic deficiency also exacerbated some of the IDF's tactical difficulties, as addressed by van Creveld. In my opinion, the IDF, its officers and combatants, and of course the public failed to understand the nature of the war and consequently acted in a way that did not match the situation.

In general it is customary to classify the various types of confrontation as follows:

Homeland security → Low intensity conflict (asymmetric) → Conventional war
 Border security activities Second Lebanon War 1973 War

By this chart the second Lebanon war is a low intensity conflict.

The more appropriate classification should be understood as seen in the chart below:

Magnitude/Enemy type	Asymmetric enemy	Conventional enemy
Low intensity	Home land security "Suicide bombers 2002"	"War of attrition"-1969-1970
High intensity	Lebanon 2006	1967, 1973

In this classification the Second Lebanon War was a high-intensity war waged against an asymmetric enemy. The distinction is not merely semantic, since it influences the nature of deployment of forces and their operations. During the Second Lebanon War, the forces were deployed in a manner similar to that of border security operations: the General Staff bunker was not activated, the CGS gave tactical orders to the forces (not to move during the day, for example), and the level of risk that the forces were prepared to take was low – the forces halted after taking their first casualties.

But the most dramatic influence was that the officers and soldiers failed to realize that this was a real war, and in such a war, completion of the mission takes precedence over political correctness and polite behavior. Officers that received commands which they did not understand and which they were certainly unable to carry out did not protest or ignore orders.

In every war there is a gap between the level of understanding between the headquarters and the reality in the field, but when the soldiers act independently they provide a solution for these differences. However in the "polite" behavior of the IDF they reduced the chance that those in the field will bridge

such critical gaps.

The criticism generally voiced, including van Creveld, according to which the tactical echelons luckily corrected the mistakes of the command, is incorrect and is due, in my opinion, to basic misunderstandings of what happens in a war. Wars are influenced by the initiative of the soldiers in the field. The IDF achieves superiority over its enemies primarily because of the high ability of its soldiers and junior officers. What was lacking in the Second Lebanon War was, in fact, a greater independence on the part of the forces.

What was lacking in the Second Lebanon War was a greater independence on the part of the forces

In order to maintain an historical balance we should recall that on the Sinai front in the 1973 Yom Kippur War the opposite mistake was made in the strategic understanding of the nature of the confrontation. The IDF acted as if it was facing an existential threat from the Egyptians, when the latter were attempting to achieve a very limited objective (and were also incapable of achieving more than that).

This mistaken understanding made it difficult to take the correct tactical decision of a withdrawal to a rear line of defense followed by a counter-attack only after the necessary conditions had been achieved. In the case of the Yom Kippur War, the result of this erroneous evaluation of the nature of the confrontation created excessive aggression that caused numerous casualties. In the Second Lebanon War it caused hesitancy.

Conclusions

At the strategic level, Israel could be regarded as the victor since it had a better strategy than that of Hizballah, which failed. However, limited, and sometimes totally lacking, strategic management led to a situation in which the strategic advantages were not fully exploited.

Problems at the tactical level resulted from lack of preparation; training was intensified by an incorrect understanding of the nature of the confrontation, evaluation that is critical for correct behavior at the tactical and operational levels.

However, the Second Lebanon War demonstrated more than anything else, the inherent problem of an asymmetric entity, which, during a high intensity confrontation remains inferior and will always lose to the conventional side (but not before inflicting casualties and damage on him).

References

[1] In his article, Martin van Creveld virtually never examined the management of Israel's strategy – what was the strategy for the war, how did the IDF plan (if it did plan) to halt the firing of the rockets, how and whether the strategy changed during the war. Consequently it is not clear how van Creveld reaches the conclusion that the persistence regarding the length of the war was what led to the positive result of quiet on the northern border.

Get More Infinity Journal at InfinityJournal.com

InfinityJournal.com is a definitive resource for anyone interested in Strategy

Subscribe for free and get:

- **My News** - Personalized news headlines. Automatically updated and collated
- **Recommended Readings & Links** - Hand picked resources, all organized and at your finger tips
- **Exclusive Articles** - Exclusive peer-reviewed articles on strategy and current events released between IJ issues
- **Past Issues** - Full access to all past issues of Infinity Journal
- Infinity Journal's global networking resource for people interested in strategy

Sneak Peak

Links

We've compiled a list of links, organized by categories, that we think might further your interest in strategy. If you have a link suggestion, send it to us at info@infinityjournal.com.

Strategy & Strategic History

- Strategic Studies Institute
- The Institute for National Security Studies (INSS)
- Rethinking Strategy
- Military Strategy - Center for Strategic & International Studies (CSIS)

[See All](#)

War & Warfare

- Michigan War Studies Group
- Michigan War Studies Review
- Small Wars Journal
- Warfare Analysis and Research Department
- Armed Forces Journal

[See All](#)

News

- Military News
- U.S. Department of Defense - News
- Defense News
- Armed Forces International
- Global Security

[See All](#)

Education

- Centre for Strategic Studies - University of Reading
- John's Hopkins University - Strategic Studies
- King's College London - Department of War Studies
- The Strategist and Defense Studies Centre

[See All](#)

Recommended Links

Readings

Interested in strategy? Our 'reading list' is a catalog of books, articles, and conference papers compiled by the staff at IJ. From the classics to contemporary writings - all of these readings will no doubt benefit your interest and knowledge in strategy and other related fields.

Want to suggest a book, article, or report for the IJ reading list? [Click here to email](#) us the author and title.

You can filter the readings to find the recommendations that interest you. Click the options below to select/deselect any options.

Filter By Topic
[Show All](#) [Strategy & Strategic History](#) [War & Warfare](#) [Policy & Politics](#) [Intelligence](#)

Filter By Type
[Show All](#) [Books](#) [Articles](#) [Reports](#)

Featured		
After Clausewitz: German Military Thinkers Before the Great War by Antulio J. Schevnia	Strategy & Strategic History War & Warfare	Book
Clausewitz and the State: The Man, His Theories, and His Times by Peter Paret	Strategy & Strategic History War & Warfare Policy & Politics	Book
Low Intensity Operations: Subversion, Insurgency and Peacekeeping by Frank Klotz	Strategy & Strategic History War & Warfare	Book
Makers of Ancient Strategy: From the Persian Wars to the Fall of Rome by Victor Davis Hanson	Strategy & Strategic History War & Warfare	Book
Masters of War: Classical Strategic Thought by Michael I. Handel	Strategy & Strategic History War & Warfare	Book
On Waterloo: Clausewitz, Wellington, and the Campaign of 1815 by Carl von Clausewitz (Author), Arthur Wesley 1st Duke of Wellington (Editor), Christopher Bassford (Editor), Daniel Moran (Translator), Gregory W. Pofford (Translator)	Strategy & Strategic History War & Warfare	Book
The Nature of War in Information Age: Clausewitzian Future by David J. Lombardi	Strategy & Strategic History War & Warfare	Book
The Strategy Bridge: Theory for Practice by Colin S. Gray	Strategy & Strategic History War & Warfare Policy & Politics	Book

Recommended Readings

My News

Instead of having to check 10 different sites every time you want to know the latest news, Infinity Journal does the hard work for you.

Customize your news feeds to select the areas that interest you, and we'll keep you up to date with all the latest news and stories.

Then, all you have to do is log in to Infinity Journal and your own personalized news feed will appear at the bottom of every page, always keeping you up to date.

[CUSTOMIZE MY NEWS](#)

We always want to hear from our members. If you would like to recommend a news source or category, please Private Message admin to Suggest a News Source.

World News / Headlines

Syria army enters towns in north - BBC News - Home - 11:41 am
US, Vietnam team up in war on Agent Orange - msnbc.com Headlines - 11:35 am
Greek PM rejects IMF finance chief's short-cut support - Reuters: Top News - 11:31 am
Saudi women to drive for change - CNN.com - 11:31 am
New finance minister for Greece - BBC News - Home - 11:22 am
Strauss-Kahn 'opposed handcuffs' - BBC News - Home - 11:02 am
Greek PM reshuffles cabinet amid economic crisis - CNN.com - 10:54 am
Documents: Strauss-Kahn initially sought immunity - msnbc.com Headlines - 10:52 am
Prayers answered: Stolen religious relic found - msnbc.com Headlines - 10:26 am
Debt talks gear up for tough trade-offs - Reuters: Top News - 9:51 am

Defense, Government and Military News

Commander Outlines Situation in Southwest Afghanistan - GlobalSecurity.org - 4:05 am
DOD News Briefing with Secretary Gates and Adm. Mullen from the Pentagon - GlobalSecurity.org - 4:05 am
in First Press Conference, Gates Cites Afghan Success, Sees Challenges For Al-Qaida - GlobalSecurity.org - 4:05 am
Report: U.S. Aid is Critical to the Mission in Libya - GlobalSecurity.org - 4:05 am
Second hypersonic flight ends prematurely, brings new flight test data - GlobalSecurity.org - 4:05 am
Army promotes soldier held by Afghan militants - Military Times - News - 2:35 am
Remarks by the President at Congressional Picnic - White House.gov Press Office Feed - 2:19 am
GI cat gets medal at arman retirement - Military Times - News - 1:50 am
U.S.-Mongolia Joint Statement - White House.gov Press Office Feed - 11:49 pm

My News



Explaining Strategic Theory

M.L.R. Smith

Kings' College London, Department of War Studies
United Kingdom

John Stone

Kings' College London, Department of War Studies
United Kingdom

M.L.R. Smith is Professor of Strategic Theory in the Department of War Studies, King's College London, University of London.

John Stone is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of War Studies, King's College London, University of London.

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

To cite this Article: Smith, M.L.R. and Stone, John, "Explaining Strategic Theory", *Infinity Journal*, Issue No. 4, Fall 2011, pages 27-30.

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 lettre*. 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',[xiv] and that consequently no stable basis for study has been possible.[xv] 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.[xvi] 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.[xvii] 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.

References

This article is based on an earlier version that appeared in *e-International Relations* (April 2011). We are grateful to the editors of *e-IR* for agreeing, and indeed, encouraging the revision and re-publication of the original ideas set out there.

- [i] Harry R. Yarger, *Strategic Theory for the 21st Century: The Little Book on Big Strategy* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2006), p. 2.
- [ii] Michael Howard, *The Causes of War* (London: Counterpoint, 1983), p. 86.
- [iii] Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, tr. J.J. Graham (New York: Barnes and Noble, 2004), pp. 1-19; Thomas C. Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), pp. 83-118.
- [iv] .F. Lopez-Alvez, 'Political Crises, Strategic Choices and Terrorism: The Rise and Fall of the Uruguayan Tupamaros', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (1989), p. 204.
- [v] Thomas Schelling, *Choice and Consequence: Perspectives of an Errant Economist* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), pp. 198-199.
- [vi] *Ibid.*, p. 199.
- [vii] M.L.R. Smith, 'William of Ockham, Where Are You When We Need You? Reviewing Modern Terrorism Studies', *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 44, No. 2 (2008), p. 322.
- [viii] See Schelling, *Choice and Consequence*, *passim*.
- [ix] See, for example, John Garnett, 'Strategic Studies and Its Assumptions', in John Baylis, Ken Booth, John Garnett and Phil Williams, *Contemporary Strategy: Theories and Policies* (London: Croom Helm, 1975).
- [x] For the development of security studies see David Mutimer, 'Beyond Strategy: Critical Thinking on the New Security Studies', in Craig A. Snyder, (ed.), *Contemporary Security and Strategy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 34-59.
- [xi] See David Martin Jones and M.L.R. Smith, 'Noise But No Signal: Strategy, Culture and the Poverty of Constructivism', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 24, No. 6 (2001), pp. 485-495.
- [xii] For example, Michael C. Desch, 'Culture Clash: Assessing the Importance of Ideas in Security Studies', *International Security*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (1998), pp. 141-170.
- [xiii] Bernard Brodie, 'Strategy as a Science', *World Politics*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (1949), p. 479, n. 13.
- [xiv] Richard Jackson, 'Why We Need Critical Terrorism Studies', *e-International Relations*, 8 April, 2008, at <<http://www.e-ir.info/?p=432>> accessed 25 April 2010.
- [xv] Dipak K. Gupta, 'Exploring the Roots of Terrorism', in Tore Bjørgo (ed.), *The Roots of Terrorism: Myths Realities and Ways Forward* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 17.
- [xvi] Jackson, 'Why We Need Critical Terrorism Studies'.
- [xvii] Peter R. Neuman and M.L.R. Smith, *The Strategy of Terrorism: How It Works and Why It Fails* (London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 7-8.
- [xviii] Smith, 'William of Ockham', pp. 322-123.
- [xix] See M.L.R. Smith, *Fighting For Ireland? The Military Strategy of the Irish Republican Movement* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 95-98 and 152-166
- [xx] See Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949), p. 16. A category mistake is defined as mistaking facts or 'things of one kind are presented as if they belonged to another', Simon Blackburn, *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 58.
- [xxi] M.L.R. Smith, 'Holding Fire: Strategic Theory and the Missing Military Dimension in the Academic Study of Northern Ireland', in Alan O'Day (ed.), *Terrorism's Laboratory: The Case of Northern Ireland* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1995), pp. 228-33.



Infinity Journal

