

Because strategy never stops...

Infinity Journal



IN THIS EDITION

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A Note From The Editor

Dear IJ subscribers,

Welcome to Infinity Journal's 2nd Issue of Volume No. 2

It is perhaps one of the mysteries of our time that an extremely well respected British General wrote a book questioning the "Utility of Force." Rupert Smith's Utility of Force is perhaps the most famous "new strategy" book of recent years, and almost everyone has strong opinions about it.

While I have the greatest respect for General Smith as an operational commander and military thinker, I find it impossible to agree with most of the ideas the book advances. The destruction/defeat/ and/or deterrence of the armed opponent to policy lies at the heart of all we do, regardless of the war being "amongst the people!"

U.S. Colonel Gian Gentile, recently reduced strategy to "achieving policy aims at the least cost in blood and treasure." Assuming the premise that military force was required, because diplomacy could not gain you the policy aim, Colonel Gentile is not wrong. Blood and treasure are the expenditure that war creates. They are the cost of strategy and that, which defines the value of the policy. Policy may not be a tyrant, but policy sets the problem as well as setting the cost to solve it.

Does General Smith's argument evaporate if the need to gain the policy becomes overwhelming? No one cared too much about the people of Afghanistan after the attacks on September 11, 2001. If the policy really matters, people will pay high and extract high prices in blood and treasure. Nothing is changing. If one political entity really fears for its well-being or existence, then it will care very little about the people who live in another political entity.

Getting the enemy to quit or want to give up is still central to all we do. If the policy does not allow that, then the policy is wrong. If someone wants to suggest that a lot of modern policy aims are simply not worth dying over, or worse; not worth killing over, then a lot of what General Smith said is right. The book might have been better titled, the "Utility of Bad Policy."

As it seems increasingly unlikely that anyone is gaining the policy outcomes they wanted in Iraq, Afghanistan, or even Libya, General Smith may well have been ahead of his time, in accidentally suggesting that by and large the policies the "West" seeks to advance may well not be those that can be effectively advanced via violence, and thus if violently resisted, have little or no hope of success.

War isn't changing. Warfare will change only slowly and in no way that we cannot comprehend. Politics will alter faster than we can often cope with. If anyone doubted that then the recent slew of uprisings in the Arab world should demonstrate it pretty clearly. The people of Libya and Syria may have some quite plain views on the utility of force, in terms of gaining the political conditions they are prepared to die and kill for.

William F. Owen

Editor, Infinity Journal

April 2012

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Strategy: Some Notes for a User's Guide

Colin S. Gray

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FEATURED ARTICLE

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 books include *The Strategy Bridge: Theory for Practice* (2010) and *War, Peace, and International Relations: An Introduction to Strategic History* (2nd Edition, 2012).

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

Williamson Murray[i]

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

What is the challenge?

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

The challenge is to serve policy by military behaviour.

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

The answer in part is strategy.

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

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

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

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

Strategic sense:

The idea of operational art to direct large military forces in campaigns is only sensible. The problem lurks not in the idea, but rather in the consequences in practice of the idea when very senior command fails to exercise a tight enough strategic grip on tactical behaviour, no matter that it is organized and directed operationally. In his book *The Generals* (about Allied

military leadership in the war in Asia, 1941-45), Robert Lyman talks about the need for generals to conduct their operational tasks with "strategic sense".[v] So, the operational level of war ought not to be regarded by its commanding generals as a politics-free or politics-lite zone wherein a professional military can do its thing untroubled by policy considerations. But, if strategy is missing or confused, strategic sense will be hard to demonstrate, because the generals will not know how and why their efforts should contribute to success overall.

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

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

What is strategy?

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

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

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

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

Understanding the problem

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

Where Clausewitz probably errs seriously in the familiar persuasive words quoted above, is in his apparent assumption that a particular war must be one of a distinctive kind that has a fixed character, expressed by him here as "nature". His point is harassed by, if it does not founder on, the historical reality that the belligerents in any war are engaged in a unique dynamic creative act. The war's course and outcome is produced by combined behaviours and its course reflects a single collective net strategic effect. The strategic effort of

each combatant combines as both cause and effect for a grand effect that cannot be predicted in detail. In other words, it is not sensible to assume that a possible war has a nature (really meaning character) that can be predicted with confidence. Not only is there policy logic to wars, in addition there is grammar to warfare that is ever ready to show its indifference to politics and policy, and instead encourage its servants to wage more warfare more effectively.

The currency conversion problem:

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

Strategy-making:

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

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

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

Disharmony among levels of behaviour:

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

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

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

Education in strategy.

It ought to be a good idea to educate the military in strategy, but in practice few soldiers, sailors, and airmen are really thus educable.[xv] Genius as potential can be polished and helped along, but one cannot put in what God and

nature have left out.[xvi] One can train for the mastery of operational skills, but the imagination needed for strategy cannot reliably be taught. Still, one should not blame armed services for trying to do the very difficult. A huge problem is that politicians are likely to be even less gifted in aid of an understanding of military strategy than are soldiers. Clausewitz claims that that ought not to matter, because allegedly policymakers can find the military expertise they need, when they need it. Manifestly, this is not the case.

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

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

Every war/conflict is different:

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

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

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

Decisions to fight:

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

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

Since strategists are required to prescribe contingently for the use of force in a future that at best can only be anticipated, it follows that their duties oblige them to operate on the basis of assumptions rather than facts. When assumptions are tested in the laboratory of history's actual strategic narrative and are verified adequately by events, they cease to be assumptions and instead are established as facts. Although assumptions necessarily play a critical role in defence planning, as a vital category of working and contingent beliefs they are greatly under-examined and under-theorized. However, it would be a serious mistake to believe that assumptions' fragility can be usefully much reduced by a more rigorous planning methodology. The beginning of wisdom should be frank, if unwelcome, recognition of the fact that by definition assumptions transcend proof; if they did not they would cease to be assumptions. It is easy to understand why strategists typically need the reassurance of a truly unjustifiable faith in their assumptions, in order to cope with the moral and other burdens imposed by objectively irreducible ignorance about the future. Assumption generation is improvable, and testing by a "Red Team" may be heuristically useful, but the strategist leaning forward into the future with assumptions about future war is always going to be leaping in the dark. He cannot know, for example, just how much pain will need to be caused for North Vietnam for it to call off its

extant campaign against the South. As much to the point, the American strategist cannot be certain that any level of coercion against North Vietnam that is tolerable to U.S. domestic opinion, would suffice to deliver a fair facsimile of political victory. It is commonplace to refer to the calculations of statesmen and strategists. But, it is a fact that decisions to fight, or to fight harder, cannot be made on the basis of metric calculation. There are and can be no verified numbers that a brilliant methodology could convert into clear answers to such questions as "should we fight?" and "how expensive would victory (defined carefully) be?" Notwithstanding these rather negative thoughts, strategists have to practice strategy, even though their assumptions must leave much to be desired. Ignorance cannot be allowed to promote the paralysis of policy and strategy, when "something has to be done" (e.g. over Iran's nuclear weapons' programme).

Policy is not always rational and reasonable:

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

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

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

Dilemma of ignorance:

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

to do the impossible. The logic is inexorable, but in historical practice often one cannot follow the logic. For example, the overriding problem in 1914-18 was that policy required the military effort to accomplish military results that literally were beyond its ability. Therefore, the deadly tactical problem of the offence-defence relationship in World War I was really a political problem. Policy did not fit military conditions until the Hundred Days Campaign of August-November 1918. German military manpower and other assets needed to be massively attrited and their morale had to be destroyed. The technical and tactical key to battlefield success was the generation of a battlefield dominance enabled by an unmatched quantity and quality of precise artillery fire. The underlying problem, of course, is that when one chooses to fight, or even conduct "armed and episodically violent social work", one cannot know just how hard one will have to fight, or for how long. Future warfare is the kingdom of guesswork. Because of the inherent uncertainty about the course and outcome of future warfare, it is a little unsettling to realize that the key factors in decisions to fight or not to fight frequently are not assessments of the believed military balance and suchlike rational matters. Instead, what matters most is the measure of the most influential policymaker's personal tolerance of risk. And an individual's risk tolerance/aversion varies widely, as investment and insurance theory and data tell us. Official processes of policymaking should discipline unduly adventurous policies, but all too obviously frequently they either do not really exist or they simply fail to

function as a dampener of unwarranted optimism. Some politician policymakers are highly risk-tolerant; indeed, there are people who derive pleasure from the thrill of danger, physical, political, and moral. Yet others will not be risk-tolerant, but instead will be risk-blind, if not indifferent. Peril will not be recognized, or will be noted but hastily dismissed because its possibility is so unwelcome. One should never discount the sovereign potency of human weakness, folly, incompetence, and sheer ignorance, over a context of strategic decision that must strain the abilities even of those who are sober, capable, and well informed. Because strategists strive to cope well enough with a professional realm wherein chance can rule, even their well-laid plans and sound practice can be undone unfairly by the contingency known simply as bad luck.

Future warfare is the kingdom of guesswork.

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

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Offshore Control: A Proposed Strategy

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In November of 2011, President Obama announced his intent "to make our presence and mission in the Asia Pacific a top priority." [i] As the United States executes this "pivot to Asia," it must develop a military strategy for the potential, if highly improbable, conflict with China. [ii] To date, it has not. Based on emerging Chinese military capabilities, its existing nuclear arsenal, declining U.S. defense budgets and the inherent advantage of the offense in the cyber domain, Offshore Control provides a strategy for conflict termination on terms acceptable to the United States and its allies.

While military strategy is sometimes seen only as guidance for success in a conflict, its role as a deterrent and alliance builder prior to the conflict is also critical. Deterrence is particularly important against an enemy with thermonuclear capability. Thus, any U.S. strategy for fighting China must achieve three things. It must assure U.S. allies that they can count on the United States. It must deter Chinese aggression by convincing China that it cannot defeat the U.S. strategy. And if it comes to war, it must win while minimizing the probability of escalation to nuclear exchange. Two other factors complicate the formulation of a strategy. First, looming budget cuts require that it significantly reduce the cost of maintaining U.S. influence and presence in the region. Second, there is no "good" strategy for a conflict between the United States and China. Any conflict will result in massive damage to the global economy. With no favorable outcome possible, the strategist is forced to look for the least bad results.

While military strategy is sometimes seen only as guidance for success in a conflict, its role as a deterrent and alliance builder prior to the conflict is also critical.

Outline for a Strategy

There are a number of useful models to guide strategists. I use Eliot Cohen's. He noted a strategy should include critical assumptions, coherent ends-ways-means, priorities, sequencing and a theory of victory. Each element is essential but the planner must always start with assumptions. [iii] Without listing, examining and challenging those assumptions, it is not possible to either develop or evaluate a strategy. The next step — insuring coherence in ends-ways-means — disciplines the strategist to truly examine whether the available means can be applied in ways that achieve the strategic ends. If ends, ways and means are not aligned, it is not a strategy. Priorities are also required since one has never got sufficient means to achieve all goals at the same time and, of course, sequencing flows from priorities. Last on Cohen's list, a strategy must have a theory of victory — a "how does this end?" It must express how the strategy achieves a war termination on favorable terms. Finally, the strategy must be both credible and feasible in its geo-political context.

Offshore Control interdicts China's seaborne trade while partnering with willing nations to protect those nations' territorial integrity. Rather than seeking a decisive victory against the Chinese, Offshore Control seeks to use a war of economic attrition with very limited damage to Mainland China's infrastructure to bring a stalemate and cessation of conflict. War termination will be through economic exhaustion rather than kinetic destruction.

Assumptions

As stated above, a strategy should start by listing key assumptions so that the reader is aware of how the writer framed the problem. I have listed three key assumptions below.

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- China starts the conflict. While it is possible to envision scenarios where the United States would initiate a major conflict, China starting the conflict presents the most difficult military case for the United States because it cedes the initiative.
- A conflict with China will be a long war. For the last 200 years, wars between major powers have generally run for years rather than months. Since powers with major nuclear arsenals have never fought a major war, it is impossible to say whether the nuclear factor will shorten the war, as was the case in the minor conflict between the USSR and China, or lengthen the war because neither side can seek a decisive resolution with conventional forces. However, both the historical record and the greater difficulty of fighting a long war make it prudent to assume a long war.
- The United States does not understand China's nuclear release decision process.

Ends, ways and means coherence

The combination of decreasing defense budgets and rapid increases in procurement costs of new weapons suggests the United States cannot count on major increases in platforms or systems. This indicates a strategy for conflict with China should start with limited means. Obviously, it should play to current and projected U.S. strengths. In addition to limited means, the United States must accept that China's nuclear arsenal imposes restrictions on the way American forces may attack Chinese assets. The United States must select ways that minimize the probability of escalation to nuclear conflict simply because it does not understand China's nuclear release process and no one can win in a major nuclear exchange. With limited means and restricted ways the ends selected should be modest.

With limited means and restricted ways the ends selected should be modest.

This logic leads to the concept of Offshore Control. Operationally, it uses currently available means and restricted ways to *deny* China the use of the sea inside the first island chain, *defend* the sea and air space of the first island chain, and *dominate* the air and maritime space outside the island chain. There will be no operations conducted to penetrate Chinese airspace. Forbidding penetration is intended to both reduce the possibility of nuclear escalation and to make war termination easier. Instead, this strategy uses economic strangulation to exhaust China to the point it seeks war termination.

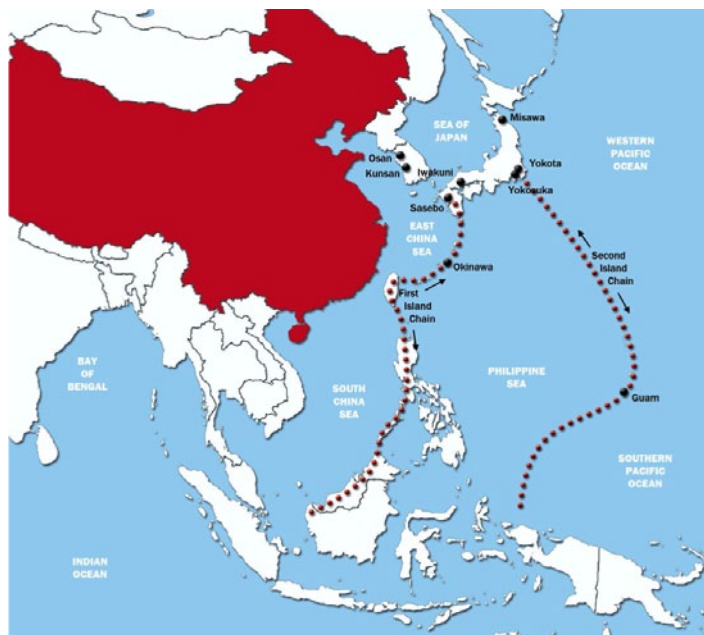


Figure 1 - Island Chains

The "deny" element of the campaign will establish a maritime exclusion zone inside the first island chain. The United States will use its dominant submarine force, mines and a limited number of air assets to enforce the zone by sinking entering ships.

The "defend" element will bring the full range of U.S. military assets to protect those allies that choose to actively assist the United States. By moving the surface Navy and air fight away from the Chinese mainland, it will force China to fight at longer ranges while allowing U.S. and allied forces to fight as part of an integrated air-sea defense over their own territories.

The "dominate" campaign will be fought outside the range of most Chinese assets by interdicting shipping in the choke points along the Indonesian island chain and the west coast of the Americas. The campaign will use a combination of air, naval, ground, and rented commercial platforms to intercept and divert the super tankers and post-Panama max container ships essential to China's economy. The global total of about 900[iv,v,vi] is a manageable number for U.S. forces to control.



Figure 2 - Strategic Chokepoints

This leads us to modest ends. Offshore Control is predicated on the idea that the presence of nuclear weapons makes

seeking the collapse of the Chinese Communist Party or its surrender too dangerous to contemplate. The United States does not understand the Communist Party decision process for the employment of nuclear weapons, but it does know the Party is adamant that it must remain in control of China. Thus, the U.S. war termination goal is the cessation of hostilities and return to pre-war boundaries.

Priorities and sequencing

The first priority in execution will be reinforcing the defenses of those nations who choose to ally themselves with the United States. Next, U.S. forces will establish the distant blockade. Then, U.S. forces will establish the maritime exclusion zone inside the first island chain. Finally, the United States will dominate the area outside the first island chain to tighten the blockade against China and insure the continued flow of trade to our allies.

Sequencing will follow priorities. However it should be noted that due to the different forces required for each of the required steps, further study may find that multiple steps can be initiated simultaneously. Of particular importance is the peacetime preparation necessary for the strategy to succeed. Thus diplomatic and military preparation will begin immediately. Because the strategy is transparent, the United States can explain it to allies and openly exercise all elements of the plan.

Theory of Victory

Offshore Control seeks to allow the Chinese Communist Party to end the conflict in the same way China ended its conflicts with India, the UN (in Korea), the Soviet Union and the Vietnamese. It allows China to declare it "taught the enemy a lesson" and thus end the conflict. By forbidding strikes that destroy Chinese facilities on the mainland, it both reduces the probability of escalation and makes it easier for the Chinese to claim they taught "the enemy" a lesson, declare victory, and terminate the conflict. Offshore Control does not seek decisive victory. This recognizes that the concept of decisive victory against a nation with a major nuclear arsenal is obsolete.

Advantages of Offshore Control

A strategy cannot be evaluated in isolation, but must be compared against the outcome of another competing strategy.

A strategy cannot be evaluated in isolation, but must be compared against the outcome of another competing strategy. Unfortunately, to date the Department of Defense has merely published the operational concept of Air-Sea Battle, but not a strategy. While many media reports have suggested that Air-Sea Battle is that strategy, it is in fact the anti-thesis of strategy. It is totally focused on the tactical

employment of weapons systems with no explanation of how it leads to favorable conflict resolution. The Pentagon's new Joint Operational Access Concept states "Air-Sea Battle is a limited operational concept." [vii] In considering the possible advantages of Offshore Control, this author can only compare it to a strategy that employs Air-Sea Battle as its operational "way" of achieving the ends. Obviously, comparing an operational concept to a strategy is unsatisfactory, but until the Pentagon publishes a strategy, it is the only option available to this author. The primary advantages of an offshore control strategy are:

Increased deterrence and assurance due to feasibility and transparency

The idea that an air-sea strike campaign can defeat a continental size power in a short war is dubious at best and certainly ahistorical. In addition to lacking feasibility, Air-Sea Battle lacks transparency. It can neither be publically discussed, nor openly exercised, because many of the technologies are highly classified. This creates a dilemma, since both deterrence and assurance are rooted in a confidence that the stated strategy can be executed. It will be difficult for other nations to have confidence in an approach they are not allowed to understand. In contrast, Offshore Control will be essentially unclassified. Through joint and combined exercises both enemies and potential allies will be able to see that the United States has sufficient trained forces to execute its strategy in time of war.

Reduced reliance on allies

Offshore Control does not require bases in allied nations except Australia. Even these bases will only be needed to support the blockade the routes north and south of Australia and the Straits of Malacca, Sunda, and Lombok. Partner states will only be asked to allow U.S. forces to protect that nation's sea and air space from Chinese attack. Combined exercises will focus on defense of allied territories. Since the defense will rely heavily on land-based air defense and short-range sea defense to include mine-and-counter-mine-capability, the U.S. can encourage potential partners to invest in these capabilities and exercise with them regularly in peacetime. Maritime pre-positioning of defensive assets in theater can add to both a rapid reinforcement capability and a reason to conduct exercises with friendly nations.

Greater opportunity to cooperate with allies

In keeping with the concept that the strategy must be feasible in peacetime, the United States will not request any nations to allow the use of their bases to attack China. The strategy will only ask nations to allow the presence of U.S. defensive systems to defend that nation's air, sea and land space. It will encourage peacetime training exercises to develop interoperability, but will not require commitments to join the U.S. side in the event of a conflict. Given potential allies trade relations with China and their clear understanding that Chinese missiles can range their nations, it is highly unlikely any allies will participate in training exercises designed to strike the Chinese mainland.

No discussion of direct attack on China

The publication of Air-Sea Battle's concept of direct attack on the Chinese mainland has not been helpful to diplomatic relations with China. Its inherent requirement for secrecy heightens the uncertainty over U.S. plans for the region. In contrast, Offshore Control will allow both diplomatic and military personnel to explain U.S. strategy and its operational approach to the nations and corporations which count on freedom of the seas. While the prospect of a long blockade is clearly a tough sell, the fact remains that any aggressive attack into China will most likely lead to a long war which will include such a blockade. Offshore Control reduces the uncertainty by emphasizing that the infrastructure damage of the campaign will be minimized, thus making restoration of trade easier.

Lower probability of nuclear escalation

Air-Sea Battle is inherently escalatory. It seeks to convince China that the United States can overcome China's anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) concept, and thus place China at risk. Unfortunately, this operational approach will depend very heavily on U.S. space and cyber capabilities. Given the current dominance of the offence in both cyber and space, this creates the unintended consequence of raising the value of a first strike. The only ways to reduce the vulnerability of the strategy to a first strike in cyber and space is either to create redundant systems that can immediately restore lost systems, or not rely on those systems. Redundant systems are very expensive and not currently funded. Further, since much of the U.S. command network depends on commercial cyber and space assets, it may not even be possible to restore them.

Air-Sea Battle requires early and repetitive attacks on the Chinese mainland as well as in cyber and space.

Air-Sea Battle requires early and repetitive attacks on the Chinese mainland as well as in cyber and space. The Chinese could well mistake attacks on conventional A2/AD systems for attempts to blind China and destroy its ability to command and control its nuclear forces. This is a very dangerous form of escalation. Of particular concern, space and particularly cyber escalation take place in seconds and thus will drive decision makers to rapid decisions based on preliminary reporting.

Offshore Control does *not* rely on extensive use of space or cyber systems. With limited investments in alternate systems such as HF radio and a training program, Offshore Control can be executed even if China conducts a highly successful first strike in space or cyber. By devaluing the first strike, such an approach can increase the deterrence value through reducing the incentive to start a war.

While the distant blockade required by Offshore Control is escalatory, its execution and impact take over a period of weeks and in no way threatens Chinese strategic early

warning or command and control systems. The combination of transparency and limited infrastructure damage reduces the probability of escalation.

Lower peacetime costs increase deterrent effects

To be credible, a strategy must be economically sustainable within the projected decrease of U.S. defense budgets. Due to lack of transparency, it is impossible to say for certain, but seemingly Air-Sea Battle concepts require new major procurement programs. In contrast, Offshore Control can be executed based on current capabilities and does not require future investments in large numbers of expensive penetrating platforms.

Reverses the cost imposition effect

The cost of systems required to penetrate integrated air defenses is significantly higher than the cost of those defenses. In addition, sea control is much more costly than sea denial. By shifting the onus of penetrating integrated air defenses and achieving sea control to the Chinese, Offshore Control neutralizes much of China's investment in A2/AD and reverses the current cost imposition. If China fails to invest, it concedes the strategic advantage to the United States.

Higher probability of allowing China to declare victory and end the conflict

A consistent aspect of modern warfare has been the impact of passion once war has started. Clausewitz understood that the primary trinity of passion, chance and reason frames any conflict, with passion often becoming the driving force once the war starts. It is essential for today's strategists not to lose track of that point. If the United States conducts numerous strikes into Mainland China, it will be much more difficult for Chinese leadership to tell their people they taught the U.S. a lesson.

Plays to U.S. strengths

Offshore Control is built on U.S. superiority in submarines and, with proper investment, sea mines to achieve sea denial inside the first island chain. It then adds highly effective U.S. air, ground, and sea-based air/missile defense systems to the battle for air superiority over those nations that choose to fight with the United States. Finally, it allows U.S. ground forces to contribute to the fight by intercepting and controlling major commercial ships. The U.S. Navy has insufficient ships to board 900 commercial ships. However, it can put Marine or Army boarding parties aboard each to insure it does not trade with China.

Reverses the tactical geographic advantage

Rather than engaging Chinese weapons over their home territory, Offshore Control forces the Chinese to send their limited number of long-range assets into U.S. and allied integrated air, sea and land defenses. The only exception are

the U.S. submarines which can use their tactical advantages to operate inside the first island chain. If Chinese anti-submarine warfare improves significantly, these assets can move back to the entrances to the South and East China Seas.

Allows for the rebuilding of the global trade system during the conflict

Sustainability is essential in a long war. The U.S. strategic geographic advantage and the maritime nature of global trade means the rest of the world's economy can rebuild around the U.S. blockade perimeter. In contrast, China has little prospect of rebuilding via a new Silk Road. Further if China attempts to blockade allied or neutral nations, the United States has a major geographic advantage in conducting convoy operations to sustain those nations.

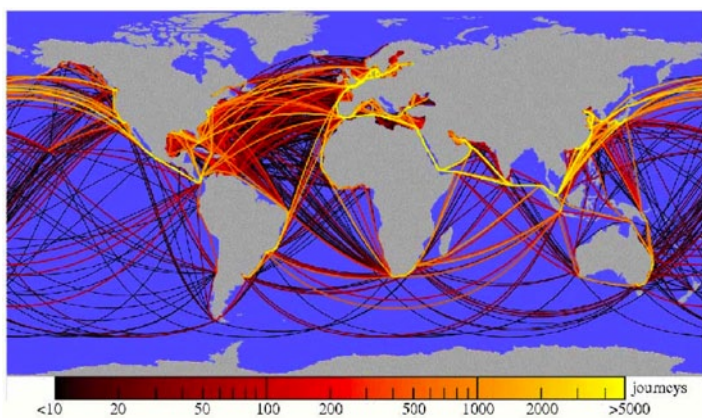


Figure 3 - Global Maritime Trade Routes

Previous conflicts between nuclear powers

Usually strategists have a depth of previous conflicts that can illuminate how antagonists may respond in a conflict. Fortunately, there have only been two conflicts between nuclear armed states, i.e. the 1969 Sino-Soviet Border Conflict and the 1999 Pakistan-India Kargil Conflict. In each case, the leadership on both sides responded to the original crisis cautiously. Military moves were announced and essentially transparent.

In addition to these two active conflicts, we have decades of history showing how the United States, USSR, China, Pakistan and India have dealt with crises between/amongst themselves. The Cuban Missile Crisis highlights the pattern of cautious and relatively transparent actions taken when nuclear-armed powers found themselves in a growing crisis. Leaders on both sides avoided sudden escalatory moves or offensive actions that could be misinterpreted as a major attack. In all cases, there was clearly no great benefit to a first strike. Unfortunately, Air-Sea Battle's dependence on cyber and space will provide a major payoff for the nation that strikes first in these domains. In contrast, Offshore Control's resilience dramatically reduces the value of a first strike and allows decision makers to be deliberate and transparent.

Critical continuing research

Two critical areas need much deeper research to understand their impact on a conflict between the U.S. and China. First, the fiscal situation that will result from such a conflict must be examined and second, the longer term economic impact must be understood. Both areas lie well outside the expertise of this author.

Summary

One of the central criteria of any strategy for a potential conflict with China is the reality of China's nuclear arsenal. It cannot be wished away. Thus, the strategist must examine the degree to which the strategy fuels escalation in a pre-war crisis or in a war. Further, the strategy must be affordable in peacetime and executable in wartime, even if China strikes first. It should shape the operational/tactical fight to provide geographic and temporal advantages to U.S. forces. And finally, it must provide a possible theory of victory.

By reducing reliance on space and cyber and maintaining transparency in peace, crisis and war, Offshore Control reduces escalatory pressure and better aligns U.S. strategic requirements with available resources. Further, Offshore Control reduces peacetime demands on allies while offering reassurance by demonstrating its feasibility. It also makes use of the strategic geography to reverse cost impositions and place U.S. and allied forces in favorable tactical positions. Finally, it provides a way for the conflict to end without forcing either side to seek a decisive victory.

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The Myth of the Post-Power Projection Era

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"We may in fact be entering what could be called the post-power projection era in which traditional modes of power projection may no longer be as viable as they've been in the recent past. It's going to be harder for us to operate once we're there, especially in traditional modes of operation."

A leading American strategist, James Thomas of the well-respected Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments (CSBA), has suggested that one of the foundations of U.S. primacy, its incomparable reach and power projection capability, is crumbling. He has gone on to suggest the emergence of a "Post-Power Projection era." [i] Mr. Thomas was not suggesting that American power projection capabilities, in their broadest meaning, were less important. Power projection can include long-range missiles, bombers, and strikes from aircraft carriers. The interpretation that I, and others, took away from his remarks was that the introduction of ground maneuver forces by amphibious means were going to be harder if not impossible. This short essay explores the potential strategic implications of such an emerging development.

Thomas is not alone nor the first to point out that several regional powers are acquiring capabilities that appear to be designed to target U.S. naval and aerospace assets and their supporting bases with greater precision and lethality. This difficulty has been echoed by earlier comments made by Dr. Andrew Krepinevich, also from CSBA. He noted that the Defense Department was overly invested in "wasting assets" based on outdated operating concepts including those for power projection and amphibious landings. [ii] Much of this assessment is based on the growing anti-access threat in general and the diffusion of precision missiles in particular.

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Such commentary, in the midst of the Pentagon's efforts to make budget priorities in an era of declining resources, has led to recommendations that would reduce if not eliminate the amphibious component of the U.S. power projection arsenal. One such comprehensive report, conducted by the Center for a New American Security (CNAS), suggested that one of the targeted areas for defense reductions could be amphibious warfare since the United States had not conducted an opposed landing for 60 years. [iii]

These reports all contribute to the conception that future power projection operations will be hotly contested. There is little doubt that technological proliferation is a reality and that strategists should be acutely aware of evolving trends. The same strategists need to be alert as well to the introduction and dissemination of disruptive technologies and countering operational concepts. Military history is littered with the detritus of empires slow to recognize powerful forces of change.

At the same time, however, warfare is always evolving in character, and new technological shifts often produce offsetting changes in concepts, doctrine and maneuver.

The rifled musket and smokeless powder, in the U.S. civil war or in South Africa, did not make infantry attacks impossible, just different or harder. The introduction of the machine gun and barbed wire further complicated ground combat, but did not make it obsolete despite the horrific consequences in Flanders' fields. Radar was a fascinating new technology and arguably invaluable in winning World War II, but it did not make the airplane a wasting asset. Likewise, sonar made the stealthy depths of the sea less opaque, but did not force the submarine to go the way of the chariot or trireme. The dialectic we know as war is a violent exercise of continuous and interactive action/counter-action. So too will the dynamic between power projection and anti-access capabilities.

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We need to rethink the problem of modern amphibious warfare and reassess the benefits that accrue to amphibiously agile states. History, as Liddell Hart once intoned, suggests that this strategic capability has enormous strategic utility if not outright necessity. DoD's leadership has given clear indications that the Nation faces challenges in ensuring that U.S. security interests can be met far from its shores. The Pentagon realizes that potential adversaries can easily acquire new systems or enhance legacy systems and platforms to radically enhance their combat power.

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As noted in the Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) of 2010, these capabilities will increasingly be used to deny us access to regions where our interests are threatened. The QDR stressed the importance of overcoming the anti-access challenges as a major mission area with the clear objective of being able to "Deter and defeat aggression in anti-access environments." [iv] Thus, the priority of the mission is clear but the solutions have not yet taken form.

Defense Planning Crisis?

Faced with potentially crippling budget reductions and number of analysts have proposed strategy-driven choices to reshape America's military for what many, without any irony, call an Age of Austerity. [v] America allegedly faces a "perfect storm" in defense planning, saddled with an extended range of threats but a narrowing defense budget. [vi] After a decade at war, there is a serious need to reset priorities and narrow the yawning gap between policy ends and security means. Numerous reports are calling for "hard choices" given the need to reduce America's deficit spending levels, which will no doubt impact the Pentagon's budget.

Should amphibious capabilities be reduced or increased? This is a perfectly logical question. U.S. taxpayers should not be expected to support missions and expensive capabilities that do not have relevance to projected U.S. security demands. Even the Marines do not want to retain a mission purely for nostalgic reasons or because they simply have sharper uniforms. But the logic of strategic capabilities needs to get past the surface level, so as to explore the true historical record and assess the strategic implications if truly hard choices must be made. Hard choices will have to consider hard facts.

If one simply dismisses capabilities with strategic or operational value based on their usage over the past several decades, one could just as easily discard Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles and nuclear-armed ballistic missile submarines, as neither of them has been launched for the past 70 years either. The United States is prepared to invest more than \$100 billion to recapitalize its nuclear submarine fleet in the next decade, and another \$85 billion to modernize its nuclear infrastructure. Eliminating that requirement would make a large dent in the Pentagon's projected budget crunch. But

those capabilities are being retained and modernized not because they were employed recently because they are presumed to have a strategic effect on the behavior of states and contribute to deterrence. This same argument can be made plausibly to amphibious and other conventional power projection capabilities. Moreover, in addition to deterring bad behavior from potential aggressors, amphibious power projection capabilities have strategically positive effects such as reassuring allies and underwriting stability and crisis response operations, including humanitarian and disaster relief.

The United States is prepared to invest more than \$100 billion to recapitalize its nuclear submarine fleet and another \$85 billion to modernize its nuclear infrastructure

Of course, one cannot gainsay the fact that the CNAS report is correct if it meant that the United States has not had to conduct a large, fiercely-opposed landing across a beach head in recent history. But the United States has conducted over 108 operations with amphibious assets employed over the last 20 years (since 1991) according to statistics maintained by the Marines. In fact, the usage of amphibious capabilities has doubled since the end of the Cold War. [vii]

Some operations, like the deception operation poised by embarked Marines offshore of Kuwait in 1991, were valuable in pinning down numerous Iraqi divisions. Other operations, like the amphibiously-based Task Force 58 led by then Brigadier General James Mattis, did launch combat forces from the sea deep inland into Afghanistan as part of Operation Enduring Freedom in late 2002. [viii] Those same capabilities were used to respond to tsunamis in the Indian Ocean, to hurricane Katrina in the United States, to Haiti's humanitarian disaster, and to Japan's more recent tragic earthquake and subsequent relief operations. [ix] Arguably the United States could have found other means to transport its civilian and military assistance to these crises. Yet while the human toll of all those disasters was high, but they would arguably have been higher without the strategic reach and mobility afforded by amphibious ready groups and the skills of the Sailors and Marines that man them.

For these reasons, the U.S. defense policy community is acutely aware of how valuable the amphibious and other expeditionary components of the U.S. Navy fleet are. They appear to recognize myriad strategy and operational advantages gained by a state's possession of versatile amphibious forces.

Strategic Advantages

A robust forcible entry capability affords any nation numerous strategic advantages. These include:

Produces credible deterrent. The capability of conducting powerful joint entry operations at a time and place of our choosing produces a credible deterrent against would be

aggressors. This deterrent is more lasting than just the impact of long-range fires because it threatens regime survival or the loss of something the adversary holds dear. As U.S. naval leaders have recently noted:

...the historical evidence of strategic advantage that accrues to maritime powers with amphibious capabilities is significant across the full range of military operations. Moreover, the strategic/political costs of allowing adversaries to prevent access or to be perceived as having created 'no go' areas for U.S. forces are high and unacceptable.[x]

Power projection is certainly getting harder. However, in a world with many destabilizing areas and with increasingly urbanized littoral regions, we have not seen the end of the need to deter aggressors, preserve stability or respond rapidly to crises.

Negates adversary anti-access strategy. To the degree that a robust forcible entry capability can avoid defensive systems or slice through or over littoral regions, it contributes to negating an adversary's anti-access strategy. Since anti-access strategies and capabilities appear to be on the rise, this advantage is increasing in value in today's strategic calculus. If we ignore the need for overcoming anti-access strategies and techniques or assume away access challenges, future operations could become "the Omaha beaches of the 21st century" in the words of Dr. Andrew Krepinevich.

Generates a cost imposing strategy. At the strategic level, a forcible entry capability can be part of a cost imposing strategy. Our investment in power projection forces and littoral dominance requires an adversary to invest in a host of surveillance and defensive systems. Conversely, if we did not pose the potential for decisive forcible entry operations, future aggressors could invest more intensely in a narrower sphere perhaps focusing on theater missile or anti-air defenses exclusively and successfully. For example, if an adversary was not concerned about preserving his territorial integrity or preventing the introduction of U.S. ground forces, he could invest heavily in surface-to-air systems to counter our air superiority and impose heavy costs on U.S. air assets.

Thus, the presentation of our forcible entry capability serves to extend an adversary's investment portfolio, and dilutes his overall effectiveness relative to U.S. full spectrum capabilities.

ultimately, U.S. interests should not be held hostage to hope or the whims of third party states that may not share our interests

Assures access. In the simplest terms, a forcible entry capability assures access. We can hope that foreign governments will provide over-flight rights or port and airfield access. We might be able to negotiate and purchase intermediate or theater basing, and they may even be robust or mature enough to support major U.S. operations. But ultimately, U.S. interests should not be held hostage to hope or the whims of third party states that may not share our interests. At the end of the day, the United States should possess the capability to

project decisive combat forces into an area where its national interests are at stake. As we have seen in recent operations in Afghanistan and against Iraq, there are political dynamics at work that will constrain or completely eliminate access to countries and facilities when the United States is conducting military interventions.

Likewise, the former U.S. Joint Force Command produced a highly-regarded description of the future titled the *Joint Operating Environment*. That forecast concluded that, "the United States may not have uncontested access to bases in the immediate area from which it can project military power.... The battle for access may prove not only the most important, but the most difficult." [xi]

Poses investment dynamics and dilemmas. Forcible entry operations also generate a range of dynamics for our adversaries due to their combination of operational maneuver and fire. These combinations pose a series of dilemmas for the opposing commander and his forces. They can respond to our deep maneuver by concentrating and moving against us, which exposes them to our fire. If they remain fixed in place, they can be isolated and eliminated in detail. In any event, whatever the enemy does, he faces a continuing series of dilemmas for which he has limited or no respective countering options. This dilemma matches that described by Liddell Hart and American strategist John Boyd for diminished system effectiveness and collapse.

Sustains influence and reassures partners. Finally, as noted in the last QDR, "in the absence of dominant U.S. power projection capabilities, the integrity of U.S. alliances and security partnerships could be called into question, reducing U.S. security and influence and increasing the possibility of conflict." [xii]

These strategic benefits have accrued to the West in the past century and could make similar contributions in the current tense if retained and modernized for future contingencies.

Counter Arguments

Some might contend that the United States need not risk its ground forces in contested zones, and that we should rely on extraordinary Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) and precision strike capability. This would reduce America's power projection options to "Stand Off Warfare." Such powerful strikes, it is alleged offset the need to make the investment in littoral maneuver, and preclude the need to place Marines or soldiers at risk in the "contested zones" of the world's increasingly urbanized littorals.

Some might contend that the United States need not risk its ground forces in contested zones

Admittedly, precision strike can indeed destroy the adversary's networks and fielded forces with multiple kinds of kinetic and non-kinetic strike assets. However, these have yet to be proven as decisive in the absence of a combined arms approach. Kosovo, Afghanistan and Libya all bear witness to

the tremendous impact of air-delivered attacks, but they also demonstrate the need for complementary capabilities. Power projection cannot be just precision strike unless the mission is entirely punitive. We must create dilemmas strategically and operationally to achieve decisive results.

A need for innovative thinking

Classical amphibious assaults, with long planning cycles, extended force buildups and transoceanic deployments with massive 16" guns providing fire support to create beachheads full of troops and logistics are "old think." The Marine Corps has recognized that for quite some time. Doctrinally, they have never sought to limit the employment of amphibious forces to scenarios that involve only assaults directly against the strongest part of prepared defenses. For the past generation Marine planners have sought to apply the tenets of maneuver warfare by seeking gaps in the enemy's total system, by creating and exploiting vulnerabilities.

Furthermore, efforts at the Marine Corps Combat Development Command for the past decade have focused on achieving the capability to *avoid* enemy strengths, striking directly against critical vulnerabilities and enemy centers of gravity. Operating concepts like *Ship-to-Objective Maneuver*, and capabilities embodied in systems like the MV-22 Osprey were identified nearly two decades ago in anticipation of the emerging "anti-access era". These capabilities allow potent expeditionary forces to strike directly at operational objectives deep inland instead of merely conducting costly, manpower intensive, attrition-based operations.

there has been recognition for some time for a need to stimulate an intellectual renaissance in amphibious warfare

While U.S. amphibious expertise has been diverted to conducting protracted campaigns in the Middle East, far from shore, there has been recognition for some time for a need to stimulate an intellectual renaissance in amphibious warfare. With the drawing down of forces from Iraq and Afghanistan, the Marines seek to return to their naval roots and refurbish their core competencies. Naval journals reflect a significant increase in looking forward to preserve the capacity to conduct amphibious operations.[xiii]

Some Marines have been exploring innovative concepts, including the use of robotics in both waterborne and aviation maneuver resources.[xiv] It is this kind of innovative thinking that helped the Marines and the United States debunk conventional wisdom after the British amphibious debacle on the beaches of Gallipoli in World War One. The same innovative spirit is alive and well in today's Marine Corps, despite its recent focus on counterinsurgency campaigns far from the littorals. Since as Mr. Thomas accurately noted, the

problem is even greater now than when the Marines were developing their future tactics, they will have to continue to extend their ideas and experimentation even further.

Moreover, the Marines and Army will have to operate within and be supported by a Joint operational framework. Much intellectual work is now going into this challenge. The Navy and Air Force effort to generate greater synergies for combating anti-access threats via the widely-touted Air-Sea Battle concept is part of that framework.[xv] The larger framework has been shaped by the recent promulgation of the Joint Operational Access Concept (JOAC), signed by General Dempsey.[xvi] The JOAC reinforces many points made in this brief essay. Both concepts show promise but they are still paper documents, and require serious implementation and continuous investment to achieve the substantial results needed.

Conclusion

amphibious capabilities are well worth the investment required even in this so-called age of austerity

Thus, this assessment concludes that amphibious capabilities are well worth the investment required even in this so-called age of austerity. No doubt that this is why China, Russia and Australia are expanding their amphibious fleets. The Center for Strategic and International Studies has come to the same conclusion in a recent report.[xvii] Calls to reduce amphibious capabilities are conceding "no go" areas to aggressors, and failing to grasp the strategic effect on future crises.

The United States has not lost its need to rapidly insert combat forces inland and violently strike against adversaries far from its own shores. In fact, critical American interests argue for greater access challenges, not less, given large reductions in overseas bases and increased political considerations that may restrict access. Some of that access can be garnered with sustained engagement with allies. But sometimes access may have to be obtained at risk in contested space.

The many benefits of conducting operations from the sea, viewed as part of a Joint operation, thus remains both a viable and very necessary capability at the strategic and operational levels of war. This capability provides the United States with a distinctly asymmetric capability and disruptive option of its own.

Without these capabilities, a global power cannot extend and exert its influence, and nor can its military leadership assure its policy masters that it can effectively gain access to and respond promptly at some potential flashpoint where its security interests are at risk. The day that an American President finds himself out of these options, it will herald the dawn of a chaotic "Post-American" world.[xviii]

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The Amorites Iniquity – A Comparative Analysis of Israeli and Hamas Strategies in Gaza

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Introduction

The aim of this essay is to look at the opposing strategies of Israel and Hamas. To this end, we will attempt to define "rational" and "irrational" strategies and we will use these definitions to evaluate the parties' strategies.

A comparison of the strategies explains why a stable situation of ongoing limited confrontation in Gaza is occurring. The analysis further indicates that Hamas' strategy does not constitute an existential threat to Israel, since it contains a built-in limitation, in that excessive "success" will cause it to fail (the Amorite Iniquity Effect).

The Role of a Grand Strategy

A grand strategy is a comprehensive plan for addressing a specific problem or situation. In the political-security context, grand strategy defines the basic principles of the political-security planning from which the military and political strategies that serve it can be inferred. There is a difficulty in demarcating between a grand strategy and the underlying strategic levels, down to the level of military strategy. Grand strategy may be detailed or general. In some issues it virtually overlaps with military strategy, while in others they are almost unrelated. This essay does not differentiate between the various dimensions of strategy, and for the sake of simplicity the generic term "strategy" is used. Consequently, in this essay, "strategy" denotes the manner in which means and

ways are connected to ends in the political (foreign and domestic policy) and security (military and the state's tools of power) fields.

Why Is the Other Party's Strategy Being Analyzed?

The determination of a strategy, consisting of the analysis of alternative strategies, is an effective way of formulating and implementing a strategy designed to achieve specific ends. The work process involved in the formulation of the strategy analyzes the different options for achieving various ends in order to arrive at the preferred strategy. In other words, the principal task is that of creating alternatives, evaluating them and selecting the preferred one.

The work process involved in the formulation of the strategy analyzes the different options for achieving various ends in order to arrive at the preferred strategy.

On the other hand, when analyzing the other party's strategy, both the process and its purpose are different. The purpose of identifying the other party's strategy is not so much to *evaluate* the strategy (the degree of its effectiveness) but more an attempt to *understand* the other party's way of thinking and *modus operandi*, so that it will be possible to effectively act against it (or in collaboration with it). We are sometimes required to look at the strategy of both parties in order to choose the one that seems to have the better strategy (for instance, when it is required to select a manufacturer of a product for some purpose).

However, in the political-security context we choose our side based on other considerations (culture, history, geography) rather than on the quality of the strategy employed by it. This is especially true when we look at our alternative *modi operandi* against a specified opponent, when we attempt to understand its strategy and attach virtually no importance to our estimation of it.

Below, we will attempt to map out two types of strategy – the rational and the irrational. These two methods of thinking are

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so different that there is virtually no point in trying to determine which is preferable. The fact that there is difficulty in evaluating strategies with a different basis need not concern us when we wish to look at the opponent's strategy, since we do not have to answer the question of which strategy is preferable. All we have to understand is the other actor's strategy and adjust our own strategy accordingly, not in order to reach some level of perfection in our strategy but rather so our strategy will be "good enough".

Rational and Irrational Strategies

It is customary in the western world to employ rational thinking, on the basis of which it is possible to explain events logically. The relationship between cause and effect forms the basis for the western attempt to describe and understand reality. Whether the viewpoint is empirical (referring to perceptible phenomena) or is based on logical inferences, the guiding principle in rational thinking is the consistent link between cause and effect. According to the rational approach, mysticism or belief cannot be relied upon in order to explain phenomena and events.

Rational *modi operandi* should link the desired outcome with the actions to be taken to achieve it. If there is a logical connection between the planned actions and the outcome that they attempt to achieve, the plan can be regarded as rational.

Rational Plans Will Form the Basis for Rational Strategies.

The way to evaluate a rational strategy is not only on the basis of the prospects for its realization (since uncertainty exists) but also in comparison with the available alternatives at the time of its selection.

It may well be that the strategy of the Zionist movement in the years preceding the establishment of the State of Israel did not have good prospects for success. Nonetheless, it was far more successful than could have been expected.

On the other hand, there are plans that are totally irrational. Such plans may form the cornerstones for irrational strategies.

irrational strategies are strategies in which there is no *logical* connection between the planned actions and the attaining of the final end

As stated, irrational strategies are not rational strategies with poor prospects for success, but rather, are strategies in which there is no *logical* connection between the planned actions and the attaining of the final end.

I will subsequently argue that Hamas' strategy in Gaza is irrational. However, in order to avoid confining the discussion of irrational strategies to the Muslim world, we should recall that the Jewish People have not always adopted rational strategies. For centuries the strategy of the Jewish People

to return to their homeland was based on the prayer, "Next year in Jerusalem". This strategy was so strong (based on the coming of the Messiah) that even today there are Jews living in Israel who are opposed to the Zionist strategy (that established the State of Israel) and claim that the Jews must continue to wait for "the Messiah, the son of David" who will redeem the land and bring them to Jerusalem (where they are already living). Based on this strategy no logical connection can be discerned between the action and the desired outcome. Nonetheless, some will argue that this is an effective strategy, and in proof of this, they will argue that the author of this essay lives in a Jerusalem that has been rebuilt after two thousand years of prayer.

Hamas' Strategy

Hamas has set itself the principal objective of terminating the existence of the State of Israel as the national home of the Jewish People. Hamas does not recognize the Jewish State, and in its place wishes to establish a Palestinian entity (I use the term "entity" since I do not wish to define its characteristics) throughout Mandatory Israel. This "end" is highly ambitious when taking into account the balance of power between Israel and Hamas (even if the other terrorist organizations in Gaza are included in its ranks).

The strategy chosen by Hamas in order to attain its pretentious principal objective is that of "resistance" ("MUKAWAMA"). The major part of the strategy is the maintenance of activities (generally with terrorist characteristics) against the State of Israel. In order to realize this strategy, Hamas is investing efforts to establish operational capabilities that will allow it to operate from the Gaza Strip against Israeli assets (of both a military and a civilian nature).

Without going into depth, we argue that there is a material difference between the "resistance" of Hamas and the terrorist strategies of the PLO up to the Oslo Accords. The policy aim or end state of PLO terrorism was not to subdue Israel by terror. The PLO's strategy employed terrorism in order to bring the Palestinian issue to the world agenda.

This essay suggests that a strategy of resistance is irrational since it is impossible to demonstrate the mechanism through which the resistance will lead to the attaining of Hamas' principal objective. This statement it is not intended to pass judgment on either the validity of the strategy or the degree of its suitability for Hamas. Since Hamas (like other Islamic entities in the region) has adopted this strategy, it should be assumed that it coincides with its situation and beliefs. The question that should concern Israeli decision-makers is not how effective this strategy appears in Israeli eyes but rather what are the consequences of this strategy and what strategy should Israel adopt in order to counter it.

There are two irrational elements in the strategy of resistance:

The first assumes that Israel is incapable of countering the challenges of the resistance over time. This assumption is derived from the belief that the Zionist entity is weak and pampered. This belief is based on a virtually racist approach that regards the Jew as being weak, and the Western World (to which Israeli society belongs) as lacking ideology and of

being morally corrupt. At the same time, an examination of Jewish history in general and of Zionism in the last century in particular, indicates precisely the opposite. The Jews have always withstood extremely harsh conditions over time and have managed to survive!

The second element views the very act of resistance as a value and an expression of the strength of the resistor. The believer views the fact that he is defying the opposing forces, as a victory, regardless of the immediate gain that the resistance achieves.

A strategy of resistance is not required to describe the rational course of events on the way to attaining its principal objective. Hence, this strategy too is not examined periodically in terms of the situation it has reached on the way to attaining the ends. Rather, it primarily examines itself in terms of its capability of surviving, namely, resisting. It is interesting to note that from time to time a *rational* evaluation is made of a strategy of resistance by Palestinian elements, who generally reach the conclusion that this strategy is undermining the attainment of the ends of the Palestinian people. This conflict between the various evaluations of the effectiveness of the strategy of resistance results from the use of rational tools to evaluate an irrational strategy, and not only from the evaluator's worldview.

The strategy of resistance belongs to the family of, what can be called, "asymmetric strategies". An asymmetric strategy is characterized by its attempt to confront the opponent with *weapons* that are different from those used by him. The asymmetry may be at the most basic tactical level – such as an anti-aircraft setup constructed in response to superior air power. The response may be at a higher level, such as irregular warfare against regular military forces, or it can occur at the highest level, such as confrontation by an entity having no territory or statehood against a state. All asymmetric strategies attempt to confront the opponent not through direct confrontation against its force, with similar force, but by relocation of the conflict to a different arena, attempting to eliminate some of the other party's advantages.

When two forces confront one another with similar operational weapons, it is reasonable to assume that the stronger or larger party, or at least the better-trained party, will win. If one of the parties estimates that it does not stand a chance in a symmetric confrontation since it is inferior in terms of the above parameters, it is likely to attempt to change the character of the confrontation. A party that succeeds in relocating the confrontation to an arena, in which its tactical situation improves, will increase its chances of victory.

Asymmetric wars have taken place throughout history and are not especially characteristic of recent years. However, during recent decades (and particularly since the end of World War II) an asymmetric strategy of resistance has developed. This strategy has a number of unique characteristics:

1. **The resistor employs tools of terror.** The operational tools of terror have changed over the years. At first, terrorism was based on attacks using small arms, and subsequently employed explosive charges and suicide bombers. Rocket weaponry has gained ground in recent years but was used for terrorist purposes as early as in World War II. The major motif served by all these operational tools is

the creation of fear and terror among civilians. The tools of terror are militarily ineffective and do not significantly jeopardize military activities.

The tools of terror are militarily ineffective and do not significantly jeopardize military activities.

2. **The resistor abandons defense of its civilians and leaves the role of their protection to the other party.** The resistance does not attempt to prevent its opponents from gaining control of its territory and civilians. The major shield for the population is the restraints that the stronger party imposes upon itself. These restraints may derive from the values of the other party or from its fear of international repercussions. However, clearly, such protection is not achieved by classical means of defense and security (prevention of occupation).
3. **The resistor makes use of its civilians as a shield for its terrorist forces.** The resistor's firepower is deliberately and knowingly deployed in populated areas in order to make it difficult to attack it. If the other party nevertheless attacks, then, for propaganda purposes, use will be made of civilians who were unintentionally injured. An interesting reversal of roles occurs, where the symmetric party attempts to protect the civilians of the other party, while the resisting party exploits the damage to its civilians for its own benefit (in strategic terms). [1]

Hamas' strategy of resistance in Gaza is, accordingly, irrational and asymmetric in nature, attempting to employ terrorism to attack the Israeli side, while relying on Israeli restraints to prevent harm to civilians in Gaza, and at the very least exploits the unavoidable damage to the Gaza civilians for the purpose of strategic leverage.

Israeli Strategy against Hamas

Israel's sought political condition, its policy, is to develop and establish itself as the national home of the Jewish People, and as a democratic state. Since the establishment of the state, emphasis has been placed on ensuring its existence, and has subsequently been directed at social and economic development with the decreased existential threat against Israel.

Israel encounters difficulty in formulating a single coherent strategy that will meet the challenge of the resistance from Gaza and the political process with the Palestinian Authority. The split in the Palestinian camp, in fact, necessitates a corresponding split in the Israeli strategy in order to confront them. Some claim that Israel is cynically exploiting this split so that it will not be required to advance the political process. This essay does not address such discussions but rather focuses on the strategy *vis-à-vis* Hamas, in which there is greater agreement in Israel itself and amongst the international community.

The political conditions that Israel seeks to establish regarding

Hamas is to maintain periods of quiet, with the lowest level of violence that can be achieved over as long a period of time as possible, in order to exploit the quiet for economic and social development for Israel.

Israeli strategy relies on Israeli deterrence. Israel is attempting to preserve the relative quiet that has been created since Operation Cast Lead. The status quo allows Israel to absorb the level of terror emanating from Gaza (mainly rockets and mortars fired at open areas) while maintaining a defensive posture along the border fence with Gaza, and with occasional attacks against terrorist infrastructure from the air. From time to time escalation occurs as a result of "breaking the rules" by one of the parties, following which the exchanges of fire from both sides of the border increase. However, the mutual interest of both parties to avoid escalation helps to maintain the "cease fire". Israel is prepared for broader action against Hamas and uses this level of readiness to deter it from uncontrolled escalation of its activities or those of other terrorist organizations who act under its protection in Gaza.

The Israeli strategy is, therefore, one of maintaining the status quo at an acceptable level of terrorism while preparing for a broad operation, and deterring the other party from escalation.

This strategy is rational since a logical connection can be seen between the employment of a measured degree of force during the status quo period and deterrence from escalation, and the achievement of Israel's principal political objectives during that time, namely, to develop its economy and society while deterring its enemies from escalation.

An interesting phenomenon may be observed, in which the strategies of the parties do not exactly conflict with one another. Hamas is interested in resistance, and Israel manages to absorb a certain level of terrorism in order not to escalate into war. This is the reason that an ongoing situation of low intensity confrontation has been able to exist over the years between Israel and Gaza. So long as Hamas prefers the very act of resistance to the attainment of the principal goal of Israel's liquidation, it will keep its level of activities within limits that Israel can live with. Israel, on its part, will attempt to extend the period of relative tranquility in which it absorbs the low level of terrorism that it is prepared to accept. Israel's primary goal is to exist and develop. Peaceful borders are, of course, preferable to a situation of ongoing terrorism, but if terrorism continues at a tolerable level, Israel will prefer the option of economic and political development over a decision to go to war against Hamas.

Why Asymmetry Cannot Win – "The Amorites Iniquity"

In the "Covenant between the pieces" (Genesis 15, 13-16), the Almighty makes a promise to Abraham that he will inherit the land, but not just now – "since the Iniquity of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure". In other words, Abraham's descendants will inherit the land but only after the Amorites, who are living in the country, have sinned enough and their iniquity becomes total. Without addressing the issue of the problematic nature of this morality and the meaning of "free will" in a promise of this kind, the principle that the other party is going to reach is a situation in which its iniquity will cause

its downfall, which well illustrates the reality of Gaza.

Based on its strategy, Hamas is a "resistor". Its terrorist attacks against Israeli civilians are gradually accumulating. So long as the level of terrorism remains low, Israel's response is not substantial. On the one hand, Hamas can continue its activities. On the other hand, this activity does not advance Hamas in the achievement of its ends since Israel can easily absorb it.

In such a situation, in which Hamas and Israel are acting with restraint, it is the parties' ability to withstand attacks that is being tested, and not their relative strength (since they are restraining themselves). Hamas can carry on its strategy of "resistance" and even feel that it is implementing it well through such resistance. As stated, Hamas does not have to examine its strategy against the probability that it would achieve its ends (an irrational strategy).

If Hamas' efforts become too "successful" (more Israeli casualties) it will approach the point at which the Israeli side can no longer exercise self restraint, and will resort to serious reprisals.

In this situation in which Israel responds with great intensity, the parties are evaluated on the basis of their relative strength, and, as stated, the Israeli side is far stronger in terms of firepower, as well as the size and effectiveness of the army. A strategy of "resistance" is no longer sufficient since Israel is acting with great strength. Since Hamas is also escalating its activities, Israel's legitimacy of action increases, removing some of the restraints against the implementation of force applied by Israel's military instrument. The damage caused to Hamas itself and to civilians and infrastructure in Gaza following the collapse of the "humanitarian defense" is immense and harsh – the Sin of the Amorites has reached its full measure!

The inherent problem in the strategy of "resistance" may thus be discerned: it can succeed so long as it is not too successful, and if it is too successful, it fails. However, this estimation of the strategy has been made by a rational observer who is attempting to discover the connection between the terrorism of resistance and the achievement of Hamas' principal objectives. Nonetheless, as stated above, these are not the irrational eyes through which Hamas looks at itself. Hence, although to a western observer a strategy of "resistance" appears to be pointless, and it may be expected that it will be abandoned, it well matches the approach of Hamas that attaches value to its very resistance.

As stated above, there is no need to ask which strategy is better, but only to examine how the strategy of each party counters that of the other. Rationally speaking, Hamas' strategy does not guarantee the achievement of its stated ends, and consequently Israel is not required to employ full force against it.

The fact that a situation is likely in which both parties are satisfied with their own strategies is what permits the existence of a (limited) ongoing confrontation, the price for which is being paid by both parties, who are not getting any closer to a situation of peace or resolution.

Summary

From Israel's perspective, Hamas' strategy compels it to absorb what it regards as a tolerable level of terrorism (although Israel would prefer total quiet on its borders) but one that permits it to make progress towards its national ends of social and economic development.

Hamas' asymmetric and irrational strategy permits it to resist without bringing it closer to achieving its ends *vis-à-vis* Israel. The strategy is problematic since if it is too successful it will fail (the Amorite Iniquity Effect).

In rational eyes Hamas' strategy appears to be problematic since it does not seem to be helping it to achieve its ultimate ends, but Hamas' irrational point of view causes it to ignore this drawback!

A stable situation is thus created in which the two conflicting strategies can co-exist over time, and in which the parties have no motivation to reach a peaceful solution. This strategic stasis explains the current pause in Israeli-Hamas interaction. It remains to be seen whose assessment of the competitive interaction between their respective strategies is the most accurate. Clearly, Israel's strategy appears both more rational and more sustainable.

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[i] I refer to the last two cases as "humanitarian defense" (or the "Goldstone defense"). The concept of humanitarian defense is a new one! To emphasize its novelty, it may be seen that the Jewish community (*Yishuv*) during the 1948 War of Independence, defended its populated areas against the Arab armies that invaded Israel. A populated area whose defense was breached was evacuated, and then demolished by the Arab forces that occupied it. On the other hand, villages and neighborhoods occupied by the IDF in Operation Cast Lead in Gaza were not evacuated, and the IDF generally avoided harming them.

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Why Hybrid Warfare is Tactics Not Strategy: A Rejoinder to “Future Threats and Strategic Thinking”

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Introduction

The Fall 2011 issue of *Infinity Journal* included an article called “Future Threats and Strategic Thinking,” which argued that the construct of “hybrid threats” is particularly useful for how the United States military prepares to fight in the future. We find it all-too-typical that an article about “Future Threats and Strategic Thinking” be associated with a concept like

hybrid threats, because contemporary discussions of future warfare and strategy are littered with unclear, incomplete, or just plain bad ideas. The concept of hybrid threats (or hybrid warfare), as defined by its main proponents, is indeed unclear, incomplete, and often unhelpful. The concept is not unique in this regard, so while this article critiques the concept of hybrid threat, we see this specific idea as a telling individual case of a larger problem of muddled thinking about future warfare and strategic thinking.

The concept of hybrid threats (or hybrid warfare), as defined by its main proponents, is indeed unclear, incomplete, and often unhelpful.

To be clear, however, the proponents of hybrid threats make an important point. As American forces in the Middle East draw down, the budget wars within the beltway are heating up. The United States military does indeed need to think very hard about prioritizing resources for future contingencies, an essential task of strategic thinking. Funding priorities are determined in part on the basis of anticipated future threats, and so it is important that we get the threat right. That said, trendy concepts like hybrid threats might sound promising, but their conceptual weaknesses serve as an impediment to clear and productive strategy making. What we propose is that the hybrid warfare concept really comes down to a focus on tactics and techniques which is not a useful construct to guide policy and strategy makers.

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Why Hybrid Warfare Does Not Make Sense

Frank G. Hoffman has been the most vocal proponent of the hybrid threats concept, introduced in his off-cited 2007 monograph, and followed up by a series of writings of which the *Infinity Journal* essay is only the latest.[i] Hoffman has

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been joined by others, including Colin Gray, Max Boot, and John McCuen^[ii], who maintain in Hoffman's words "that future conflict will be *multi-modal* or *multi-variant* rather than a simple black or white characterization of one form of warfare."^[iii] Margaret Bond extends this notion by arguing that hybrid warfare is the paradigm for all future stability operations.^[iv] To clarify, Hoffman describes hybrid threats as incorporating:

...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. Hybrid Wars can be conducted by both state and a variety of non-state actors. These multi-modal activities can be conducted by separate units - or even by the same unit - but are generally operationally and tactically directed and coordinated within the main battlespace to achieve synergistic effects in the physical and psychological dimensions of conflict.^[v]

Critics have questioned the utility of such a definition, in that it appears to be a repackaging of any number of older concepts that described an enemy or scenarios that switch between ways of fighting, including compound warfare, three block war,^[vi] or fourth generation warfare.^[vii] For example, the Vietnamese communists used conventional, guerrilla, terrorist, and criminal activities in their war against South Vietnam and the United States.

In reply, Hoffman and his compatriots have emphasized that what makes hybrid threats different is that they will be characterized by "more blurring and blending of war forms in combinations of increasing frequency and lethality."^[viii] In other words, these "multi-modal" or "multi-variant" hybrid threats would individually be able to apply multiple modes of war either all at once or at nearly the same time, and at high rates of lethality. In this line of thinking, the Vietnam example does not really apply because, supposedly, the North Vietnamese Army handled most of the conventional fighting, while the Vietcong acted as guerrillas. Therefore, hybrid threats proponents see the wars in Chechnya over the last two decades and the 2006 Israeli Lebanon campaign as examples or harbingers of this emerging way of warfare. (Hoffman also recently added the 2nd Anglo Boer War as another example, which is hard to square with an emerging concept).^[ix]

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We see two related problems with this line of thinking. The first is that, despite some protestations to the contrary, hybrid threats imagine an enemy of nearly mystical powers. The second is that hybrid warfare is almost entirely tactically focused in its analysis and prescriptions.

As should be clear already, the thinking about hybrid threats is convoluted by its speculative nature. It imagines a threat that can only loosely be identified with any concrete examples. Hoffman argues, "[p]olicy makers and strategists need to define their assumptions about frequency, consequences, and risk far more carefully and analytically."^[x] Yet the hybrid threat construct applies a flawed logic of induction to predict future threats. In fact, the concept is induced and assumed from an exceedingly narrow selection of historical wars, many of which are oversimplified to fit the hybrid model. The problem is that it is exceedingly difficult to find anyone, ever, who could do all that the hybrid threats concept prescribes.

By arguing that individual units (or even separate but aligned units) can somehow simultaneously (or easily and quickly) switch back and forth between conventional, irregular, and criminal activities elevates the enemy to mystical status. One comes away with the image of a single hybrid warrior simultaneously targeting and firing artillery, setting an ambush with an IED, hiding among the population to which he is selling drugs and setting up protection rackets, developing and deploying biological and/or nuclear weapons, and hacking into the Pentagon mainframe to insert a computer virus, all while conducting an interview on Al Jazeera specifically targeted to destroy morale among the civilian population in the American heartland.

from the perspective of those groups or individuals who might adopt the hybrid model, the fallacy of a hybrid warrior becomes clear

We exaggerate in this hypo-ethical, but only a little. In order to execute all of their supposed tasks simultaneously or in close sequence, any hybrid threat would have to be highly proficient in a wide variety of modes of warfare, an idea that strains the bounds of reality. When one views the problem from the perspective of those groups or individuals who might adopt the hybrid model, the fallacy of a hybrid warrior becomes clear. The entire reason they fight in different ways is because they cannot match the conventional and irregular capabilities of the United States.^[xi] They have to look for different ways to defeat superior American capabilities specifically because they do not have the wherewithal of the United States. Because of cultural impediments and highly restrictive materiel backing, they only have limited capabilities and time for training. For that reason, their efforts tend toward economy of force. They go for austerity, not complexity. If they could prepare troops simultaneously to engage in conventional, guerrilla, terrorist, and criminal activities, they would not have to use suicide bombers. More to the point, they would not dream of wasting such highly trained troops on suicide missions.

Even at the height of American economic doldrums, the American government invested almost as many resources into the doctrine, training, education, equipping, and development of our military as the rest of the world combined. An oil tanker's worth of ink has been spilled on the question of how many instructional hours in professional military education are enough to prepare lifelong professional officers to be capable of doing counter-guerrilla war, while

not sacrificing the basic capability to call in a time on target artillery mission. Yet we are supposed to believe that Hezbollah, with a vastly smaller resource base, has somehow developed comparable skill-sets in every poor sap they have scraped off the street and run through their training program? That must be some annex class they are running at Beirut Terrorist Technical College.

Even more important, if we did face an enemy of such impressive powers, then we would see that the logical solution to such a problem leads in the exact opposite direction that hybrid warfare proponents suggest. If one enemy soldier or one enemy unit could really undertake all of the things hybrid theory says they can do, then the clear solution is not to try to match that skill set by becoming hybrid warriors of our own. The solution would be to become proficient at targeting and destroying those super soldiers or super units. If all that capability is located in one person or one unit, kill the person or unit, and one removes the awesome, multi-modal capabilities from the field of battle.

Hoffman seems to recognize this truth, which is why he writes that, "properly trained, conventional forces employing combined arms usually win." However, he wishes this away, maintaining that conventional forces succeed with "far greater losses than expected" using historical techniques "that are anathema" in today's casualty sensitive, population-centric counterinsurgency environment. [xii] This assertion is not backed by any evidence, and he does not elaborate, which is a telling omission in an article on strategic thinking about future threats. If well-trained conventional forces win against hybrid threats, but there are some other factors that complicate the winning, then we should at least entertain a discussion of those other factors before we dismiss winning tactics out of hand. That would be a strategic discussion. Which leads to the next point: most of the hybrid warfare literature is really about tactics, not strategy.

None of this is meant to underestimate potential enemies. Rather, the idea is to provide an accurate understanding of potential threats *as part of* an overall strategic picture. In that sense, there are deeper problems with the hybrid warfare/ threats theory, which are revealed by an examination of its underlying assumptions. Hoffman reveals the flaw himself in his critique of how the U.S. Army has used the term "hybrid threats" in its doctrine, which he notes, "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." [xiii] Hoffman argues that the modes are what really matter. But his focus on modalities of warfare is really just a focus on tactics and techniques—a mistake that would lead policy and strategy makers to focus on tactics and techniques, and as we have already pointed out, in unrealistic and ahistorical scenarios.

Hoffman's overemphasis on the modes threats use begins to resemble a strategy of tactics. Colonel Gian Gentile has correctly observed that population-centric theorists took tactics that were developed to be used specifically as part of a strategy in Iraq in 2007-2008, and then argued that those tactics should be used in any even remotely similar circumstance. Since those tactics in Iraq served an explicit mission of armed nation-building, their application elsewhere

would dictate that the mission was always armed nation building, *regardless of the different strategic circumstances*. [xiv] The hybrid warfare emphasis on matching and defeating modes is likewise tactically focused. Boiling war down to mixed modality threats focuses strategy squarely on tactics that potential enemies might employ. Leaving aside the unlikelihood of any enemy actually being able to be a hybrid threat in the way that Hoffman et al. described them, defeating a potential enemy's tactical capabilities is only one part of strategic posturing. If the tactics employed to defeat supposed enemy tactics run counter to or unnecessarily complicate the purpose of the mission, then the tail is wagging the dog.

The fundamental problem with the hybrid warfare analysis is that it ignores the role of interaction in strategy. War "is not the action of a living force upon a lifeless mass... but always the collision of two living forces." [xv] According to Clausewitz, interaction in war leads to extremes and divergence, not the

The fundamental problem with the hybrid warfare analysis is that it ignores the role of interaction in strategy.

convergence predicted by hybrid warfare. Interaction implies that there can be no good strategy without considering the reaction-counter-reaction dynamics of potential adversaries. The problem with arguing that the U.S. should prioritize resource allocation against hybrid threats because this minimizes risk (measured by the product of probability and magnitude of threat), is that the very act of resource allocation alters the probability of the threat. Enemies of the United States will always seek to attack our weaknesses rather than our strengths. If we focus scarce resources on countering hybrid threats, this immediately makes them less likely. The implication is that conflicts at the extremes become relatively more likely. Does the United States really want to be steering its enemies towards major combat operations and long, protracted insurgencies?

The weakness of the hybrid warfare model in addressing the entirety of the strategic context is perfectly evident in Hoffman's assumptions and recommendations. As he writes, "In a perfect world, our military forces would be robustly sized and we would build distinctive forces for discernably (sic) different missions along the entire conflict spectrum." [xvi] Yet Hoffman would have his perfect world: "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." [xvii] Leaving aside the fact that the resources are not there to achieve such an ambitious agenda, apparently it needs pointing out that this is an odd definition of a perfect world. We do not imagine that war is going away anytime soon, but you do not have to be a starry-eyed utopian to believe that unconstrained military development is not particularly healthy for the American political system. As one American military thinker wrote over one hundred years ago "It is well for us to be familiar with the organization of the German forces, for example, and to understand their splendid system

of recruitment and mobilization; but we can never hope for such in America, unless some great national catastrophe should befall to convince our people and their lawmakers of the necessity for them; which God forbid!" [xviii] The point is that strategic thinking must also account for more than the *capabilities* of the friendly force, it must account for the *character* of the friendly force. Who we are and why we fight is at least as important as how we fight.

Wars are fought by people; wars do not do not consist of just tactical systems squaring off against tactical systems. Proper strategic thinking must always keep that in mind. That is why the estimate of the situation—something professional militaries have been doing formally for over a century, and informally from time immemorial—includes mission, friendly forces, terrain, weather, technologies, *and* enemy. The estimate of just the enemy includes strength, intentions, morale, technologies, *and* tactical capabilities. Any strategic thinking should include, at a minimum, all of those factors. Hybrid warfare looks at just enemy tactical capabilities, disconnected from the enemy himself.

Worse still, concepts like hybrid threats actually get in the way of doing a full strategic estimate, because such concepts are confusing, incoherent, and ubiquitous. American doctrine writers and scholars have crammed so many pet theories into the military lexicon that no reasonable person who adheres to them could be expected to estimate anything anymore. The proliferation of unclear concepts such as hybrid warfare has made clear strategic thinking nearly impossible.

An Alternative Way to Look to the Future

simultaneous combination of means in novel combinations can produce surprising synergistic effects

Having roundly criticized hybrid warfare, we should emphasize those areas where we agree with Hoffman. We agree in the value of adaptability as an antidote to uncertainty and complexity. We agree that the simultaneous combination of means in novel combinations can produce surprising synergistic effects. We agree that the entrenched camps that have coalesced around the most likely (counterinsurgent) and most dangerous (major combat operations) future threats both provide an incomplete vision for future security strategy. We also find that the full spectrum operations concept is an unhappy compromise that tries to be strong everywhere and is therefore nowhere strong, and that resource constraints force difficult prioritization decisions that must be based on rational anticipation of future threats. We believe that black and white schemes for categorizing conflict create conceptual blind spots at the seams that will be exploited by an adaptive enemy. Our main disagreement is that a hybridized blend of those flawed categories of war does not provide a useful construct for strategic planning.

Hybrid warfare does not explain the history of war, nor is there compelling evidence that it predicts its future. Indeed, "hybrid warfare" is a misnomer, since it is not actually a type of

warfare. A more accurate, but substantially less marketable label would be 'convergent trends in tactics.' Convergence is a trend that has been heralded before in other fields, notably information and communications technology. However, surely reality follows a more subtle and complex trajectory than a deterministic arc of convergence. As some boundaries blur and previously distinct categories merge, new boundaries are created and reinforced. Convergence and divergence coexist and coevolve. So too, modalities or tactics continually evolve and are recombined, but a strategy focused on means is a strategy of tactics. To prepare for the future of conflict, the concept of hybrid warfare is not required.

Current U.S. Army doctrine offers just one alternative example of how to look at future threats and strategic thinking. Hoffman is critical of the U. S. Army's definition of hybrid threats in doctrine. Hoffman is correct in noting that recent U. S. Army doctrine uses hybrid threat to describe the character of forces (traditional, irregular, and criminal elements), and not simply modes of fighting. [xix] As should be evident by now, we agree that this more general approach is better than focusing on specific tactical capabilities. For example, in U.S. Army Doctrine Publication 3-0, Operations, hybrid threats are defined as "the diverse and dynamic combination of these forces, irregular forces, terrorist forces, criminal elements, or a combination of these forces and elements all unified to achieve mutually benefitting effects." Like Hoffman's definition, ADP 3-0 agrees both state and non-state actors can present hybrid threats, and that emerging technologies and the employment of proxy forces blurs lines between threats that simplistic categorization schemes portray as distinct, ideal types of conflict. But unlike Hoffman, ADP 3-0 does not focus on hybrid threats as modes of tactics, nor does the manual focus solely on hybrid threats. The manual explicitly identifies non-state entities wielding weapons of mass destruction and coalitions of nation-states and ideological actors as potential threats. [xx]

Such a broad understanding of potential enemies might seem to push the military back into the trap of preparing to fight everything everywhere. But there is an essential difference in the new doctrine. Unified Land Operations, the operating concept in which Army Doctrine Publication 3-0 is based, emphasizes commanders and planners need to understand the character of the friendly force, *and* the character of the threat. Based on this perspective, the operating concept guides adaptive leaders and planners in developing operations that will not simply encompass a reaction to the threat but will leapfrog to seizing, retaining, and exploiting the initiative, thus helping set the conditions for favorable conflict resolution. By transcending specific tactics, this approach allows leaders to be proactive instead of reactive, because they are not focused solely on responding to specific enemy tactics.

When it comes to looking to the future, if you prepare military leaders to understand that potential enemies, collectively but not individually, have the potential of using multiple strategies and tactics, and that individually they may use some clever but not infinite combinations of strategies and tactics, then they will truly be prepared to face any future threat. The point is to prepare and enable our forces to fight and win wars, not give them bogeymen to chase into the night.

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Military Self-Definition as Strategy

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Most military strategy discussions, devoted to choosing actions meant to achieve ends efficiently, presuppose the actors that undertake the actions. That the actor is a military is taken for granted, and discussions are limited to whether they should fight in this way or that, with these weapons or those, here or there, or fight at all as opposed to not fighting; at least not here and now. Thus the strategic aspect of the military machine itself, namely the question of whether it is well equipped to undertake any action at all effectively, tends to be neglected.[i] This is conceptually wrong as well as dangerous for strategy: it's as if we spent all our time mapping where the car was to go without considering the strategic implications of keeping it low on oil. If the tank spews oil or grinds to a halt, all subsequent questions of tactics are moot. All strategy is compromised, or at least threatened.

The forms these strategic threats take in Western and Western-allied militaries concern issues of military self-definition: how do standing militaries designed to serve democracies conceive themselves, or of their very nature? If their conception is contradictory, as I argue it is, or ill thought out, as I also argue it is, they build inefficiency and problems into the very machinery itself. It is the equivalent of grit in the gears. Military self-definition is as fundamental to strategy as the equally nebulous but hyper-important notion of "morale" is to battlefield action: how does the military understand itself? Morale, the tactical cousin of strategy's "self-definition," is notoriously hard to measure, yet we talk about it all the time, and recognize its essential nature. A military that doesn't

understand itself is a strategically impaired military, just as a fighting force low on morale is unlikely to perform effectively.

Strategic inefficiency in military design

I will be focusing here on two sources of strategic inefficiency within militaries: a sense of moral superiority and the "cult" of leadership. This assessment acknowledges that the world's militaries of course vary to a great degree, but all are at least generically militaries, and hence heir to the same ills of the genus.

The first source of strategic inefficiency is the dangerous notion, apparently the creation of the military itself, that the military is morally superior to the citizens it is meant to defend. This produces disdain of the military for the very civilians for whom it exists. Such an effect firstly leads to uncertainty about why they are fighting at all: why put your life at risk to defend lesser mortals? That then in turn leads to a sense of wounded defensiveness: why are they not acknowledging our sacrifices?

This attitude was documented at length in a *Washington Post Magazine* article by Kristin Henderson from 2007, what was arguably the nadir of the Iraq and Afghani wars for the U.S. It begins with the realization that fewer than 1% of the American public is in uniform in this age of an all-volunteer force.[ii] I have argued that this sense of distance from civilian society on the part of the military has only gotten more pronounced since then.[iii]

More importantly, the military's notion that it is morally purer than the civilians it serves sets up a situation where inevitable moral or indeed even tactical lapses within the military tend to be covered up for as long as possible. In effect, lying to its civilian paymasters and those it exists to protect. Numerous ongoing problems created during my time at Annapolis by the military's ham-fisted treatment of women, whether too harsh or too lenient, are vociferously denied until they are uncovered by civilian Freedom of Information Act requests. The same is true of the academies' preferential treatment of non-white applicants for admission, also documented by civilian journalists in the face of military denials.[iv] And consider the way the U.S. Army vociferously denied that the death of the football star Pat Tillman was the result of "friendly

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fire.”[v] This lying both to military and civilians is, I argue, a fundamental breach of the contract between civilian paymasters and the military that exists to serve them. It is furthermore quite contradictory for a service that claims to be morally pure must then lie to preserve this reputation.

Occupying the moral high ground has certain public relations benefits. (Polls consistently suggest that the U.S. populace has great faith in the military.)[vi] But it also has huge disadvantages, especially if it’s difficult to actually occupy this moral high ground, rather than merely claim it. Every time a problem is discovered, the discovery doubly wounds the military: first in the revelation itself, then by “counting twice” for damage, given the assertion of the military that it’s abnormally moral. Under the current situation, hearing about problems in the military is like discovering that the preacher has been guilty of impropriety, sexual or otherwise: if it hadn’t been for his pretense of greater virtue, his actions wouldn’t be so shocking. This damage is self-inflicted, and can be minimized or eliminated by simply going back to the more defensible (World War II era) notion of the military as effective rather than virtuous.

The other source of fundamental strategic weakness in the military is an emphasis on military decision-making through what is called “leadership,” a notion popular in the Victorian era and now largely replaced in the civilian world by less mysterious concepts like reasoning and justification. The military’s cult of “leadership,” decision making by gut intuition and fiat, is related to the personal nature of command in the military (and also to the military’s fetishization of the notion of “character”). The military is one of the last bastions of the attitude of Louis XIV, “l’état, c’est moi”: I am my command and these are “my” people. A command “is” that of so-and-so until (s)he is “relieved” of it. “Leadership” in the twentieth and now twenty-first centuries, once the mainstay of pre-modern societies based on hierarchical class notion (as expressed in the emphasis on what “gentlemen” do) has been relegated to niches like the military and business. In these niche callings without clear technical capabilities, the notion of “leadership” serves to give an aura of value to actions separated from their basis in the objective world.

The military draws a certain number of people who think that responsibility is power, and power is about aggrandizing themselves. Such people tend to believe that anyone who suggests changes or improvements to their view of mission is inimical to the mission and must be annihilated. This is a fundamental mistake, though one to which the military is prone as a result of its personal nature and its belief that “leadership” is a separable skill, an independent commodity that can be taught; as all Western military academies claim to do.

Of course, in the heat of battle it makes sense to stick to a single course of action until it’s clear it’s the wrong one. But in the planning stages, it makes sense to listen to as many views as possible. Yet if decisions are reached not through rationality but as the result of one person’s instinctive reaction justified by the assertion that (s)he is exercising “leadership,” dissent or questioning will be perceived as a personal affront rather than an attempt to use rationality to look objectively at options. Such a reaction makes certain that once a bad path is embarked upon (the “leader” is “leading,”), it will be

relentlessly followed—something which is harmful to mission and a major source of strategic folly in the military.

In the civilian world, the rule-by-personality paradigm of the Victorians has been largely replaced with such things as efficiency and technical expertise. Perhaps for this reason the military frequently draws people nostalgic for the “good old days” of a century ago when “father knows best”, and where following authority was its own end. Victorian notions were based on a class-based society where it was assumed that certain groups of people, usually determined by birth, had the qualities needed to tell others what to do just because of who they were. This was “leadership” of “gentlemen” based on “character” and “honor.” Now we have rejected the notion that people are, have, or can exercise these things based on who they are intrinsically. Yet the military insists that these mysterious capabilities or qualities or entities are accrued to those given a certain rank. Outmoded notions are thus unsuccessfully retrofitted to a new purpose for which they are ill suited. (Perhaps the military would say it intuitively that those promoted to these ranks possess these qualities and thus that all those with rank are also “leaders.” This is both circular reasoning, and belied by evidence.)

The civilian world in a democracy in the twenty-first century contains many checks and balances that, while not making wrong courses of action impossible, at least render them less likely. The military isn’t self-correcting to any great degree, at least not as it’s currently run, and it has to reach a major crisis before outside correction intervenes. A *Washington Post* article about a U.S. Army survey from 2010 notes that:

80 percent of Army officers and sergeants had directly observed a ‘toxic’ leader and that 20 percent of the respondents said that they had worked directly for one. . . . The Army defined toxic leaders as commanders who put their own needs first, micro-managed subordinates, behaved in a mean-spirited manner or displayed poor decision making. About half of the soldiers who had worked under toxic leaders expected that their selfish and abusive commanders would be promoted to a higher level of leadership. [vii]

A related article in the *Post* notes that “the Navy has fired a dozen commanding officers this year [2011], a near-record rate, . . . which follows a similar spike in firings last year.” [viii]

Such a conception of decision making as a separable skill called “leadership” that certain people can exercise and others can’t encourages the formation of “toxic” “leaders”, people who go by their gut instinct, need hear no opposing views, and brook no opposition. Thus the specific tactics that emanate from such a paradigm are highly likely to be flawed, and cannot be addressed if we fail to consider their source. At the Naval Academy, for example, I have seen bad call after bad call from short-term commanding officer Superintendents (who are asked to “lead” a college when they have no experience doing so and usually no understanding of what a college does), all rammed through with great gusto on the grounds that they constitute “leadership.” Some of these have been retired early: the last two Superintendents have been terminated early for egregious misbehavior, one after only a single year—the most “toxic” of all. However, most serve out their time and pass the problems they have created

on to their equally inexperienced successor. Asking for nay-saying input that is seriously considered is a better option than merely "leading." The Light Brigade, after all, was "led."

These two sources of strategic weakness can be corrected: the military can simply, quietly, abandon its strange pretense to greater moral purity than those it defends, the way the U.S. has retired the strange and far too ill-defined (not to mention terrifyingly ambitious) notion of GWOT, Global War on Terror. Officers can be encouraged to arrive at decisions based on evidence and rational considerations of probable outcomes rather than on their gut instincts, personality, or the exercise of "leadership." Dissent and "what if?" scenarios from those not in agreement would be encouraged rather than punished, as is now all too frequently the case.

Both the pretense to greater moral purity on the part of the military and its reliance on the smoke-and-mirrors concept of "leadership" that concentrates power in the hands of a single individual rather than relying on rationality and group strength pose serious strategic threats to any military endeavor. They create a machine riddled with what I have elsewhere called structural weaknesses which compromise or render risky any subsequent strategic decision.[ix]

Held to a higher standard?

The notion that the U.S. military—and also, Western militaries in general—are "held to a higher moral standard" than the civilians they defend has become so widespread in recent decades and is repeated so often as to have become one of those things everybody says and nobody questions. The pervasive nature in the U.S. of the notion that the military is defined by its greater moral purity is articulated by J. Carl Ficarrotta of the U.S. Air Force Academy, who puts it this way:[x]

It's been a commonplace for a very long time that military professionals are 'held to a higher moral standard'. It's certainly part of the image some in the larger society have of the profession. The sentiment is especially prevalent inside the military. The military establishment represents itself as embracing higher expectations, even if there are occasional (perhaps inevitable) moral failures. There are codes and public espousals of a special moral commitment. Commanders exhort their troops to moral goodness and chastise them when they fall short. Military education is full of courses on professional ethics. Indeed, from the top down, part of the background noise of professional military life are these 'higher' expectations, and a belief that somehow, this line of work is one shot through with a special moral status, special moral problems, and special moral demands.

Certainly I hear this notion constantly at the U.S. Naval Academy, usually to defend midshipmen (officer cadets) who have been caught red-handed doing one of the many things they have been discovered doing during the decades I've been there: assault with a deadly weapon, credit card fraud and drug dealing, to name just a few.

Ficarrotta implies that the military itself created this view (he

says it's "especially prevalent within the military"). I think this likely, as there is no reason why civilians in a democracy would have come up with this—though the notion that individuals have to subsume their volition to a common law is congenial with conservative ethics, and certainly provides the reason why right-wingers, whether American conservatives or European fascists, are typically great boosters of the military for its own sake.[xi] (Of course there are countries such as Turkey where the military sees itself and is seen as the defender of secular ideals, though this view seems to be weakening.)

Yet if it is undeniably part of military self-image in the modern age, where did it come from? I'd say: because the militaries of Western democracies no longer have a clear purpose. (The same is not true of separatist wars of fragmented countries, or perhaps of striver countries such as China. But even Israel's military has lost moral ground as its actions are less clearly defensive in nature.) The notion that the military is morally purer than the civilians it defends fills a void for an understanding of itself that the U.S. military has experienced since Vietnam; the French, arguably, since Algeria; the Germans and Austrians since the Third Reich; and other Anglophone militaries since World War II. We are not so clearly defending ourselves against an attack as at Pearl Harbor, nor even against a plausible threat. And now even the Cold War is long over. Our biggest problems worldwide are economic; we in America can't define the military as Captain America any more, fighting the Nazis—despite the successful movie of 2011.

The notion that the military is defined by greater moral purity is, in fact, quite bizarre. As Ficarrotta observes later in his article, there is no clear connection between actions usually held to be moral, such as giving to charity or being faithful to a spouse, and military effectiveness. Nor, I would add, is there the slightest reason to think that someone whose function is to kill people for the State would be more moral in all aspects of his or her life than others. The military in a democracy is the hammer to the civilian hand, part of a larger whole, not its own world that must replicate all the aspects of the larger. [xii]

The more traditional vision of the military as a fire hose spewing muscle and testosterone has not gone away in niche specialties like SEALs or Rangers (or USMC) in our own age. But in the military as a whole it's been largely overshadowed by the claim to being high-powered Boy Scouts, not to mention chivalrous eunuchs. This self-understanding seems to go hand in glove with the all-volunteer U.S. military's perceived need to attract women and non-whites to fill its ranks, and hence to be playing political cards unrelated to combat effectiveness.

This creates problems, however, for the niche specialties, which have never departed from the more traditional notion of military effectiveness being the highest good, not military virtue. Thus the pressure to exhibit the political values of the society at large poses problems for these elite combat specialties: the poll of service members cited as justification for lifting the U.S. ban on openly gay service members showed that, according to *The Washington Post*, "The Defense Department survey . . . found that 58 percent of those in Marine combat arms units predicted that repeal

would negatively affect their ability to 'work together to get the job done', compared to 48 percent in Army combat units.[xiii]

Members of the military are not more moral, they're just required to exercise what I call technical or professional virtue. In tight quarters with a mission that takes precedence over all else, each sailor (or soldier, or Marine) has to know where his/her gear is: thus stealing is moved close to the top of the list of military sins. Lying is probably at the very top: for mission effectiveness the Commanding Officer has to be dealing with correct information. A machine made out of human beings only works with correct information, to the extent that it works, this is a necessary but not sufficient condition for mission effectiveness. But the military should have no pretense to an overall moral caste or stance: the military is a separable tool of the civilian world. Morality in general is irrelevant to its definition, and the attempt to create such a definition out of morality shows just how inefficient and insecure Western militaries, especially that of the U.S., have become since World War II and the traumas of Vietnam, and now Iraq and Afghanistan.

Aside from these technical needs of the tool, the same morality works for both the civilian and the military worlds.

And decisions have to be reached in the military the same way they are in the civilian world: by considering evidence and weighing input, not through individuals exercising their gut instinct and passing this off as "leadership." It need not in fact be "held to a higher standard"—and indeed, it's the military that set this notion abroad to begin with, not the civilian world. If the military ceased to create problems like this for itself, it could get back to its real mission: fighting the country's battles, as *The Marine Corps Hymn* has it. As it is, the military sets up unrealistic expectations. It then has to deal with the consequences when these expectations are shown to be disappointed.

Conclusion

If the military gives up its pretense to greater overall morality and leadership through the personal gut instincts of individuals, it has some hope of reducing the strategic flaws that beset it to manageable levels. If the machinery is not intrinsically ill constructed and maintained, we can put it into play with some confidence it will, or at least may if the fog of war permits, achieve its tactical goals. But it is part of strategy too—a fundamental part—to make sure the machinery can actually function in whatever circumstances we put it in.

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