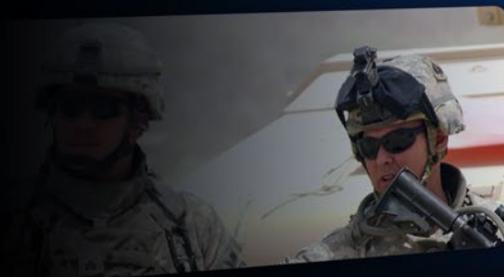


Because strategy never stops...

Infinity Journal



IN THIS EDITION

Paul van Riper | Benjamin "BJ" Armstrong | Cole Petersen
Paul Darling | Justin Lawlor | Robert Mihara | Joseph M. Guerra

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A Note From The Editor

Dear IJ members,

Welcome to Volume 2, Issue No. 3 of Infinity Journal.

Clearly, one of the hazards of running a Strategy journal is that people assume you are an able strategist. I say “clearly” because everyone assumes it to be the case. Oh that it were.

While it may not be obvious, it should be recognised that understanding Strategy and being a good strategist, are not actually one and the same thing. They should be, but to assume they are is to perhaps make an assumption too far.

Doing Strategy and understanding Strategy are “clearly” two very different things. Moreover, understanding Strategy does not mean that you can actually ‘do’ it. This isn’t merely sophistry or pedantry. This is a real problem.

Understanding Strategy means that you know how Strategy works. You can explain the historical phenomena and this will enable a small degree of prediction. Good strategic theorists are not confused by what they see, and they don’t feel the need to propose new theory. Such is good theory. Reality and thus practice present you with something far less comfortable and certain, because while it is easy to spot the mistakes with hindsight, it is far less easy to convince policy makers and soldiers that the same mistakes are apparent in the here and now. Bad policy and bad tactics may not be apparent to those invested in them. Indeed brilliant tactics may be wholly irrelevant, when given a policy that will not accept the use of violence, and the best policy is doomed, or gained at a far too greater cost when tactics are poor.

Obviously, those well schooled in strategic theory are far more likely to detect the errors than those that are not, but theorists are mostly inoculated from the task of having to set forth a policy that will not accept the use of force, or will do so only at very small costs, and/or in a greatly restricted form. Skill in Strategy is clearly doing the difficult stuff and not just making the easy stuff work. Tactical excellence is almost always required, as are the sound political judgements that ensure that the policy is achievable via force.

Strategy is far more practical than theoretical, but the theory is nevertheless essential to the practice. It seems reasonable to suggest that while a good strategist can cope with less than ideal policy and even poor tactics, his primary utility lies in being able to understand what is wrong with the policy and how it may be changed, and/or knowing where the tactics are falling short in terms of the outcomes desired and why.

William F. Owen
Editor, Infinity Journal
July 2012

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The Foundation of Strategic Thinking

Paul van Riper

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Lieutenant General Paul Van Riper retired from the United States Marine Corps in 1997 after more than 41 years of service. Since retiring, he has remained active within the defense community participating in an array of war games and conferences, and lecturing at military colleges. He also consults on national security issues. He holds the Bren Chair of Innovation and Transformation at Marine Corps University.

The noted strategist Colin Gray claims that, "Everything pertaining to strategy relates, or at least might relate, to everything else." [i] Although I subscribe to Professor Gray's assertion, my reach in this article is far more limited. Specifically, I intend to show why system theory as represented in mental models underpins and connects Clausewitz's remarkable or paradoxical trinity, operational art, and operational design, making these seemingly disparate subjects the foundation of strategic thinking. My contention is that when national leaders and defense officials understand the relationships among these outwardly unrelated subjects, they are able to implement military strategy more effectively.

system theory as represented in mental models underpins and connects Clausewitz's remarkable or paradoxical trinity, operational art, and operational design

System Theory

Because it is central to my line of reasoning we turn first to system theory. Few in the U.S. military are bothered by the term *system* when defense professionals use it in relation to

weapon systems; or functions, such as intelligence systems, logistics systems, or command and control systems, and so forth. Outside of these realms, however, the term often conjures up unpleasant memories of former Secretary of Defense Robert. S. McNamara's attempts to apply systems analysis to the battlefields of Vietnam.

The word system, however, is simply a noun meaning "an assemblage or combination of things or parts forming a complex or unitary whole." [ii] We only know what those things or parts form when we delineate them by adding an adjective in front of the noun; as an example, *economic* system. Or if we wish to be more specific we can identify the *U.S. economic* system. With each addition of an adjective we become more exacting about a system, so to take our example one step further, we can describe the *current U.S. economic* system. The words, however, are only a symbolic representation of the system. When we form an image of a system in our minds we create a schema or mental model, which is also a symbolic representation.

Mental Models

Cognitive psychologists tell us that humans think and reason using mental pictures or mental models. These pictures or models determine how we perceive actual or imagined objects or situations. Derived from our intuition such models are central to reasoning and decision-making. Sometimes we sketch these models on paper to help explain an idea to others. Nearly all groups or teams working together construct shared mental models depicting how the members see a particular problem or circumstance.

We occasionally encounter shared mental models when we observe drawings that appear to be purposeful musings on white boards or flip-charts in offices and classrooms. In a way, all mental models portray a system view of an entity or a state of affairs. That is, mental models reveal how individuals or groups select and arrange into a system the elements of something in which they are interested. Succinctly stated, mental models reflect how we think components that we have circumscribed operate as a system, or more narrowly, how we believe some part of our world works.

Few of us consciously recognize that there are two distinct

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types of systems. One writer identified these as *structurally complex* or *interactively complex* systems in a 1997 publication.[iii] The use of these two terms is now widespread within and outside the military when people discuss system theory.

The use of these two terms is now widespread within and outside the military when people discuss system theory.

When thinking of a system most people conjure up attributes that are mechanical in nature and therefore exhibit structural complexity. Accordingly, the more parts in a system, and the more orderly the arrangement of those parts, the greater its structural complexity. These systems produce fixed, regular, and generally predictable behaviors. Machines like automobiles and weapons possess these characteristics; they have numerous parts arranged in specific structures, but they operate in a specific way or they malfunction. Elements of our bodies—skeletons and circulatory systems—have the same attributes. Electrical power grids and integrated air defenses systems are examples of greater structural complexity.

Usually we can understand structurally complex systems better by disassembling them and studying their parts separately. They are systems where the sum—the entire system—equals the parts. When we act on a structurally complex system — that is, do something to affect a component — it produces a reaction in that system that is proportional to the action. Structurally complex systems function with related causes and effects; therefore, systems analysis is a powerful tool for examining and studying them. We can create computer models that accurately reflect what happens in actual structurally complex systems. Structurally complex systems are also known as *linear* systems.

Conversely, interactively complex systems lack a fixed structure, and their parts have significant freedom of action. Thus these systems are often dynamic and unpredictable. In general, the more freedom of action the parts enjoy, the greater are the dynamics of the system. Interactively complex systems create multifaceted, rich, challenging, and potentially volatile behaviors. Even interactively complex systems with only a few parts can exhibit surprisingly rich and novel behavior. Measures taken to affect these systems often produce disproportionate results relative to the size or scale of the measures, because effects cascade throughout the system. Interaction among constituent parts commonly produces unanticipated emergent behaviors that make these systems unique.

Interactively complex systems are, on the other hand, not additive systems; indeed, they are greater—or more accurately, different—than the sum of their parts. We benefit little when we separate the parts of an interactively complex system and study the parts in isolation, because in the act of separation the system loses its coherence and the parts lose their meaning. For this reason, a reductionist approach like systems analysis is an ineffective tool for examining

such systems; we must look at them holistically. We can model these systems in computers, however, the models are only representative, thus we cannot expect an actual system to behave exactly as the model does. Interactively complex systems are also known as *nonlinear* systems since any action to these systems can cascade and produce disproportionate and unexpected outcomes.

We benefit little when we separate the parts of an interactively complex system and study the parts in isolation

Ecologies, weather, economies, and political systems are excellent illustrations of interactively complex or nonlinear systems. While not commonly thought of as systems, international relations, wars, campaigns, and battles are also nonlinear systems. Human organizations like schools, businesses, and battalions are as well.

We note again that systems are in effect mental models that human minds create and destroy constantly. Therefore, there is no realistic way of fixing on how many may exist. However, of the two types of systems that we encounter, those that are nonlinear or interactively complex undoubtedly constitute the larger set by many orders of magnitude.[iv]

Clausewitz's Remarkable Trinity

Although a few scientist and mathematicians recognized the significance of nonlinear systems more than a century ago,[v] it is only within the last thirty years or so that the general population began to become aware of their existence.[vi] Hence, it is surprising to many members of the defense community that some 180 years ago Carl von Clausewitz, the master military theorist, clearly understood that the central elements of war and, therefore war itself, manifest the features of nonlinear systems.

While Clausewitz alludes to this nonlinearity through much of his opus *On War*, he speaks to it directly in Book One, Chapter 1, Section 28. This section, which hardly takes up half a page, summarizes many of the essentials of Clausewitz's theory of war. He begins the section noting: "War is more than a true chameleon that slightly adapts its characteristics to the given case." [vii] His use of a biological metaphor indicates war is not mechanistic and therefore not a controllable or predictable phenomenon. He then lays out the dominant tendencies of that phenomenon, which strategists often sum up as passion, probability, and reason. He mentions that most often the three tendencies are the concern of the people, army, and government. [viii] Continuing, Clausewitz makes a strong claim: "A theory that ignores anyone of them or seeks to fix an arbitrary relationship between them would conflict with reality to such an extent that for this reason alone it would be totally useless." [ix]

In other words, to be valid any theory of war must incorporate war's intrinsic dynamism. He goes on to say: "Our task therefore is to develop a theory that maintains a balance

between these three tendencies like an object suspended between three magnets." This analogy points to a cutting-edge scientific experiment of his era, that demonstrates the nonlinearity of any system where there is freedom of movement among three or more elements.[x] The virtual impossibility of duplicating the path of a pendulum as it moves among three equally spaced magnets tells us that despite our desire to balance passion, probability, and reason—the three central tendencies of war—it is simply not possible.[xi] War is a nonlinear phenomenon.

As with all nonlinear phenomena, we can only study war as a complete system, not as individual parts. Clausewitz is clear in this regard claiming that, "... in war more than in any other subject we must begin by looking at the nature of the whole; for here more than elsewhere the part and the whole must always be thought of together." [xii] This advice runs counter to Americans' preference for using an engineering approach to solve all problems. Reductionism tends to be part of the national character. We persist in using linear methods even when the evidence shows their limitations.

John Lewis Gaddis described the difficulties this approach has caused the U.S. national security community in a ground-breaking article questioning why political scientists failed to forecast the end of the Cold War. [xiii] His convincing conclusion is that while members of the physical and natural sciences were incorporating the tools of nonlinear science into their various disciplines those in political science were adopting classical linear practices, which blinded them to the dynamics that led to the Soviet Union's demise. In the end, we confront the reality that as with war, international relations is nonlinear. Indeed, so also are most things that flow from it, including strategies and strategic thinking.

Strategy and Strategic Thinking

Hew Strachan contends that "[t]he word 'strategy' has acquired a universality which has robbed it of meaning, and left it with only banalities." [xiv] This charge certainly fits American military officers, whose professional lexicon is careless at best, and often simply confused and meaningless. Throughout the U.S. defense community definitions of strategy abound, making any discussion of the subject difficult unless those involved first clarify their terminology.

So, at this point I'm compelled to tell the reader that my definition of strategy is specifically about linking military actions to a nation's policy goals, and ensuring the selected military ways and means achieve the policy ends in the manner that leaders intend. Today this normally involves two steps. The first is to determine a nation's grand strategy, or national security strategy in contemporary terminology, which lays out how that nation expects to coordinate and employ all elements of national power—diplomatic, economic, military, and informational—to protect its interests. The second step is to determine how the nation's military actions are to achieve the stated policy goals. This step includes the creation of operational plans, as well as the conceptual ideas that lead to operational doctrine.

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Historians and pundits have made a strong case that the United States has failed since the end of the Cold War to develop a national security strategy that articulates clear and attainable goals. More often what passes as goals are actually ambiguous statements meant to advance the cause of freedom and expand democratic ideals. These supposed national strategies are further hampered by a lack of detail on how the instruments of government might actually attain the stated goals, even when the strategies state those goals more concretely. Among the most significant reasons for these shortcomings are the absence of an identifiable threat, and flawed methodologies for thinking about the emerging international security environment.

Colin Gray argues in an article meant for defense planners that, "[b]y implication, strategy (and by extension defence planning) requires an enemy." [xv] Defense planning involves considering many factors. The products of this planning include national security and military strategies, guidance for development and employment of the force, and strategic guidance for combatant commanders, service chiefs, and heads of various defense agencies. The U.S. experiment with capabilities-based defense planning in the 1990s, as opposed to its traditional threat-based planning, proved less than successful, particularly in regard to writing the operating concepts that guide force development.

I use the definition for an operating concept contained in a respected paper on the subject of writing concepts: "An operating concept is the articulation in broad terms of the application of military art and science within some defined set of parameters. In simplest terms, operating concepts describe how military forces operate." [xvi] The U.S. military creates operating concepts for two reasons. First, to solve a problem, that is:

... propose a solution to an anticipated or newly identified military problem for which there is currently no adequate military solution. This new problem is brought about by some new combination of political, social, economic, technological, doctrinal or other factors. The new problem may be brought about by new objectives in an existing situation. For example, a situation itself may be unchanged, but political expectations may have increased, necessitating a new operating concept. [xvii]

Second, to take advantage of an opportunity, that is:

... propose a better solution than currently exists to an existing military problem. This better solution may be made possible by some technological, organizational, tactical, societal or other developments that did not

exist previously, or it may be necessitated by the failure of an existing operating concept.[xviii]

There are many signs that the failure of the United States to identify a potential enemy contributed to the nation's dismal attempts to develop imaginative operating concepts in the years leading up to September 11, 2001.[xix] A number of qualified observers have made known that factoring in an enemy and the challenge that this enemy presents is a core requirement to all defense planning. Williamson Murray, pointing to successful innovation in the years between the First and Second World Wars states, ". . . that in virtually every case was the presence of specific military problems the solution of which offered significant advantages to furthering the achievement of national strategy."[xx] Some very effective operating concepts were meant to take advantage of an opportunity, not solve a specific problem. For example, the use of V-22 tilt-rotor aircraft to enhance the concept of operational maneuver. Bottom line, the first order of business in all types of defense planning is to come some understanding of the emerging security environment, and to determine who might be an enemy.

the first order of business in all types of defense planning is to come some understanding of the emerging security environment, and to determine who might be an enemy

Most U.S. leaders have an unwarranted faith in the ability of various organizations and agencies to predict the emerging international security environment with some measure of accuracy. This predicting depends upon a number of techniques. One authority lists and evaluates the strengths and weaknesses of "three distinct methodologies currently in favor for use in assessing the future security environment: estimates, forecasts, and scenarios."[xxi] The record of success with all of these methodologies is dismal.

This should not surprise us for as a story of a detailed and extensive study evaluating expert judgment tells us: "The simple and disturbing truth is that experts' predictions were no more accurate than random guesses."[xxii] To illustrate this point, the team of an experienced and very practical U.S. General commissioned in 2010 to examine the coming operating environment found that the "common wisdom" about the future at the beginning of every decade for the past century was absolutely wrong.[xxiii] To those who understand nonlinear systems the reason is obvious, the interaction of so many variables causes countless unexpected and surprising events.

Yet despite this, too many strategists are unaware, perhaps even uninterested, in advances in the nonlinear sciences of the past half-century. Many, being pragmatic and ahistorical, are unlikely to have read these words from the "Dean of Cold War Historians," John Lewis Gaddis:

By the 1960s it was becoming apparent that . . . two whole classes of phenomena existed, one of which lent itself to prediction, and one that did not. Prediction was

possible where one or two variables interacted under known or controlled conditions. But if the number of variables increased even slightly, or if the conditions under which they operated changed even a little, all bets were off.[xxiv]

Similarly, most strategists likely missed the words of Williamson Murray, a historian reporting on advances in science who wrote:

...the world as a whole does not work in a mechanistic, deterministic fashion...complex social interactions like military innovation or actual combat do not reduce to simple, linear processes and...the study of human affairs, the interplay of literally hundreds, if not thousands of independent variables, is more of an art than a science.[xxv]

Good strategists know how nonlinear systems such as nation-states, non-state actors, international relations, politics, economics, wars, campaigns, and a host of others work in the real world. More importantly, they use this knowledge of a nonlinear world when they ponder strategic questions or recommend strategies. Good strategists don't depend on analytical tools to uncover the future security environment or potential enemies. Rather, they look to history and economic and demographic trends to inform their judgments of what might happen in a nonlinear world.

Operational Art

Following the end of the Vietnam War the U.S. military undertook an extensive examination of what went wrong. An outcome of this thorough assessment was an intellectual renaissance, leading to important changes in doctrine and military education.[xxvi] One of the products of the renewed interest in professional thought was the recognition of *operational art* as a needed activity to tie together strategy and tactics.

The term entered the U.S. military's lexicon in the 1986 edition of the U.S. Army's Field Manual 100-5, *Operations* with this definition: "Operational art is the employment of military forces to attain strategic goals in a theater of war or theater of operations through the design, organization, and conduct of campaigns and major operations."[xxvii] This definition of operational art reflected that of its originator, Soviet General-Major Alexander A. Svechin who introduced the term in 1922.[xxviii] "Svechin defined operational art as a critical conceptual linkage between tactics and strategy. In this manner, senior commanders transformed tactical success into operational 'bounds' to achieve strategic objectives."[xxix]

Another, but related, construct created by the American military during this intellectual renaissance was a three-level mental model of war, that is, the strategic, operational, and tactical levels. The rationale for this three-level construct was similar to that of operational art, that is, to enable commanders to plan campaigns and major operations that allowed U.S. forces to fight battles and engagements to accomplish a higher purpose — one related to the strategic and in turn policy goals. Properly designed campaigns

and operations were to overcome a serious and accurate charge that U.S. forces won every battle and engagement of the Vietnam War—on occasion at tremendous cost—even though they were unable to win the war itself because there was no overarching plan.[xxx] Political and strategic failures negated tactical successes in that tragic war.

Political and strategic failures negated tactical successes in that tragic war.

Regrettably, introduction of the operational level of war did not bring about the desired results. Rather than center attention on operational art, too many officers focused on mundane issues like what types of units were to deal with the operational and tactical levels, and the creation of new and more complicated planning techniques based on formal analyses. Noted historian Hew Strachan sees an even more pernicious fault with the so-called 'operational level' of war, that is, it "occupies a politics-free zone" where military officers are able to concentrate on maneuver while ignoring strategy and policy.[xxxi]

A better and more useful construct than the popular levels of war is one of *strategy*, *operational art*, and *tactics* with no artificial divisions. All strategies possess some degree of abstraction while tactics are always particular. The challenge is to convert the relative abstraction of strategy to the mechanics of tactic. Operational art serves as a bridge from strategy to tactics, while the operational level tends to erect boundaries between the two.[xxxii] Operational art's very purpose is to force discourse between policy makers, strategists and operational commanders. There can be no politics or strategy-free zone where operational artists practice their role professionally. The principal means of operational art is operational design whose purpose is to arrange campaigns and major operations in time and space to fulfill the aims of strategy, which in turn is to accomplish the goals of policy.

Ironically, this "new" approach is simply retuning the United States to similar ones many civilian and military leaders employed very well in the Second World War—though the military did not call it operational design. Unfortunately, such approaches atrophied in the years after the war as the entire U.S. defense community became enamored with applying management techniques to strategic, operational, and in some cases, tactical planning.

Operational Design

Information on operational design in U.S. joint doctrine has always been very thin, constituting little more than definitions such as the elements of operational design; examples being centers of gravity and lines of operation.[xxxiii] Though the U.S. military has been slow to adopt it, a more formidable approach to operational design exists. Retired Israeli Defense Force Brigadier General Shimon Naveh first introduced the outlines of this much improved method to the U.S. military in 2004.[xxxiv] Known as systemic operational design, it rests on an understanding of system theory. Due to language and

cultural differences, many U.S. officers found General Naveh's pure method unworkable. However, several individuals have revised and integrated his method with the concept of ill-structured or unstructured problems.[xxxv] The latter idea was offered by two sociologists in an important journal article in 1973.[xxxvi] These ill-structured problems exist as undesirable situations, and there is no obvious way to tackle them. They are not subject to intuition or analytical procedures; a rule-set does not exist for solving them. Each is unique; therefore, planners must uncover a structure.

The essence of this more modern approach to operational design requires a group of people knowledgeable about some aspect of an area, enemy, issue, and so forth to engage in a discourse as they attempt to give structure to what appears unstructured. This discourse must extend to policy makers and national strategists if the means and methods the participants recommend using are to support policy and strategy. All members of the group must be conversant with the basics of nonlinear systems as they undertake to create a system view, which they hope will reveal some structure.

The product they create not only reflects the nonlinearity of the system, it also serves as a shared mental model of how they perceive and think about the situation. In the act of creating that structure a potential solution commonly becomes self-evident. In place of the verb *structure* some have used words like *frame*, *set*, *formulate*, or *define* the problem. Of course, since the design team considers the problem as a nonlinear system there are a multitude of ways to structure it, which means there are no right and wrong answers, just better and poorer ones. Moreover, there are no permanent answers, just a way to act on the existing system to move it to a different and more desirable state. John Schmitt provides an eloquent and elegant synopsis of the central elements of design in his paper on the subject:

To the extent that we face socially complex, wicked problems, we should design before we plan and execute. Design is essentially the process of rationally formulating the problem to be solved out of the mess that confronts us, and doing it in such a way that the logic for solving the problem emerges intuitively. We design by holding a conversational discourse among stakeholders during which an image of the problem and the solution emerges gradually through the collective intelligence of the group subjected to critical argument. During operational design, we think systemically—we imagine the problem as a system driven primarily by its own purpose, structure and processes, but also influenced by the broader environment within which it exists. We do this by developing, testing and modifying conceptual models hypothesized to explain the workings of the system in its environment. Because we cannot observe the physical causality that underlies the situation, we test our hypothesis heuristically through action. We observe the results of our action to see if they conform to the expectations of our design, and we redesign accordingly. In this way, design provides the basis for assessment and for adapting our operations to the situation through learning.[xxxvii]

To date no part of the American Armed Forces has adopted this simple and common sense version of operational

design. Instead, each service and the joint community have attempted to merge some of the key ideas with old analytical methodologies, thus creating doctrinal publications that are confusing to readers in all cases and virtually unintelligible in others. To illustrate, U.S. Army Field Manual 5-0, *Operations Process* dated March 2010 and U.S. Marine Corps Warfighting Publication 5-1, *Marine Corps Planning Process* dated 24 August 2010 fail to capture the essence of the ideas espoused by General Naveh or the approach outlined in the Rittel and Webber article. On 7 October 2011 the Joint Staff J-7 issued a *Planner's Handbook for Operational Design*, Version 1.0 whose value is limited since it mixes some good material with other material that is especially bad. Moreover, the citations provide evidence that the authors of the publication had minimal knowledge of the important literature on system

theory and decision-making. This handbook refers to some of the ideas espoused by General Naveh and the approach described in the Rittel and Webber article, but it frequently misinterprets those ideas.

The United States and its allies need senior civilian officials and military officers who grasp the fundamental nature of systems, are adept at building shared mental models, comprehend the significance of Clausewitz's paradoxical trinity, understand operational art and can connect strategic thinking with tactical actions through operational design. These are the true competencies of modern defense professionals.

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- [i] Colin S. Gray, *War, Peace, and Victory: Strategy and Statecraft for the Next Century* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990), p. 14.
- [ii] Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary (New York: Barnes & Noble, 2003).
- [iii] John F. Schmitt, "Command and (Out of) Control: The Military Implications of Complexity Theory," *Complexity, Global Politics, and National Security*, edited by David S. Alberts and Thomas J. Czerwinski (Washington, DC: National Defense University, June 1997), p. 234. According to a 2 November 2011 e-mail to the author from John Schmitt, he drew from Heinz R. Pagels' *The Dreams of Reason: The Computer and the Rise of the Sciences of Complexity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988) in naming the two types of systems, especially from page 40. Reinforcing this paper's argument for the power of mental models are these words from that page: "What has changed is that we, in forming a picture of all sciences in our mind, have appealed to new categories in organizing that picture, categories that are informed by new instruments." A web search on 14 November 2011 does, however, show separate uses of the terms in other fields and contexts, none related to system theory.
- [iv] In chapters 1, 4 and 5 and scattered elsewhere in a well-argued book Colin Gray discusses the relationship of chaos theory to strategy. In a chapter endnote in that book he takes the author of this article and other defense scholars to task for, "... neglecting the fact that much, perhaps most, strategic behaviour in peace and war is significantly linear." (See note 1 on page 57 of chapter 1, "High Concept" of *Strategy for Chaos: Revolutions in Military Affairs and the Evidence of History*, Frank Cass: London, 2002.) I beg to differ. Scientists have long understood that any system where three or more elements have freedom of action is in effect nonlinear, that is, we can only approximate its motion and future state. Often referred to as the "three-body problem" because of its association with astronomers' inability to predict the future relationship of three heavenly bodies, it is more accurately an n-body problem. Certainly, Gray does not intend to imply that strategic behavior of any sort is limited to two elements. This inability to predict a motion or a future state does not mean, however, that strategists should throw up their arms in dismay for many nonlinear systems display patterns that allow us to manage our actions reasonably well. Otherwise we would never be able to drive safely, for traffic patterns are a nonlinear phenomena. Drivers as well as strategists, military commanders, and all experienced decision makers look for familiar patterns in nonlinear systems to guide their actions.
- [v] As an example, Jules Henri Poincare in his 1890 "Acta Mathematica" provided mathematical descriptions of the chaotic behavior evidenced in dynamical systems.
- [vi] A large number of books were published in the 1990s under the rubric of chaos or complexity theory that described the ubiquity of nonlinear systems. Among the most popular were: James Gleick's *Chaos: Making a New Science* (New York: Penguin Books, 1987), Mitchell Waldrop's *Complexity: The Emerging Science at the Edge of Order and Chaos* (New York, NY: Touchstone, 1993), and Murray Gell-Mann's *The Quark and the Jaguar: Adventures in the Simple and the Complex* (New York: W.H. Freeman and Company, 1994).
- [vii] Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, edited and translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1976), p. 89.
- [viii] Ibid. Several noted historians have mis-interpreted the people, army, and government as the primary elements of the "remarkable trinity" and then dismissed the trinity because of the supposed demise of governments and the rise of non-state actors. Among these are Martin van Creveld in *The Transformation of Warfare: The Most Radical Reinterpretation of Armed Conflict Since Clausewitz* (1991) and John Keegan in *A History of Warfare* (1993). Christopher Bassford has published several articles pointing out van Creveld and Keegan's erroneous interpretation of the Clausewitzian trinity (see <http://www.clausewitz.com/readings/Readings.shtml>).
- [ix] Clausewitz, 89.
- [x] The experiment is reflective of the "three-body—or more accurately n-body problem" (also discussed in endnote iv), which puzzled astronomers for generations. Employing Newtonian physics mathematicians could accurately determine the future position of two heavenly bodies affected by gravitational pull; adding a third body, however, precluded them from doing so. Only after many unsuccessful attempts did mathematicians come to understand that any system in which three or more elements have freedom of action will be inherently nonlinear; the future state of such a system is unknowable.
- [xi] Alan Beyerchen's "Clausewitz, Nonlinearity, and the Unpredictability of War" in *International Security* (Winter 1992/93), pp. 59-90 is the seminal work on Clausewitz and nonlinearity.
- [xii] Clausewitz, 75.
- [xiii] John Lewis Gaddis, "International Relations Theory and the End of the Cold War" in *International Security* (Winter 1992/93), pp. 5-58.
- [xiv] Hew Strachan, "The Lost Meaning of Strategy" in *Survival* (Autumn 2005), p. 34.
- [xv] Colin S. Gray, "Strategic Thoughts for Defence Planners" in *Survival* (June-July 2010), p. 170.
- [xvi] John F. Schmitt. *A Practical Guide for Developing and Writing Military Concepts*, Defense Adaptive Red Team (DART) Working Paper #02-4. (McLean, Virginia:

Hicks & Associates, Inc., December 2002), p. 7. (http://www.dtic.mil/futurejointwarfare/concepts/dart_paper.pdf)

[xvii] John Schmitt, *A Practical Guide to Developing and Writing Military Concepts*, Defense Adaptive Red Team (DART) Working Paper #02-4 (McLean, Virginia: Hicks & Associates, Inc., 2002), p. 12.

[xviii] Ibid.

[xix] Among the most egregious of the vacuous concepts developed during this period were "effects-based operations" and "network-centric operations." Neither these two nor other similarly weak concepts truly recognized a thinking and adaptive enemy.

[xx] Williamson Murray, "Innovation: Past and Future" in *Military Innovation in the Interwar Period* edited by Williamson Murray and Allan R. Millet (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 311.

[xxi] Sam J. Tangredi, *Futures of War: Toward a Consensus View of the Future Security Environment, 2010-2035* (Newport, Rhode Island: Alidade Press, 2008), p. 43.

[xxii] Dan Gardner, *Future Babble: Why Expert Predictions Are Next to Worthless and You Can Do Better* (New York: Dutton, 2011), p. 25. Gardner's book is based on a study by Phillip E. Tetlock described in his *Expert Political Judgment: How Good Is It? How Can We Know* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2005).

[xxiii] Joint Operating Environment, "Strategic Estimates," U.S. Joint Forces Command, February 18, 2010, signed by General James N. Mattis, U.S. Marine Corps.

[xxiv] Gaddis, p. 54.

[xxv] Ibid. p. 303.

[xxvi] Unfortunately, for all its successes this intellectual renaissance failed to capture and benefit from the hard lessons of the many years of counterinsurgency warfare in Vietnam, consequently, a new generation of soldiers and Marines was forced to learn these lessons again in Iraq and Afghanistan at great cost in lives, limbs, time, and dollars.

[xxvii] A current joint definition of operational art misses the mark: "The cognitive approach by commanders and staffs—supported by their skill, knowledge, experience, creativity, and judgment—to develop strategies, campaigns, and operations to organize and employ military forces by integrating ends, ways, and means." (DOD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/dod_dictionary/index.html, accessed on 11 May 2012). This definition is more appropriately that of operational design.

[xxviii] Jacob W. Kipp, "General Major A.A. Svechin and Modern Warfare: Military History and Military Theory" in *Aleksandr A. Svechin's Strategy* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: East View Information Services, 1991, a translation of *Strategiia*, Moscow: Voennyi vestnik, 1927), p. 23.

[xxix] Jacob W. Kipp, "The Tsarist and Soviet Operational Art, 1853-1991" in *The Evolution of Operational Art: From Napoleon to the Present*, edited by John Andreas Olsen and Martin van Creveld (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 65.

[xxx] Williamson Murray asserts in *Military Adaptation in War: With Fear of Change* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 29-30 that the battle at Landing Zone Albany during the Vietnam War was so pyrrhic that it can hardly be considered a victory. He also contends that the war was lost as a result of poor political and strategic decision making.

[xxxi] Strachan, p. 47.

[xxxii] Several observers have made the claim that operational art has usurped strategy. Among these are Justin Kelly and Mike Brennan in a monograph titled *Alien: How Operational Art Devoured Strategy* (Carlisle, Pennsylvania: U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, September 2009). Though well documented, the argument Kelly and Brennan present is disjointed and factually inaccurate in many areas; but, it is fatally flawed by their erroneous contention that: "It is time we returned what we now call campaign design to the political and strategic leadership of the country and returned operational art to its original venue, where it was overwhelmingly concerned with tactics." (See page viii.) Neither the Soviets who originated the term nor the Americans, who adopted and practiced it for some twenty years, ever saw operational art as "overwhelmingly concerned with tactics." Moreover, the term campaign design is unique to Kelly and Brennan as it does not appear in the DOD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms or the U.S. Joint Forces Staff College's *The Joint Officers Staff Guide*. The DOD Dictionary does define operational design: "The conception and construction of the framework that underpins a campaign or major operation plan and its subsequent execution." Kelly and Brennan also conflate operational art and campaigns when they write: "campaigns clearly need to be designed and that if we call this process 'operational art' it does not matter that we are diverging from the classical use of the term." (See page 3.) Classical use can only refer to the Soviet military's use of operational art, which saw operational art and campaign as separate and discrete things; therefore, Kelly and Brennan's recommendation makes no sense. Moreover, to suggest that operational art and campaigns are the same is as illogical as claiming that tactics and battles are the same thing. Surprisingly, Kelly and Brennan appear unaware of the latest research on Russian and Soviet development of operational art, for example Richard H. Harrison's 2001, *The Russian Way of War: Operational Art, 1904-1940*, which drew upon Russian military archives unavailable to earlier researchers. Another example is Bruce W. Menning's July 2005 translation of G.S. Isserson's, *The Evolution of Operational Art*. This is a U.S. Army School of Advanced Military Studies publication. Happily, Kelly and Brennan do make a case similar to the author of this article that the three-levels of war construct hinders clear thinking about war and war planning.

[xxxiii] See especially Joint Publications 3-0 Joint Operations and 5-0 Joint Operation Planning

[xxxiv] Following the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah War in Lebanon some analysts blamed the Israel Defense Force's deficiencies on its adoption and use of effects-based operations. There is evidence to support this contention. At least one analyst, Matt M. Matthews, however, incorrectly connected effects-based operations and systemic operational design as similar ideas in his occasional paper, *We Were Caught Unprepared*:

The 2006 Hezbollah-Israeli War (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: U.S. Army Combined Arms Center Combat Studies Institute Press, undated, p. 63): Shimon Naveh's SOD, which formed the core of the new IDF doctrine, also proved highly disruptive. The new language and methodology severely handicapped many commanders in the field. A large majority of IDF officers simply did not grasp the SOD-inspired doctrine. When the terminology made its way into at least one division's operation orders, the brigade commanders were at a complete loss to understand them. The use of this effects-based, SOD-inspired doctrine in the 2006 Hezbollah-Israeli war should promote spirited debate within the US Military's doctrinal establishment and stand as a lucient example of the limitations of EBO. [Italics added.]

Nothing could be more wrong; effects-based operations take a linear view of war and operations while systemic operational design takes a nonlinear view. They are polar opposites. Nonetheless, Matthews' accusation that systemic operational design terminology was extremely difficult to understand is accurate. Shimon Naveh's other work has been criticized by some as lacking intellectual rigor. His writing may contain errors (whose doesn't?), but his superb intellect is beyond reproach. I have worked with him on a number of projects and found his knowledge and insights on all aspects of war and warfare to be profound and often original. He is the most widely read person I know. Argumentative and even at times arrogant, he either overwhelms or infuriates the less informed.

[xxxv] The very best of several good pamphlets on operational design is John S. Schmitt's, *A Systemic Concept for Operational Design* published by the Marine Corps Combat Development Command, Concepts and Plans Division, Marine Corps Warfighting Lab in August 2006, http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/usmc/mcwl_schmitt_op_design.pdf. Also of some value is the former U.S. Joint Forces Command's *Design in Military Operations: A Primer for Joint Warfighters* published on 20 September 2010 as Pamphlet 10, part of its Joint Warfighting Center Joint Doctrine Series. A commercial company, Booz Allen Hamilton has created an extensive program, which it uses to educate military staffs on the new approach to operational design. The company has considerable written material on the subject that is useful, however, all of it is proprietary.

[xxxvi] Horst W. J. Rittel and Melvin M. Webber, "Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning," *Policy Sciences* 4 (1973), 155-169.

[xxxvii] John S. Schmitt, *A Systemic Concept for Operational Design* published by the Marine Corps Combat Development Command, Concepts and Plans Division, Marine Corps Warfighting Lab in August 2006, p. 32.



Living in a Mahanian World

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In the second decade of the 21st century the United States Navy faces a multitude of challenges. Operational requirements outpace the ability of the Navy to maintain and deploy the required assets to meet the demands of combatant commanders. Maintenance and readiness issues that have been put off for a decade, in order to cut costs and support the Navy's Fleet Response Plan deployment concept, have begun to impact the fleet.[i] Budgetary struggles look to shrink the future force and only make the problems worse.[ii] With these administrative and force disposition challenges as a background, the United States faces a world defined by globalization, instability, and rising powers. As the Department of Defense and the United States Navy enter a time of change and restructuring, there must be a strategic vision behind the decisions that are made for the future.

In recent years it has become common for naval leaders and analysts to discount the strategic thinking and writing of Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan.

In recent years it has become common for naval leaders and analysts to discount the strategic thinking and writing of Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan. They tell us that he wrote for a different time, and a different United States of America. They point to his book *The Influence of Seapower Upon History*, with its focus on the age of sail, and say that he has nothing

to offer the modern and high technology military forces of today. We have been encouraged to dismiss him because of his focus on battleships, or because his approaches are outdated.[iii]

These writers and thinkers are mistaken. While they focus on his single most famous work, and unthinkingly repeat decades old analysis taught by some academics, few of these writers appear to have actually read the works of Alfred Thayer Mahan. As the 20th century approached, and after its turn, the preeminent American Navalist penned over a dozen books and several dozen articles. His writings cover a multitude of topics from combat leadership to global strategy. The world that his Navy faced at the end of the 19th century has many similarities to the one we are experiencing at the opening of the 21st century. Much of his strategic thinking is applicable today, and deserves consideration as the maritime world faces the challenges of the new century.

Turn of the Century

Mahan wrote in a time of change and international development. Increasing consumption at the end of the 19th century led to a rise in living standards for most Americans, and other Western nations, when compared to the rest of the world. Economic interests took a primary place in the interaction between nations and the development of rapid transportation and communication systems, driven by steam power and undersea telegraph cables, began to link the globe. Today's writers would have said that the world was experiencing globalization. Mahan wrote that, "the vast increase in the rapidity of communication, has multiplied and strengthened the bonds knitting the interests of nations to one another, till the whole now forms an articulated system." [iv] He recognized that the interaction between nations was increasingly economic. It was apparent to him that in the new century's international relations "the maintenance of the status quo, for purely utilitarian reasons of an economical character, has gradually become the ideal." [v]

The rapid advance of modern technology created an increasingly interconnected world and Mahan perceived that while there were reasons to maintain the status quo, there were also other motivations at play. He believed that the increased speed of communication, and a view of

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national greatness that was purely economic, tended to make the new global international order excessively sensitive to disruption. He wrote that "commerce, on the one hand deters from war, on the other hand it engenders conflict, fostering ambitions and strifes which tend toward armed conflict." [vi] In a statement reminiscent of another great strategist, Carl von Clausewitz, Mahan wrote that "War is simply a political movement, though violent and exceptional in its character." [vii] Yet Mahan took a step beyond Clausewitz and tied the political, and military together with economics. He admitted that economic considerations can have a stabilizing effect on world affairs, but he also pointed out that though they were "logically separable, in practice the political, commercial, and military needs are so intertwined that their mutual interaction constitutes one problem." [viii] Economic or commercial motivations could drive a nation to military conflict just as easily as they could encourage stability in the global commons.

In a statement reminiscent of another great strategist, Carl von Clausewitz, Mahan wrote that "War is simply a political movement, though violent and exceptional in its character."

Looking East

With these conclusions as background Mahan looked at the world in an attempt to determine the next area of great conflict. His focus settled on Asia. Almost a century before today's writers and thinkers identified the start of a Pacific century; [ix] Mahan suggested that Japan, India, and China would become central players in a great economic and political conflict with the West. Mahan knew that the economic and political could not be separated from the military, and saw trouble in the future. He wrote, "as we cast our eyes in any direction, there is everywhere a stirring, a rousing from sleep," in the non-Western world, and a craving for the two advantages of the West at the turn of the last century: "power and material prosperity." [x]

Mahan admitted that generally the Western world knew less about China, but he argued that experience had already shown a forceful and determined character in the Chinese people.

His first indicator was the early development of Japan, and the Japanese adoption of some parts of Western culture and economics. He also saw India as having great potential. He saw in both countries the chance that they might adopt important portions of Western culture, resulting in what he called a "conversion". China, however, was a different story. Mahan admitted that generally the Western world knew less about China, but he argued that experience had already

shown a forceful and determined character in the Chinese people. He suggested that there was a general conservatism in Chinese culture, and he wrote that "comparative slowness of evolution may be predicated [*sic*], but that which for so long has kept China one, amid many diversities, may be counted upon in the future to insure a substantial unity of impulse." He feared that China would lead a rejection of Western values, and would pull the other future powers of Asia toward a conflict with the West. [xi]

Because other parts of the world aspired towards the power and material prosperity of the West, Mahan believed conflict would begin in the realm of economic competition. He believed that access to markets, as well as the raw materials needed for production, were at the heart of the economic competition between nations. He wrote that "as the interaction of commerce and finance shows a unity in the modern civilized world, so does the struggle for new markets and for predominance in old, reveal the un-subdued diversity." [xii] As the large populations of Asia struggled to gain their economic strength, and achieve the power and prosperity of the West, Mahan thought that they were likely to do so based on their own cultural norms, rather than those of the West. Of China and the West he said that "they are running as yet on wholly different lines, springing from conceptions radically different." [xiii] In the future he believed that these differences would result in competition and conflict.

Mahan believed that the world was "at the beginning of this marked movement" toward economic cooperation balanced by competition that would bring nations into political and military conflict with one another. [xiv] He reminded his readers that "those who want will take, if they can, not merely from motives of high policy and as legal opportunity offers, but for the simple reasons that they have not, that they desire, and that they are able." Because of this, and because of the fact that "we are not living in a perfect world, and we may not expect to deal with imperfect conditions by methods ideally perfect," Mahan turned his attention to military policy. [xv]

Preparing for Conflict

As the United States approached the beginning of the 20th century, Alfred Thayer Mahan looked at his nation's military policy and saw disaster on the horizon. If his analysis of international affairs was correct, if the United States faced a time of rapid globalization, rising powers from the non-Western world, and particularly the awakening giant of China and Asia, then the military policy of the United States was in need of a drastic overhaul.

Mahan was living in a United States that considered the Army more important to national security than the Navy.

Mahan was living in a United States that considered the Army more important to national security than the Navy. He lamented the fact that "of invasion, in any real sense of the word we run no risk, and if we did it must be at sea...yet the

force of men in the navy is smaller, by more than half, than that in the army." [xvi] He felt it clear that overseas commerce, overseas political relationships, and commercial routes that were maritime in nature, would dominate as "the primary objects of external policy of nations." It was only logical that "the instrument for the maintenance of policy directed upon these objects is the Navy." [xvii] The nations of Europe, at the time the great powers of the world, were on the same page as Mahan. He noticed that the newspapers and political journals of Europe were showing an appreciation for the importance of naval forces in the new century, and it was reflected in the growth of naval spending and sizes of fleets. [xviii]

Approaching the question of military organization for the United States, Mahan wrote that it was wrong to start with the sizes of the armies and navies of the world with the idea of coming up with a mathematical equation that would allow you to ensure your own superiority. Instead he felt that it was better to determine "what there is in the political status of the world, including not only the material interests but the temper of nations, which involves a reasonable, even though remote, prospect of difficulties which may prove insoluble except by war." Those prospective difficulties provided the guidance for the strategic vision of the nation. He continued that "it is not the most probable of danger, but the most formidable that must be selected as measuring the degree of military precautions to be embodied in the military preparations thenceforth to be maintained." [xix]

Mahan believed that, because of the challenges faced by the United States at the start of the 20th century, a military organization that favored naval power was the most strategically viable course for his country. The most reasonable "prospective difficulties" that the United States would face would be overseas. The most formidable danger, an attack on the United States itself, would have to come from overseas. He wrote, "every danger of a military character to which the United States is exposed can be met best outside her own territory - at sea. Preparedness for naval war - preparedness against naval attack and for naval offence - is preparedness for anything that is likely to occur." [xx]

Mahan feared the political process in the United States would never be able to provide the nation with a defense policy based on such a strategic foundation

Responding to both of these threats, the most reasonable and the most formidable, required a strong and forward deployed naval presence. Despite the clarity of his reasoning, Mahan feared the political process in the United States would never be able to provide the nation with a defense policy based on such a strategic foundation. He knew that the political establishment was more interested in making everyone happy and was "too often equally unable to say frankly, 'This one is chief; to it you others must yield.'" Instead he foresaw a pendulum that would swing wildly between extremes, or even worse in his opinion, "all alike receive less...in other words, the contents of the national purse are distributed instead of

being concentrated upon a leading conception, adopted after due deliberation, and maintained with conviction." [xxi] It was a recipe for strategic failure for a great power.

The Modern World

While the technology of today's United States Navy has developed far beyond anything Mahan could have conceived, it is unlikely that it would surprise him. He recognized the importance of what he called "rapid mechanization" or what we call the development of high technology. The political state of the world that the United States faces today, meanwhile, would not have surprised Mahan at all. Globalization, rising powers, Asian development, and the impact of technology were just as important a century ago as they are today.

As the defense budgets of the United States and the European Union contract in the early 21st century it is important that policymakers understand the world that they face, and consider the strategic questions that should guide their decisions. Alfred Thayer Mahan laid out the questions that need to be asked when facing similar challenges. Answering them can help create a sound foundation for any new approach to defense spending, as the 21st century progresses.

First, what in the "temper of nations" around the world could lead to a reasonable expectation of armed conflict? Considerations should include growing movements in the non-Western world for freedom and representative government and the potential conflict of that temperament with the spread of radical and religious ideologies. The role played by smaller nations like Iran and North Korea, in attempting to exploit the divisions and uncertainty that have been introduced by the most recent round of globalization, must also be taken into account. The growing potential for economic competition between the rising powers of China, India, and Brazil on the one hand and established great powers like the United States and European Union on the other raises a reasonable expectation of conflict in the future. The diplomatic and military wrangling in the South China Sea revolves around economics as much as nationalism and militarism. [xxii]

The prospect of an armed conflict between the United States and China or one of the other rising powers, sparked by economic competition, is a very formidable challenge and a more direct threat to the United States.

Secondly, what is the most formidable of these potential conflicts? While the clash between authoritarian governments and the building momentum of freedom movements is likely to create conflict, it produces little direct strategic threat to the United States as a nation. Likewise, attempts to exploit international instability by regional powers will probably

impact American policy and interests, but not the security of the country's borders. The prospect of an armed conflict between the United States and China or one of the other rising powers, sparked by economic competition, is a very formidable challenge and a more direct threat to the United States.[xxiii] Mahan would not suggest ignoring the first two reasonable expectations, but according to his strategic approach the focus should be on the final, and most formidable, threat to American security.

The makers of defense policy today face the same challenges in the development of sound, defense policy shaped by a clear strategy as Mahan lamented in his day. The tendency in the halls of power to avoid making hard decisions has not changed. As the United States approaches significant cuts in defense spending there have already been calls to divide the cuts evenly between the budgets of the services, ignoring Mahan's warning against the great risks of such a policy. The rise of counter-insurgency theory, or COIN, and the identified risk of applying that operational and tactical template to strategic problems, also demonstrates a potential risk of the pendulum that the Captain warned about.[xxiv]

A Mahanian World

The world of Mahan is today.

The world of Mahan is today. The international challenges that the United States faced, that sparked Mahan's writing and thinking, are strikingly similar to those which we face a century later. The basic principles of national strategy and armed conflict have not changed, despite the rapid advancement of technology and a new version of globalization that has left the colonial model behind. Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan wrote about much more than simply battleships and overseas colonies. His voluminous books and articles provide illumination and insight that would serve today's military leadership as well as the commonly discussed lessons of other great strategic thinkers like Clausewitz or Sun Tzu. To help face a world of globalization, rising powers, increasing worldwide spending on naval forces, and a rapidly developing Asia, students, officers and policymakers will all benefit from reading the works of America's great strategic thinker, Alfred Thayer Mahan.

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- [x] Mahan, "Twentieth Century," 244.
- [xi] *Ibid.*, 237.
- [xii] Mahan, "Considerations," 146-7.
- [xiii] Mahan, "Twentieth Century," 228.
- [xiv] Mahan, "Considerations," p. 147.
- [xv] Mahan, "Twentieth Century," p. 230, 244.
- [xvi] Mahan, "Preparedness," p. 212.
- [xvii] Mahan, "Considerations," 149.
- [xviii] Alfred Thayer Mahan, "The Future in Relation to American Naval Power," in *The Interest of America in Sea Power, Present and Future*, (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, and Company, 1897): p. 184.
- [xix] Mahan, "Preparedness," p. 180.
- [xx] *Ibid.*, 214.
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Clearing the Air - Taking Manoeuvre and Attrition Out of Strategy

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In defining the aim of strategy Basil Liddell Hart stated, 'The perfection of strategy would be...to produce a decision without any serious fighting.'^[i] This approach, with its central premise of strategic dislocation, would be the first of what has become an enduring debate within the discourse of war and strategy. This article will evaluate arguments that strategies emphasizing manoeuvre are superior to those that focus on attrition. It will argue that not only does putting the idea of attrition and manoeuvre into opposition create a false dichotomy but that these concepts are tactical, and not strategic, in nature. Ultimately, the ideas of annihilation and exhaustion, as distinct from manoeuvre and attrition, may better serve as components of a superior strategic model.

Formation of the debate

In analyzing the question of strategies of manoeuvre and attrition, we will look at two fundamental problems that become apparent as one sorts through the literature on the subject:

1. The definitions of manoeuvre and attrition within much of the literature is loose and inconsistent, creating a logical fallacy of a false dichotomy;
2. Arguments are often framed within poor definitions of strategy itself.

The first notable idea of a distinct strategy based on manoeuvre followed on the heels of the First World War. Basil Liddell Hart, in a series of writings, saw two forms of warfare within what he dubbed the 'direct' and the 'indirect'

approach^[ii]. Critical of the stalemate on the Western Front during the First World War, where generals would 'batter their heads against the nearest wall' using a direct approach of position and attrition, Liddell Hart proposed the ideal execution of strategy as one that sought 'not so much battle as...a strategic situation so advantageous that if it does not of itself produce the decision, its continuation by a battle is sure to achieve this.' This indirect approach aimed to dislocate the enemy, on the physical and (preferably) psychological spheres, to produce dissolution or disruption of his fighting force.^[iii]

Debate similar to this would reappear in the 1970s in the format we are most familiar with. Concerned with the U.S. Army's revision of its fundamental land doctrine, FM 100-5, critique from commentators such as William Lind attacked, amongst other things, a continued adherence to firepower/attrition doctrine, as opposed to manoeuvre doctrine. Lind claimed that attrition doctrine utilized manoeuvre to bring fire on the enemy and cause attrition; while manoeuvre doctrine, developed by the Germans following the First World War, embraced firepower as an enabler for manoeuvre that could then break the enemy's spirit and will to create favourable operational or strategic conditions.^[iv]

As those familiar with the theory know, Lind's ideas would touch off a long-running debate on the validity (and superiority) of what would come to be termed 'manoeuvre warfare.'

As those familiar with the theory know, Lind's ideas would touch off a long-running debate on the validity (and superiority) of what would come to be termed 'manoeuvre warfare.' For Lind, manoeuvre warfare was based upon the idea of Boyd Cycles, or the speed in which a unit could cycle through an iterative process of observe-orient-decide-act. Manoeuvre for Lind was to 'out Boyd cycle' the enemy, causing him to lose cohesion and no longer fight effectively.^[v] The subject of many a service article or staff college paper, manoeuvre warfare divided the profession of arms.

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Contemporaries of Lind also focused critiques on the doctrinal imbalance in Central Europe caused by an American adherence to attritional warfare as opposed to a more dynamic manoeuvre form.[vi] Edward Luttwak would broaden this into his own theory of the manoeuvrist strategy, defining attritional war as a strategy to win through the cumulative destruction of the enemy through superior firepower and material strength. Relational manoeuvre, on the other hand, was a strategy focusing on the incapacitation of enemy capabilities through systemic disruption, rather than physical destruction.[vii]

Other figures, both military and academic, entered the manoeuvre/attrition ring with their own ideas. A leading British proponent, Richard Simpkin, wrote of attrition or positional theory that concerned itself with fighting — focused on casualties to enemy personnel and materiel — to create a shift in relative strengths. This was contrasted with manoeuvre theory, the pre-emption and exploitation of enemy vulnerabilities and the circumstances of the battlefield to undermine the will to fight.[viii] Others engaged in the discussion with variations of this paradigm, but the general idea of a diametric relationship of manoeuvre and attrition remained dominant in the debate over military doctrine.

Conceptual and historical problems

As one takes in the expanse of ink spilled over the manoeuvre/attrition debate, the problem of a lack of firm conceptual definitions becomes apparent. In terms of manoeuvre, there are a variety of explanations as to what constitutes manoeuvre warfare. Liddell Hart's indirect approach sought dislocation, but did not quite explain how it was to be accomplished. Luttwak proposed relational manoeuvre as systemic disruption through the targeting of enemy weaknesses. Lind states that the essence of manoeuvre warfare is more than gaining physical positional advantage, but also defeating the enemy through superior tempo, specifically in terms of Boyd cycles.[ix] Simpkin points to manoeuvre as an added dimension of attritional warfare that saw the superimposing of active measures for pre-emption.[x]

When taken as a whole, theories of manoeuvre often boil down to simply fighting effectively; the prescriptive aspects of much of manoeuvre theory can be reduced to obvious statements of good tactical sense, such as targeting an enemy's vulnerabilities or using surprise. Creating a theory that collects all sensible operational activities under one banner has in fact simply formed a mystique that is immune to criticism. If you're good, you're a manoeuvrist; if you're not, you're a clumsy attritionist fit to sit in the trenches with Haig and Foch. The value beyond any cognitive exercise is apparent; as one critic stated, manoeuvre warfare is 'a bag of military Doritos - tasty and great fun to munch, but not very nutritious.'

This cherry picking and confusion also finds its way into the historiography of manoeuvre proponents. Lind claims the first recorded instance of manoeuvre warfare as being the battle of Leuctra in 371 B.C. simply because the Thebans attacked the Spartans on the flank.[xiii] It seems a stretch to equate tactical envelopment contrived by a wily commander in Epaminondas with a complete system of warfare underpinned

by a philosophy of superior tempo to undermine the will of the enemy. The German *Wehrmacht* of the Second World War also gains laurels as a manoeuvrist force. Proponents handily ignore the facts of grinding campaigns of exhaustion in North Africa and the steppes of the Soviet Union. Instead, the argument tends to focus heavily on the 1940 campaign in France. Yet here, too, sweeping claims of a manoeuvrist approach have since run into trouble against more detailed historical analysis that shows the German victory to be almost accidental or 'attritional' at times, with lessons only being codified after the campaign[xv].

cherry picking and confusion also finds its way into the historiography of manoeuvre proponents

The 1940 campaign also serves to show the strawman that is built out of attrition. Manoeuvrists tend to hold the French of 1940 as an attritional force hiding behind the Maginot line. But closer analysis shows the shallowness of this argument; the French had a mobile force and were not seeking costly battles but rather a mobile, forward strategy in the Low Countries. This was strategically sound considering the vulnerability of the northern, resource-rich departments of France. French failure is rooted in reasons far more complicated than simply their desire to fight a war of attrition.

If manoeuvre has been over-credited in the manoeuvrist dialogue, then attrition suffered the fate of the whipping boy. As opposed to manoeuvre, the definition of attrition is quite consistent in various theories; simple, unimaginative physical destruction of men and material, a match of strength-on-strength to overwhelm the enemy. In another showing of poor history, attrition is generally established as an unattractive and less sophisticated option — a punching bag for the shrewdness of manoeuvrists to exploit.

Yet detailed case studies of the actual employment of attrition, from the First World War to Korea and Vietnam, conclude that attritional approaches are actually undertaken for the opposite reasons than those given by manoeuvrists. Attrition in these cases was not used to create bloody sloggish matches, but rather designed to preserve friendly forces. Additionally, numerical superiority was not a defining factor of attrition, and annihilation of the enemy was rarely sought. [xvi]

The varied definitions and poor use of history serves to undermine the normative value of the concept of manoeuvre warfare. John Kiszely noted that such oversight has made much of the debate meaningless to military and strategic thought due to its lack of anything more than conceptualism, and its propensity to bandy about terms without consideration of the underlying meaning or context. He highlights the need for a proper conceptual glossary to bring some concrete utility to the concepts.[xvii] There is indeed a need for such discipline.

Adding discipline to the doctrinal discussion

I can now apologize for dragging readers through the

trenches of doctrinal debates fought before, but I assure you there is purpose to this. Let's start with doctrinal discipline. For doctrine to be of use, a common understanding between its practitioners is necessary. These definitions already exist and are agreed upon by western militaries in the form of NATO standardized definitions. Manoeuvre is defined as employment through 'movement in combination with fire...to achieve a position of advantage in respect to the enemy...'[xviii] Likewise, the common definition of attrition is 'the reduction of the effectiveness of a force caused by loss of personnel and material.'[xix] To go beyond these simple and effective terms is to invite confusion.

For doctrine to be of use, a common understanding between its practitioners is necessary.

If we use these definitions, we are provided with more concrete explanations as to what attrition and manoeuvre actually are. Attrition is an absolute. If I lose 100 tanks or 200 soldiers on the battlefield, my force has suffered attrition. Manoeuvre is also an absolute. If my armoured brigade penetrates into your rear area astride your lines of communication, then I have clearly employed manoeuvre. Manoeuvrists argue that manoeuvre is more than simple movement to gain advantage, but their disunity as to what the 'more' actually entails makes such an argument limited in its utility.

If we accept the definitions above then the first fundamental problem of the manoeuvre/attrition debate becomes evident. When one considers what actually occurs in an engagement, then establishing manoeuvre and attrition as diametrically opposed forms of fighting creates a false dichotomy. Some proponents try to address this; Luttwak is careful to term the relationship of attrition and manoeuvre as one on a spectrum. Others are not so concerned, such as Lind with his generations of war approach; one that clearly points to manoeuvre as a superior form of fighting compared to its older, outmoded opposite of attrition.

The reality is that combat involves both manoeuvre and attrition. Dislocation cannot occur without attrition and destruction cannot occur without manoeuvre. Manoeuvre and attrition are tools of tactics and are better defined as a complementary system, a yin and yang, that occurs in the engagement. Manoeuvre positions forces to inflict attrition on the enemy while attrition disrupts the enemy to enable manoeuvre. These elements are combined in the realm of tactics to cause physical destruction and psychological disruption: resulting in tactical victory.

Critical to all of this is that manoeuvre and attrition are clearly tactical in nature. They are concerned with concrete battlefield events. While theorists will argue that manoeuvre is about an operational level (Lind) or a strategic one (Mearsheimer), nothing about manoeuvre and attrition as explained above really leaves the battlefield. They are not strategic principles.

If manoeuvre and attrition are tactical concepts, then what provides us with a better understanding of strategic tools to

link tactics and policy? The discourse on strategy has suffered from the same problems as manoeuvre, with expansion of the definition to be so inclusive at times that it is robbed of its utility as a military concept.[xx] Hew Strachan laments that strategy — being usurped by politicians, academics and think-tanks — has bled into the realm of policy, presenting the conundrum as to whether a strategy defines a policy or a policy defines a strategy.[xxi]

the way to achieve those aims, consists of one primary element, as 'there is only one means in war: combat

Therefore, when considering strategy, the classical definition provided by Clausewitz will be used. This, the ways to which means are linked to ends, is 'the use of the engagement for the purpose of war.'[xxii] How does this classical conceptualization of strategy work? Clausewitz again lends us a useful tool with his dialectic of ends and means. He explained that the political rationale behind a state's move to war becomes its aim, or the ends of war.' [xxiii] The means, the way to achieve those aims, consists of one primary element, as 'there is only one means in war: combat'[xxiv].

Lt. Col (Ret.) Jim Storr has provided a graphic depiction of the dialectic of ends and means that provides an excellent picture of the relationships that occur in war. The dialectic of ends (or aims) and means creates competing relationships between aims (political discourse between groups) as well as competing relationships between means (the engagement). It is in the middle ground, consisting of numerous relationships linking ends to means — and how combat and its outcome affect both participants in a war — where the realm of strategy exists:

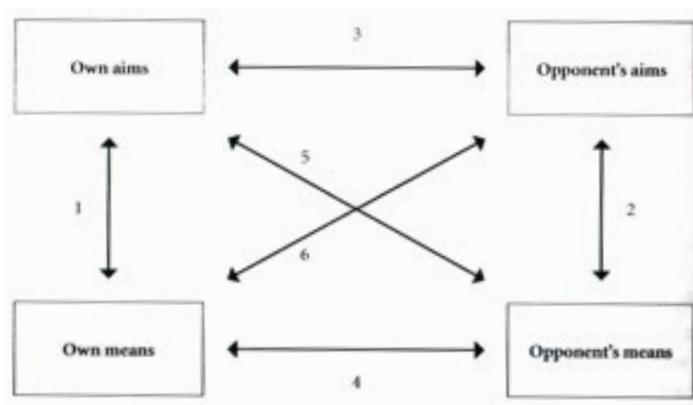


Figure 1 [xxv]

As illustrated, strategy is a two-way relationship. It is shaped and informed by policy, the aims of war, in the determination of appropriate means. It is also shaped by consideration of the means of war, combat, and its effect on all war aims. Thus strategy shapes, and is shaped by, both aims and means. With the concepts of policy, strategy and tactics overlain on this dialectic, we get the following:

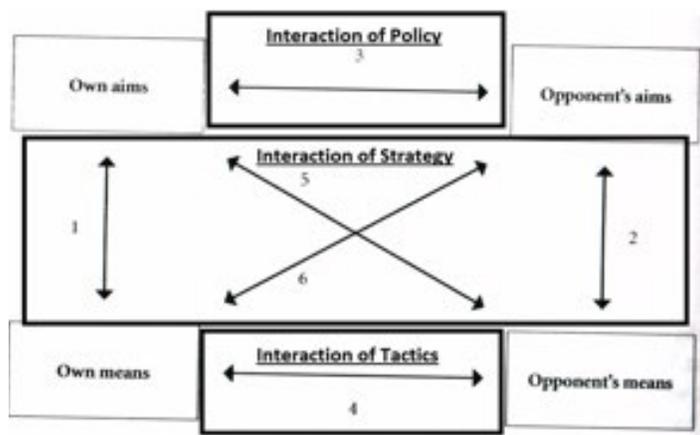


Figure 2

The engagement provides an input into strategy through the provision of tactical decision, and a change in the disposition of the battlefield. Strategy acts to translate these battlefield changes — caused, as we have no established, by attrition and manoeuvre — into something that can feed into both one's own aims as well as the opponent's. In targeting the opponent's aims (and protecting one's own), strategy can be seen at its root as a system for impacting the will of an opponent to continue pursuing his aims. A successful strategy, therefore, is not one that kills the most soldiers or achieves the ideal manoeuvre in relation to the opponent, but rather one that forces a culminating point on the will of the opponent to continue with his policies.

This provides a simple explanation as to why tactical successes do not always equal victory. The interaction of tactics, which features the relationship of manoeuvre and attrition, can produce dozens of defeated divisions and an advantageously situated friendly force, but strategy must put this to use. As Clausewitz points out, 'war, that is the animosity and the reciprocal effects of hostile elements, cannot be considered to have ended so long as the enemy's will has not been broken'. The will is broken when the enemy leadership sues for peace or the population submits. [xxvi]

The will is broken when the enemy leadership sues for peace or the population submits.

Influencing strategic will

What elements work within strategy as it attempts to introduce this culminating point on the opponent's will? A useful concept is derived from Hans Delbruck's notion of the strategies of annihilation and exhaustion. Originally conceived to explain the linkage of war to politics, Delbruck's model saw a single-pole strategy (annihilation) that sought decisive battle while a double-pole strategy of battle and movement (exhaustion) aimed to husband resources and seek battle at the appropriate time to wear an opponent down. [xxvii]

But, in our case, we are not looking for a system to discuss

decisiveness in battle (this is manoeuvre and attrition) but decisiveness in war. As discussed above, this involves forcing a culminating point on the opponent's will. The Delbruck model still works, but must be amended to target will, and not enemy forces.

In doing so, the definitions change. A strategy of exhaustion is one that uses the engagement of forces to chip away at the will of the opponent. What is critical in this definition is what separates it from attrition. Attrition is the wastage of physical forces — men, equipment and resources. Exhaustion is the wastage of will. Will can be chipped away through economic strangulation and blockade, social repercussions due to high losses in the field, or through an inability to achieve aims in an acceptable period of time.

A strategy of annihilation is one that seeks to directly disrupt or dislocate the enemy's will.

A strategy of annihilation is one that seeks to directly disrupt or dislocate the enemy's will. However, this is much simpler than Liddell Hart's esoteric dislocation through an indirect approach. A strategy of annihilation seeks to maximize destruction within time and space to impact the enemy's aims. Unlike the indirect approach, annihilation seeks serious fighting sequenced in a decisive manner. This destruction is a key aspect of conflict and is, realistically, hard to achieve. [xxviii]

A key distinction is that while attrition and manoeuvre are absolute (10,000 casualties are 10,000 casualties), annihilation and exhaustion are contextual and are based upon the aims set by policy and the nature of the group undertaking them — 10,000 casualties will likely have separate implications for state A than state B.

In this model, therefore, exhaustion and annihilation exist as two poles of strategy. But as with manoeuvre and attrition, they exist in a relationship with shades of grey. As one does not simply manoeuvre or attrit, one cannot purely exhaust or annihilate the enemy. Even in cases such as the Franco-Prussian War or the Gulf War, where tactical victory was complete, the losing side continued to pursue an altered strategy (in the former a siege of Paris was required, the latter saw Saddam pull back to Iraq) as it still possessed some will to continue.

For a strategist considering the shades of an exhaustion/annihilation relationship in his approach, a vital area to focus on is the key distinction of time and space. Consideration of the dialectic of ends and means aims to give the strategist an idea of the time and space required to achieve friendly aims (and defeat the opponent's).

The other key consideration is one's capabilities as compared to the opponent's. Such a comparison should inform how one's means can impact the opponent's aims. An effective system of strategy should analyse aims and means to determine what degree or mix of annihilation and exhaustion is required to provide the culminating point on the opponent's will. The variation of annihilation/exhaustion should provide three

things to a strategist; support to his own ends, a way to attack enemy means and plans to undermine his ends. With this basic relationship conceptualized, concrete manifestation can begin to take shape with a strategic approach (offence or defence) and strategic employment within theatres of war (naval blockade, limited territorial acquisition, destruction of field armies, etc).

Now for the 'so what' of all of this. The fact that manoeuvre warfare's ability to garner discussion has faded over the last decade in the face of insurgencies in Afghanistan and Iraq has demonstrated the likelihood of it being a fad. Clumsy attempts to shoehorn it into an insurgent model with 'Fourth-Generation Warfare' have not made it any more appealing.

For strategic and tactical terminology to be of use, it should have both some enduring properties and some concrete value to those who practice it. I've attempted to impose some rules on the model to give strategy this contextual discipline, as described above.

Yet elements of strategy should be relatively immutable, equally applicable in a conventional battle between states or an insurgency in the world's forgotten corners — and of course, always of some use to practitioners. While I don't pretend to have this timeless thesis just yet, hopefully I've helped to clear the air somewhat on what could be a good start.

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Married to Clausewitz but Sleeping With Jomini: How Operational Concepts Masquerade as Strategy, and Why They Must

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"War is nothing but the continuation of policy with other means." This simple statement's implications are unquestionably profound. Its common sense conclusion found in hindsight does nothing to diminish the importance of the statement. Typically the Fog of War and War's friction machine dominates discussions of Clausewitz's defining contributions to military thought. With any hope however, inevitably, the former statement must overshadow any discussion of national military strategy. Even the definition of strategy itself defies simple explanation. My military-issue American Heritage Dictionary defines it as both "The science or art of military command as applied to the overall planning and conduct of large-scale combat operations" and "The art or skill of using stratagems in endeavors such as politics and business." The vague understanding of even the definition results in a complex problem, where political infighting and the resulting lack of a coherently consistent national strategy in the US create the requirement for a massive and unsustainable military.

Suffice for this discussion, strategy is the means by which ultimate political goals are achieved. The Department of Defense does not limit itself to military mechanisms when discussing and planning strategy. The acronym "DIME" is a model to incorporate the diplomatic, informational, military and economic power of a nation working together to

achieve its objectives. But DIME is limited to discussions only around the military planners' table, as the other three remain effectively out of the grasp of the military. Theoretically, the US Government firmly controls both the diplomatic and military arms, but even these two are more often seen grappling with each other rather than our nominative antagonist. The economic might of the nation, outside of foreign aid and assistance, can only be manipulated with difficulty to our objectives. The government's most decisive effect on the economy is the power to destroy it. Finally, the informational battle is one against the medium more often than the foe. Thus leaving the military grasping to provide a singular solution to what should be a nationally coordinated hydra.

Suffice for this discussion, strategy is the means by which ultimate political goals are achieved.

These issues, as daunting as they certainly are, pale against the most challenging aspect of American Strategy: effectively we have none. The bi-polar nature of American politics leaves our two political parties (and their often exchanged chief executives) in a fight against one another for national political power. That is their ultimate political objective: retaining or regaining power. In the contest for the Presidency especially, differentiation between candidates on national security grounds is a key discriminator. A candidate has the luxury of running a political campaign on the foreign policy wrongheadedness of his opponent. The political tack of stating "Everything my predecessor did was wrong" comes with a significant practical cost for a military procuring on multi-decade timelines. In the absence of an existential threat previously in the formidable form of the Soviet Union, our would-be Commanders in Chief have the freedom to completely change, manipulate, reverse and undermine their political opponent's currently standing strategy. Clausewitz certainly never assumed in developing his theories that the Prussian nation would completely change its foreign policy objectives twice per decade. And he certainly didn't envision a 30-year time line for the procurement of key weapon systems to achieve those same off-changing objectives. Had he done so, Clausewitz may never have put pen to paper and rightfully retreated into insanity.

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These issues, as daunting as they certainly are, pale against the most challenging aspect of American Strategy: effectively we have none.

When you only control 25% of the mechanisms of national strategy, and that strategy itself is subject to rapid and radical change, this leads the military to develop operational concepts that must cover every conceivable enemy, in every conceivable circumstance, in any terrain or theater. It is said that money makes one stupid. The horrific elegance of the 9/11 attacks was the direct result of any enemy with a fixed strategy executed with limited means. Until quite recently the United States suffered the opposite, a fluid strategy with unlimited means. As ugly as that combination was, it was manageable. But, as our unlimited means inherited from our Cold War armories melt away in our fiscal troubles, our fluid (or, less charitably, confused, ineffective and ultimately of questionable existence) strategy now looms imposing for military planners who are running out of options.

AirSea Battle is the schizophrenic result of this conundrum. While nominally a response to our shifting Pacific focus, it is easily seen uncharitably as a necessary procurement justification exercise with the façade of strategic planning. The US does need ships and planes. But one cannot call counting targets and dividing by ships and planes a strategy. In this absence of a coherent strategy, the US Military cannot take intelligent, mitigated risks. Moreover, the US can't procure what it requires on 24 and 48-month political timelines. As money makes us stupid, it is a logical corollary that stupidity is expensive. As long as our civilian masters who unquestionably and rightly wield the military arm cannot agree to coherent national strategies, it is the military's duty to ensure their military is in the best possible position to do whatever is asked of them. That tragically requires the threadbare justifications by the two most technology dependent branches of service, and concurrent bill-paying by the other two.

The growth of Special Operations Forces (SOF) as a stand-alone element is another symptom of the situation. Much like insurgency is a method of warfare for combatants poor in physical capital but rich in political capital, political leaders have flocked to the promise of rapier-like SOF capability with comparatively little political risk but with significant practical cost.

Like all Combatant Commanders, the creation of Joint commands was partially an attempt to merge the elements of national power, which in actuality turned the concept of "DIME" into the reality of "diMe." In the specific case of USSOCOM, our leaders have become quite enamored with benefiting from operations with little or no political visibility. They have been thus even further distanced from the personal political risk to which Presidents have been exposed since the ratification of the Constitution.

And what of the enemy that dare not speak its name? China is unquestionably in competition with the United States, wielding deftly three of the four mechanisms of national strategy; the three the US military cannot grasp nor at times

it appears comprehend. The US will likely dominate every aspect of the Military field for the foreseeable future. But a race car without a steering wheel still cannot win the race. The go-cart equivalent of China is driven effectively and decisively. Even the most paranoid cannot envision China being an existential threat to the US the way the Soviet-led Communist movement was. In the absence of this clarifying threat, we are left with endless contradictions that lay bare the thin veneer of American so called "strategy." We seek a trillion dollar military solution to a foreign military that is largely funded by the US trade deficit. We seek a military arms race against a nation whose ultimate aims appear identical to our own; namely stability of East Asia and a reunified China. We will procure planes and ships to defend the East Asian status quo, and the US will borrow the money we require, in part, from the very source of that perceived instability, China.

China is unquestionably in competition with the United States, wielding deftly three of the four mechanisms of national strategy

Our most effective weapon we currently have against China is "Most Favored Nation" trading status. As dependent as we are on them, their recent attempts to stimulate internal demand in China are in their infancy and the Chinese export driven economic model remains dependent upon Western markets; most notably the US. Only in continuing the astonishing growth rate will the Chinese Communist Party satiate the legitimate desires of 1.3 billion Chinese citizens who rightfully question the distribution of China's growing and impressive wealth. This requisite growth rate can only be gained by lop-sided, though nominally "fair", trade with the United States; itself openly planning to counter a Chinese military threat. China's willingness to fund this exercise can only serve to underscore its outward foolishness.

Worse still, neither the US nor China has clearly delineated when they will use their formidable military capabilities. Expansive militaries wielded by countries with nebulous *casus belli* are a recipe for disastrous wars neither side anticipates nor wants. This again shows the conflict between State and Defense. No diplomat wishes to show their cards, which easily leads to bluffing and sudden unwanted showdowns. The American military, amazingly open in both its assumptions and procurements, is wary of their Asian rival as the Chinese hesitancy in clarifying their true military capability creates distrust between the two, which in truth is more cultural than nefarious. Regardless, in the specific case of Taiwan, both countries share the same overt objective of a unified China. Will the US partake in a direct military engagement vis-à-vis China over this island? It would probably depend on a host of domestic circumstances and ultimately on the personality of the occupant of the White House. It is not unforeseeable that China would be willing to sacrifice more men in retaking Taiwan militarily than the US would be willing to kill. As ties between the PRC and Taiwan continue to strengthen, China would most likely be best suited to allow the US to exhaust itself in procuring a military that would, at the moment of truth, be, in all probability, left unused. But as we cannot clearly state what exactly the *casus belli* specific to Taiwan is, the US military is forced to procure for the worst case. This is but

one example of a dozen key points globally that leads to the dismal situation our planners and budgeters find themselves in.

When faced with shifting global order, fiscal weakness, and capable adversaries, the US military is past time to start making fundamental and aggressive reforms to put its strategic house in order working within the fiscal constraints and strategic uncertainties. The historical value and unquestioned legitimacy of the Constitutional order of the US is not in doubt. We do see three lines of effort that would start the momentum for a smaller, more agile military.

In reality, we have a golden opportunity to put trained and experience officers into offices around the US Government.

The first requirement should be the demand of the closer integration of the diplomatic and military elements of national power. Since the end of the CORDS program in Vietnam, political-military operations have searched for the proper balance in the operational sphere, with examples of both success (Colombia and El Salvador) and failure. Even within those noted successes, there still remained outright hostility in some political circles to the national objectives and the means to execute them, regardless how paltry. The issues in the diplomatic-military relationship are many. The legal status and ultimate authority of the Chief of Mission to control peacetime operations is balanced against the geographic Combatant Commanders prerogatives, power and prestige. Integration and appreciation of the role of DoD and DoS between one another is low. The vital role of USAID and other agencies and programs is limited by the small size of these organizations. DoD outreach to the DoS has run aground in both Congress and Foggy Bottom, as equity-driven decision-making attempts to defend billets and budgets. Even at the most pedestrian, the DoD Combatant Commander Area of Responsibility map isn't the same as the DoS. Cross-training between various State and Defense Department elements during peacetime exercises is rare. The ultimate result is a lash-up that under optimum conditions might affect at the operational and strategic levels of national engagement, with little potential of even minimal liaison having tangible effects. This creates an incomplete feedback loop, where operations in the tactical, operational and strategic spheres, both diplomatic and military, operate independently and often at cross-purpose. Right now, the US military is perceived to have "excess" manpower due to the post Iraq drawdown. In reality, we have a golden opportunity to put trained and experience officers into offices around the US Government. More than just sending officers, these organizations must be prepared to accept them.

A second requirement will be the acceptance of the reality of limited means for military operations, going into the future. Along with the requirement of fiscal constraint, the military commander will likely be the individual at the overlap of the DIME design and implementation. First, all the forces must embrace their own existing 'by-with-through' military engagement programs, like the 1000 ship Navy, to learn the fundamental requirements for multilateral operations.

This is ultimately a diplomatic and military issue. Expansion of bilateral and multilateral engagement, training and personnel exchange is no longer a nicety, but a critical element of leveraging US soft power. The current budget for the US Army National Guard's State Partnership Program is \$8 million USD, and shrinking. A critical relationship and capability building tool, even at nearly an invisible level of overall defense spending, faces the budgeter's axe. This in spite of the fact of the prominent role Alliances hold in the US National Security Strategy of May 2010. The secondary benefit is the sharing of values unavoidable in long-term partnerships. It is no coincidence that the two Maghreb nations with the strongest military exchanges with the United States had a peaceful overthrow of their longstanding leadership (Egypt and Tunisia). While Libya, the most isolated, required external military support to defeat the local militaries whom retained the traditional role of mere guardians of the ruling power. Now, certainly, one would not wish to advertise that a military exchange with the United States means a loss of control of your own military to merely regime defense. However, the United States would be well served to spread the idea of a military subservient to the people, not merely the dictator who rules over them.

A third requirement would be to identify the capability and requirements of our allies, and aid them in developing capabilities which complement and augment our own. The affluence to which the American military has become addicted to is simply outside the scope of many of the countries we should be working with in the future. And much of the equipment we develop to procure is either denied to our allies (F22) or simply outside of their budgetary capabilities (F35, LCS, Virginia Class amongst countless others). The United States has made furtive attempts at developing export-only military hardware (F20 Tigershark) but for various reasons (some valid, some not) these attempts have almost invariably failed. Additionally, modern US design philosophies often revolve around minimum manning due to the very generous pay and benefits received by our all-volunteer force. For the United States, paying more to hire less is smart. But for many of our would-be friends in our hoped for future alliances, manpower is cheap. We should continue to explore low cost options in shipbuilding with an eye towards providing them at reduced cost in exchange for initial alliances, partnerships, port usage and other mechanisms to expand our influence without expanding our fleet of aircraft carriers and requisite support and escort ships. These export-ships could be simple coastal patrol craft up to missile corvettes and possibly full sized frigates with more traditional manning schemes. The designs would be optimized for low intensity presence patrolling with the explicit promise that American full spectrum capabilities will be there in our allies' times of need. In this manner we can effectively increase our available ship count, maintain our manpower cap and expand our circle of friends in the pacific and elsewhere without requiring the 2,500 desired but unaffordable F35s.

Likewise in the low-cost aviation arena, the US has ceded all semblance of competition to CASA, Embraer and other overseas countries. Even when the US belatedly sees the benefits of such low cost aircraft, we find our domestic companies incapable of competing and the programs mired by political maneuverings and cancellations that seek to undermine what fragile coalitions we do attempt to

build. Our failure to procure and field a light attack armed reconnaissance aircraft for our use or our allies (specifically, Afghanistan) only highlight a trend which goes opposite to our needs and objectives.

Our failure to procure and field a light attack armed reconnaissance aircraft for our use or our allies only highlight a trend which goes opposite to our needs and objectives

The United States' expeditionary military capability we currently possess and procure is desired by few countries and maintainable by fewer still. The post-Cold War balkanization was a luxury provided by an overwhelming and benevolent sole superpower and economically we can no longer afford to be all things to all nations. Likewise we shouldn't forfeit the opportunities created by providing military hardware that a greater majority of countries desire and can procure in the current and forecasted economic conditions. These opportunities are not merely economic, for with American procured hardware there also comes American provided assistance and partnership. One must hope that that still maintains quantifiable advantages.

it is only through concrete support and open alliances can we build upon the supremely successful NATO model

Ultimately, the United States Military can only hope to legitimately maintain global over-match through alliances, partnerships and an expanding circle of friends. We cannot afford to go alone if we hope to truly provide the flexibility and robustness required in the absence of a coherent and focused national strategy that would allow us an affordable focus we currently lack. We do not develop partnerships by procuring very expensive yet "unimposing" ships that can make port calls (one of the more tortured arguments in support of the LCS). Rather, it is only through concrete support and open alliances can we build upon the supremely successful NATO model.

The American officer class has oft boasted of its apolitical nature. We should not then ponder why we lack strategists as we have so studiously avoided the basis of strategy itself. Likewise, our politicians cannot decry our military expenditures when the frivolousness with which they treat their strategic requirements drives their nation's military inexorably towards that ruinously expensive end state. Until we can rectify these inherent contradictions, the US military may speak of its fidelity to Clausewitz but, in the end, it will continue to seek the warm comfort of the simple operational concepts found in the bed of its Swiss mistress.

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Beyond Future Threats: A Business Alternative to Threat-based Strategic Planning

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As NATO's presence in Afghanistan contracts, the discussion about the Army's future has largely revolved around the risk of pursuing alternatives in doctrine and force structure.

This article explores the validity of the U.S. Army's approach to its future as the principal landpower proponent for American defense. As NATO's presence in Afghanistan contracts, the discussion about the Army's future has largely revolved around the risk of pursuing alternatives in doctrine and force structure. The debate has produced three competing formulas. Some have argued that the U.S. should focus its landpower initiatives on those threats, which pose the gravest danger to the nation. These so-called "traditionalists" assert that inter-state conflicts should be the principal focus of the Army. Others have argued that the probability of conflict between major powers is so exceedingly remote that scarce defense funds should build a force optimized for the kind of conflicts the U.S. currently finds itself embroiled in. These "counterinsurgents" have also asserted that the diffusion of destructive means has so empowered non-state actors that they credibly constitute the principal threat to U.S. interests both now and into the future. A third school of thought argues that the U.S. cannot afford to weight its preparation towards either state-based or non-state threats. They argue that American landpower must balance its capabilities to deal

with the full range of potential threats. Frank Hoffman and others in the "utility infielder" school argue that hybrid threats will predominate in the coming decades and that American ground forces must be capable of responding to threats that operate in different modes of warfare concurrently.[i]

The debate between each of these schools of thought has been heated, but they all focus on the threat as the principal issue to be resolved. *Traditionalists*, *counterinsurgents*, and *utility infielders* begin with the consequence and probability of threats in proposing ways forward for the Army institution. The threat-based approach makes eminent sense in prioritizing initiatives for developing operational doctrine or in campaign planning, but it makes far less sense when promulgating a strategic plan for an Army institution that is posturing itself for the long term. Yet, it is from a belief in the hybrid threat construct that senior Army leaders have begun to map out the future of American landpower. This article argues that the Army's threat-based strategic institutional planning is an errant approach because accurately predicting which threats the nation will ultimately contend with is problematic and because threat-based planning focuses analyses on threats and means that can be identified today and not necessarily those that will ultimately be most consequential to national interests.[ii]

Value as a strategic concept is powerful for the Army institution because it enables planners to deliberately link grand strategic aims and enduring national interests to the dynamic realm of ways and means.

Business theorists have articulated two complementary theoretical concepts suitable for dealing deliberately with the dynamism of the operating environment: *value* and the *value proposition*. *Value* as a strategic concept is powerful for the Army institution because it enables planners to deliberately link grand strategic aims and enduring national interests to the dynamic realm of ways and means. For example, Ford Motor Company is mission-focused on "achieving

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automotive leadership” and “accelerating development of new vehicles that customers want.” [iii] In terms of *value*, however, Ford provides personalized *transportation*. Thus abstracted, *value* allows Ford to more radically redefine itself while remaining anchored on its essential service to society. Where many businesses go astray is in failing to establish the necessary linkages between lofty articulations of *value* and mission execution.

The *value* concept drives at the nature of needs. It is then *value propositions* that articulate what the customer needs in terms of what a given organization does as well or better than rival organizations. What organizations do is captured in terms of distinct functions, i.e. manufacturing tanks, repairing trucks, etc. Functions are aggregations of operational processes and are therefore quantifiable. *Value propositions* thus take enduring needs and operationalize them through these functions. However, the derivation of a viable *value proposition* is far from a simple task. It requires that an organization first understands the customer’s business as well or better than the customer; develops a mature understanding of the customer’s unique requirements; and, from a sufficient understanding of one’s own capabilities, then appropriately links one’s functions to the needs of the customer. Correctly created *value propositions* are not made out of context. In order to be valid, they must account for the highest good. [iv]

Correctly created *value propositions* are not made out of context.

The three essential steps to a valid *value proposition* run against the historical grain of Army institutional planning. More often, Army leaders have imposed their view of the world on future national strategic policy and demanded that Congress authorize the force structure the Army has deemed necessary to face that world. Rather than reflect on the enduring and essential interests of the nation, the senior civilians and officers within the Army have focused on the threats which they can see and understand. Frequently, the threats that are ultimately confronted are not what the Army had prepared for. In its ongoing assessments, the Army appears to have accepted its failure to predict future threats in planning for the coming decades, but it has embraced an equally dangerous presumption that it must prepare for all threats. As a national institution, the Army must consider the nation’s enduring national interests as a necessary point of departure before engaging in any discussion of future threats, force structure, materiel acquisitions, and so forth. Yet, there has been scant precedent for such an approach to institutional strategic planning. [v]

Since its infancy as a professional entity, the Army has guided its institutional policy by adopting a threat-based approach to planning

Since its infancy as a professional entity, the Army has guided its institutional policy by adopting a threat-based approach to planning, and this typically suited the strategic situation

of the U.S. throughout the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. The relatively limited ambitions of the U.S. through the early-1900s encouraged Army officers to define American security needs, and the Army’s role in meeting those needs, according to the greatest material threat at hand. Tepid support from Congress also imposed real constraints on Army policy. Through 1940, the Army reached only modest levels of manpower and equipping during peacetime. Army officers could only dream of substantiating their vision of the Army’s public persona with a national institution capable of determining its future. As a consequence, the strategic perspective of the Army changed very little from the founding of the republic, even as the U.S. grew in importance on the world stage. The isolationist posture of the U.S. prior to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor obviated the need for the Army to reassess its purpose in the minds of most Army officers. This is not to say that officers did not worry over the state of the Army. Many of them warned of the nation’s dangerous unpreparedness for a war they felt certain was approaching, but those warnings were only fixed on the pending crisis. The discourse amongst its officers did not move the Army towards taking a comprehensive view of the nation’s needs as its leaders weighed their own importance. It was very much an operationally-minded debate over the ways and means of warfare and not a strategic evaluation of national interests. [vi]

The unknowable future has merely led the Army to advocate a hybrid force that can succeed in any type of operation.

The Army was then all the more unprepared for the shock of atomic warfare in 1945 and, as a consequence, struggled to articulate its purpose and functions in the immediate postwar years. The Korean War revitalized all of the military services by convincing American leaders that the U.S. required a substantial defense capability to resist Communist expansion. The advent of a peacetime military establishment in the 1950s that was ten times larger than it was before the Korean War did not lead to a corresponding change in the process of strategic planning by either the Army or the other services. Instead, both in 1945 and subsequently, the Army continued to plan for the future by focusing first on presumed threats and then on the means to defeat them. Even the consensus within today’s Army that the next few decades will be characterized by unprecedented unknowns and complexities has not shaken this threat-means approach to institutional planning. The unknowable future has merely led the Army to advocate a hybrid force that can succeed in any type of operation. Despite rhetorical calls for bold new visions, the Army’s strategic response has returned to the familiar path of responding to the threat template with familiar means and organizational constructs.

In a sense, the Army has yet to reconcile its institutional purpose with post-Cold War America’s role as a global hegemon. With rare exceptions, there has been little encouragement by senior leadership for Army officers to collectively reconsider the Army’s role and functions in the context of its responsibilities as a standing institution. The Army has remained bound to following its mantra of winning

the nation's wars without evaluating the proper extent of that commitment, and to applying the tried solutions of the post-Vietnam era without reassessing the feasibility of those formulas. Several scholars have articulated compelling arguments which suggest that the Army's ways and means of the past four decades will not serve the nation well in the future.[vii]

Army leaders have bemoaned the national penchant for significantly reducing support to the Army after each war, but they have never fully invested themselves in the task of maturing the Army bureaucracy into a responsible professional institution. Responsible bureaucracies prioritize the organization's *raison d'être* ahead of its people and processes. Despite rhetoric to the contrary, the agencies and offices across the Department of the Army do not fully meet this criterion. Instead of subjecting its ways to the imperative of national interests, military and otherwise, the Army has uncritically accepted its views of war and demanded greater resources from the nation to optimize organizations and processes it had already established or was in the process of developing. It has consistently presumed that its basic functions are sound, continuing to serve the common good, and thus to be preserved – the principled response of a bureaucratic mind.[viii]

Army leaders have for generations accused the nation of naively seizing too great a peace dividend after each conflict and thus setting the stage for future military debacles

Army leaders have for generations accused the nation of naively seizing too great a peace dividend after each conflict and thus setting the stage for future military debacles, such as the defeat of Task Force Smith in the Korean War. In July 1950, roughly 540 soldiers under Lt. Col. Charles B. Smith were sent as part of the Army's 34th Division to slow down the North Korean advance north of the city of Osan, but it was poorly trained and equipped as a consequence of draconian cuts made in Army manpower and funding after 1945. Shortly after initial contact, the battalion task force was quickly thrown into confusion and routed. The ignominious defeat of Smith's command has been a rallying cry for Army proponents ever since. Despite its compelling aspects, the plea for "no more Task Force Smiths" ignores the presence of other national interests which are not inherently military, and it denies the prerogative of political leaders to determine the time and manner of wars that the nation will engage in. Forever preventing future repetitions of the fate which befell Smith's command could only be achieved by privileging the military interest as always being equal or superior to others. This mentality is emblematic of a bureaucratic perspective where the societal good offered by the organization is a fixed quantity, which is presumed rather than constantly evaluated. Is the maximum safety of our nation's soldiers always more important than any other national interest? The unabashed Army bureaucrat would answer in the affirmative. Most Army leaders would not make so chauvinistic a response when asked directly, but the logic of Army policies and the rhetoric of "no more Task Force Smiths" carry within it that tacit

reasoning. The fact that this kind of logic is so consistent and unquestioned within the Army leadership further confirms the bureaucratic nature of the institution and the compelling need for senior leaders in the Army to confront this logic as they consider the institution's future. An obstacle to Army leaders objectively dealing with their logic is the way in which they have internalized the concept of mission.[ix]

An obstacle to Army leaders objectively dealing with their logic is the way in which they have internalized the concept of mission.

The institutional Army prides itself on being a mission-focused culture. Army professionals identify themselves with the imperative of purpose over every other consideration no matter how compelling, including one's own life. However, the concept of mission is inadequate for the purpose of an institution that claims to have an enduring *raison d'être*. In Army operations orders, mission statements provide a focus for organizations addressing quantified problems with means that are on hand, but they are wholly unsuited for guiding institutions over generations through an unknowable future. As business theorists have long understood, the fount of strategic success is not in the latest great invention in development. Sustained strategic success comes from understanding what benefit the "customer" requires better than the customer does. To differentiate between the widget that provides the benefit and the benefit itself, business theorists have developed the concept of *value proposition* to fulfill the function of the mission statement that is so necessary to deliberate operations in business and in war.

Sustained strategic success comes from understanding what benefit the "customer" requires better than the customer does.

Army mission statements are inadequate for institutional strategic planning because they are by definition focused on knowable points in time and space. They demand a quantified understanding of the means and ways to be applied in pursuit of one's ends. Such guiding declarations inevitably get the end state wrong because the contributing causal factors are so complex and unknowable that quantifying what the end state will be is highly problematic. Most planners and decision-makers intuitively understand the relative futility of trying to prognosticate. The more common fallacy is to abandon the exercise of strategic initiative and instead adopt sweeping operational goals that rely upon extant or accessible solutions. The problem with these goals and solutions is that they tend to defend existing core equities within the organization. They thus reinforce incumbent boundaries, affirming parochialism rather than challenging it.

Because the Army tends to think in terms of operational

mission statements, its self-proclaimed "transformation" efforts have tended to fall far short of substantive transformation. In business theory, *transformation* describes a redefining of bureaucratic boundaries around a changed purpose. The concept thus principally addresses the nature of the organization and not the organizational units or technical means. Army transformation has frequently devolved very rapidly into an exercise of "moving the ravioli around" where major realignments of existing organizations and modifications of processes pass for radical change. The conservative nature of institutional change stems significantly from the Army's fixation on its understanding of the operating environment without having reconciled that understanding to the overriding influence of comprehensive national interest.

In imposing its worldview, the Army has implicitly refused to accept the inherent dynamics of the nation's political system and that of the international community. At its most vitriolic, the Army discourse has attacked the moral fiber of civil society and its leadership. Praetorian sentiments have arisen at moments of institutional crisis and remain simmering in the background of the current debate over the future of the Army. General of the Army Douglas MacArthur's summary dismissal of civilian prerogatives in the conduct of war is but one notable example.[x] A significance of this challenge in civil-military relations is that senior military leaders are encouraged to diminish or ignore non-military constituencies. Since the Korean War, Army leaders have repeatedly prescribed force structures and equipping strategies that ignored the toll they imposed, in terms of future opportunities, on those national interests not inherently military. The fate of Smith's hapless battalion has resonated among Army leaders who refuse to accept that other vital interests of the nation might be advanced only at their expense. Unless the Army properly measures the relative worth of its *value* against other interests, it is not in a position to develop an appropriate *value proposition*. [xi]

The institutional side of the Army has grown into a byzantine empire of parochial bureaucracies

As a consequence of its narrow view of mission, the Army has not monitored itself with the clarity necessary to truly understand what it has and what it is capable of doing. The institutional side of the Army has grown into a byzantine empire of parochial bureaucracies that have determined for themselves what constitutes the larger national interest and used that interpretation to support their functional identity. The conflicting paradigms are often arrived at by default and not contrived out of self-interest. In fairness to the Army, the nation has typically lacked a formal articulation of prioritized strategic interests that national institutions, such as the Army, could use to derive their own policy proposals. Regardless of how they are arrived at, these parochial platforms are deeply rooted, and the Army remains unequipped to corral its competing constituencies because the Army has not determined what it provides to the nation in balanced terms and how it proposes to pursue that end. In the midst of the Cold War, Richard Barnet, founder of the Institute for Policy Studies, warned of superficial links between the burgeoning military bureaucracy and the national interest. He perceived

that "the war economy [had provided] comfortable niches for tens of thousands of bureaucrats in and out of military uniform...millions of workers whose jobs depend on the system;...scientists and engineers hired to look for that final 'technological breakthrough' that can provide total security; contractors unwilling to give up easy profits; [and] warrior intellectuals who sell threats and bless wars." [xii] It is not enough to know the number of helicopters that the industrial base can build or what number of brigades the U.S. can deploy overseas. The Army must have a concept for articulating how its potential can provide for the vital interests of the nation.

The institutional side of the Army has grown into a byzantine empire of parochial bureaucracies

The *value proposition* provides just such a concept for the Army. By establishing a necessary linkage between national interests and institutional purpose, *value propositions* provide a reliable basis for continuous strategic planning rather than the episodic reviews that typify the Army's over-the-horizon thinking. The only way by which the Army can overcome the challenges of planning for the dynamic future is to focus foremost on the most immutable side of the equation. The vital and highly important interests of the nation capture the national identity. They point to the locus of political will and change very little from generation to generation. The concepts of *value* and the *value proposition* provide the kind of construct which can rescue strategic decision-makers and planners from fatalistically accepting the futility of predicting the future and thereby empowering them to deliberately accept risk where national interests will permit. Through such an approach to planning, the Army would no longer feel as compelled to retain an expansive range of capabilities because the focus will then be on protecting what is most important and not on chasing transitory threats. [xiii]

An articulation of what the Army's value proposition to the American republic should be exceeds the scope of this article, but one can begin to examine it in broad terms. The development of a proper value proposition for the Army would begin with an understanding of the historically consistent core interests of the United States. Here is where the 2012 U.S. defense strategic guidance falls short of providing sure anchorage for institutional strategic planning by renewing the American proclivity to focus on threats ahead of enduring interests. The adoption of an emphasis on the Asia-Pacific region, a renewal of countering weapons of mass destruction proliferation, and a focus on enhancing partnerships are really nothing more than priorities for near- and mid-term resourcing. The guidance required for a *value proposition* as the articulation of strategic intent requires a more enduring and less contingent set of guiding concerns. Such a set of guiding points might include: defend the homeland, prevent great-power conflict on Eurasia, preserve access to strategically important materials, preserve an open international economic order, foster the establishment of viable state structures as responsible members of the international community, and a prosperous civil society. From these interests, or something akin to them, the Army can develop a *value proposition* that defines the proper role of

American military power for the U.S. and her allies.[xiv]

**The real challenge is in maturing
such a statement of strategic intent
into something that captures the
Army's unique and necessary
contribution to national interests.**

At its essence, the Army's *value proposition* is self-evident: the Army provides security. The real challenge is in maturing such a statement of strategic intent into something that captures the Army's unique and necessary contribution to national interests. The Army's strategic planners must not only capture the unique contribution of the Army *vis-à-vis* its sister services, but the planners must also evaluate the Army's contribution to the national interest against those of civilian governmental and non-governmental organizations. It is here that the articulation of the Army's relative value brings its leaders

back to properly consider the opportunity costs their nation ought to pay in exchange for the kind of security uniquely obtained through Army landpower. When rightly considered, the Army's strategic intent ought to inform national leaders as to what price they ought to pay for the Army's contribution to security and whether what they are paying for falls short or exceeds the imperatives of national interest. For example, one can imagine the Army's pursuit of materiel superiority morphing into a virtual race for strategic primacy when strategic partnership is more appropriate to the interests of the nation. One might argue that the approach described in this article is detached from the realities of politics and a dynamic operating environment, but it should be noted that the moral obligation of professional government institutions is to serve the greater interest of their nation. Presidential administrations and congresses will inevitably misuse the Army from time to time, but it is not the prerogative of the military services to insulate themselves from the vicissitudes of political reality. It is quite simply to serve the commonwealth with integrity and competence. A strategic intent anchored in a sober assessment of national interests would be a secure first step on that path.[xv]

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- [xi] Linn, *Echo of Battle*, 49-51, 163, 195; Weigley, *History of the U.S. Army*, 276-77, 279-81; Some military leaders have publicly committed themselves to measuring the narrower concerns of the military establishment against a proper evaluation of U.S. national interests. However, the process for articulating the way ahead for the Army and Department of Defense remain rooted in assessments of threat and loosely grounded by discussions of broader national priorities.
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An Introduction to Clausewitzian Strategic Theory: General Theory, Strategy, and their Relevance for Today

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Strategy is generally understood as that which links military means and political ends. We understand this because military force is not seen as an end in itself, but rather as an instrument of power pursuing purpose.[i] Strategic theory is a way of understanding and practicing strategy; but what exactly would make strategic theory Clausewitzian as opposed to a different approach? What does this approach consist of? This paper will provide some initial answers to those questions. It will also provide the reader with an overview of a selection of Clausewitzian concepts and how they form a *larger system*. Finally, it will show how Clausewitz fits within a larger area of political thought: *classical realism*.

The context

Clausewitzian strategic theory starts with the assumption that all wars in history share certain common characteristics

Clausewitzian strategic theory starts with the assumption that all wars in history share certain common characteristics; for example, the nature of war itself does not really change, whereas warfare, the ways in which wars are fought, goes through a constant process of change. The portion of Clausewitzian theory that pertains to all wars is referred to as Clausewitz’s General Theory of war.[ii] Much of Clausewitz’s classic *On War* also refers to both war and warfare in the context of his time, thus forming in effect a theory of early 19th Century warfare distinct from the General Theory. Yet clearly, warfare has changed greatly since Clausewitz’s time. Therefore, one of the confusing things about reading *On War*

is that the various types of theory Clausewitz develops are somewhat mixed together; that is, his dialectical approach includes not only an exploration of the extremes of his concepts, but also combination of different types of theory. [iii]

Before proceeding a couple of points need to be made. First, a strategist or practitioner does not need to understand or use strategic theory at all. A military or strategic genius would create strategic effect without the need of theory. Action, or *praxis*, can exist without theory. Thus, strategic theory can be seen as a set of concepts that allow us to organize our thoughts and perceive a specific phenomenon or task more clearly, that is theory and praxis working together.

Clausewitzian strategic theory provides us with a description of how to approach a task, not what we should do in every case, nor what will in fact happen during a sequence of events

Second, Clausewitzian strategic theory provides us with a description of how to approach a task, not what we should do in every case, nor what will in fact happen during a sequence of events. The possible events/sequences initiated by war are simply too complex to predict with any regularity. Strategic theory is thus a way of thinking, not an instruction manual for action.

The theory

With those points in mind, let us get to the nature of the theory itself. Clausewitzian strategic theory has two principle applications, namely for a military historical analysis, and as a framework for war planning. Future prediction is not really part of the deal, seeking as it does to explain how military historical events in specific instances develop and lead to strategic and political effects. Yet despite this, sometimes the relation between the stated political purpose and the military aim/means available, not to mention the character

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of the two sides, the personalities of the leadership, and allied powers, can help provide a clear indicator of how events are going to turn out. This attribute can be distinguished in certain cases, such as when the political purpose – for example imposing by force a new political identity on the conquered political community – is so radical that the military resources needed to achieve it are almost incalculable, thus leading to strategic dysfunction. The political purpose has to be in line with the means.

Allowing for such factors, Clausewitzian strategic theory uses a system of interlocking concepts and operating principles which form Clausewitz's General Theory of war. As mentioned earlier, the General Theory postulates that there exists a system of *common attributes to all wars* as violent social interactions, and that war belongs to a larger body of human relations and actions known as *politics* (making all wars a subset of the realm of politics, but not vice versa). [iv] While all wars share these characteristics, warfare, as in how to conduct wars, is very much based on the political relations and characteristics of the various societies at a specific time. *War* does not change, whereas *warfare* and political relations go through a process of constant alteration.

The theory need not be perfect, and is not expected to be so.

Since war is complex, Clausewitz's General Theory need only be flexible enough to adequately describe it as a human phenomenon, and act at the same time as a basis for war planning, since it covers all wars. The theory need not be perfect, and is not expected to be so. Essentially, it need only provide a flexible framework for planning better than the next best theory, and so far Clausewitzians are still waiting for this second-best option to appear.

As new methods of warfare emerge and come in to practice, a new approach to warfare for that epoch's *art of war* develops, all of which will be by definition *Clausewitzian* provided they do not contradict the General Theory. Moreover, new military/strategic geniuses will emerge who can define the new art of war through praxis, operating in effect outside of theory, but also retrospectively expanding not only the art of war of that epoch, but also Clausewitz's strategic theory. Thus analysis of military history using this theory allows retrospectively for theory's expansion.

This provides the reason for Clausewitz's continued relevance. In fact most criticisms of Clausewitz deal to a greater extent with the perceived influence he had than with his actual writing. Since the General Theory encompasses a whole series of different approaches to warfare, subsequent theorists and practitioners (strategists) have been able to add to Clausewitzian thought as well. [v]

The text

The most thorough treatment of the General Theory is in Chapter 1 of Book I of *On War*. [vi] Here Clausewitz provides various definitions of war; introduces force and coercion, the three interactions to the extreme and their contravening

elements in reality, the ideal types of absolute war and war in reality, the concepts of polarity, attack and defense, the subordination to policy, and many more.

These are then synthesized in the last section into the remarkable trinity of:

Primordial violence, hatred, and enmity, which are regarded as a blind natural force; of the play of chance and probability within which the creative spirit is free to roam; and of its element of subordination, as an instrument of policy, which makes it subject to reason alone.

Discussion of the General Theory takes place in other parts of the book as well, especially Books II, III, VI and VIII, but the most sustained treatment is in the first chapter. [vii]

Also important to remember is that all these concepts and operating principles fit within the framework, or *Gestalt*, that comprises the General Theory as a whole. [viii] In order to get an idea of how these concepts fit together into a larger whole I will focus not on this first chapter, but on the second, since it describes Clausewitz's view of strategy.

Chapter 2 of Book I of *On War* is entitled *Purpose and Means in War*. Clausewitz begins Chapter two straightforwardly:

The preceding chapter showed that the nature of war is complex and changeable. I now propose to inquire how its nature influences its purpose and its means.

If for a start we inquire into the objective [Ziel] of any particular war which must guide military action if the political purpose [Zweck] is to be properly served, we find that the object of any war can vary just as much as its political purpose and its actual circumstances. [ix]

The concepts of political purpose, military objective or aim, and means were first mentioned in Section 2 of the first chapter and are described as the *initial trinity* of *On War*. Here they are mentioned again, but within the context of the remarkable trinity of passion, chance and subordination to politics, which had been introduced in Section 28 of the preceding chapter. It is the effective linking of the military *Ziel* by military means to the political *Zweck*, which defines strategy.

At this point it is important to bear in mind that Clausewitz is expanding on this particular *code of law* regarding subordination to political purpose (Section 28). Clausewitz's discussion in this chapter comes across at times as normative (what *should* happen), since he is describing the rational element of the remarkable trinity of war, as opposed to the irrational or chance elements. [x] This becomes particularly apparent when he mentions war termination: "Once the expenditure of effort exceeds the value of the political object, the object must be renounced and peace must follow."

Would this actually happen in reality? If the war in question did not end when the rational political purpose was unattainable, then we are talking of a war which has possibly lost its instrumental usefulness for the side that initiated it, which is Clausewitz's point following this perspective, the

code of law. We also need to consider that the political purpose/military aim can change over the course of the war, sometimes radically.

We also need to consider that the political purpose/military aim can change over the course of the war, sometimes radically.

Again assuming that this chapter introduces Clausewitz's concept of strategy, he then reminds us that theoretically war is something separate from politics, that is, organized violence to disarm the enemy, thus making him powerless. This is then following the three „tendencies to the extreme“ in regards to the military aim. Yet in reality, not all wars approach this extreme (or *absolute*) type, requiring the total overthrow of the enemy, and they vary widely due to the range of political purposes sought after/possible. This is what Clausewitz refers to as the *dual nature of war*: that war can be of two types. These two types include wars aimed at overthrow of the enemy's state/rulers, and wars conducted for more limited purposes.

The more modest the political purpose the more likely events are going to be calculated not in terms of necessities or even physical existence, but in *probabilities* of success or failure. As Clausewitz further states in Chapter 2 of Book I: "Since war is not an act of senseless passion but is controlled by its political object, the value of the object must determine the sacrifices to be made for it in *magnitude* and also in *duration*." (Clausewitz's Emphasis)

We, of course, know that war does include elements of passion and chance, but once again Clausewitz is focusing on the rational element - this *code of law* of his larger General Theory. That is to say, that it is subordination to politics (or strategy), which theoretically guides action in war, and allows it to remain a political instrument.

It is also interesting to note that in his discussion Clausewitz connects ways to ends (i.e. political purpose linked to military aim) rather than to (military) means. This military aim can vary as widely as the political purpose but reflects it in *magnitude* and *duration*. Furthermore, the sole means of the military aim/political purpose is fighting or combat.

In terms of military methods to achieve a political purpose Clausewitz mentions the following:

- Destruction of the enemy's forces;
- The conquest of his territory;
- Temporary occupation (as a bargaining chip in negotiations);
- Methods aimed to increase the enemy's expenditure of effort (to extract resources or lay waste to his territory, that is punishment or coercion);
- Wearing the enemy down by avoiding decisive combat,

using the duration of the conflict to one's advantage;

- Passively awaiting the enemy's actions;
- Projects with an immediate political purpose (*favorably affect the political scene*); and
- Actions done to exploit weaknesses/personality characteristics of the enemy leadership.

The last two are not actually military methods, but can form part of the overall strategy. Indeed the military means need not dominate, but ideally must be present; otherwise we would not be talking about war.

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Further concepts

Also, this chapter further articulates several Clausewitzian concepts, which are important later in the book. The principle of destruction ("the first born son of war") states simply that the destruction of the enemy's fighting power is the surest and most obvious method in war. It also states that if one side wishes for a decisive battle, the defender is forced to fight, presuming the attacker is willing to risk everything on this outcome, and is threatening some object which the defender must physically defend. We see here again the rational element dominating, since in actual war, the two sides interact, each attempting to dominate the other.

Force and coercion also come under examination, with coercion being the more complex and nuanced application.

Attack and defense are mentioned as well, with attack's essence being *possession* and defense's essence being *waiting*. The defense initiates the war in question when it resists. It is assumed that the defense includes both forms of warfare, since counterattack is the goal of the defender's waiting for the proper moment to strike. Linked to these forms are the positive and negative purpose/aim. A positive purpose - usually associated with attack - is an actual goal to be achieved by war. A negative purpose - usually associated with defense - is simply denying the attacker his goal. Thus, for Clausewitz the strongest form is the defense, with a negative purpose, since it is easier to deny someone something than it is to actually attain it. [xi] It is important to note that the defender need not ever have a positive purpose, denying the enemy his goal is enough to achieve a defensive goal. Defense offers more than that however, since by gaining and maintaining the counterattack, the defender can seize the instrument from the faltering attacker and impose their own political purpose, turning the war in a completely different direction.

Another concept that leads us back to the heart of the matter is the *engagement*, which is a single act of combat. Engagement links all the aforementioned concepts together, since it includes all of them. It is the purpose of military

planning, command and logistics, i.e. the process of assuring combatants are prepared to fight at a certain place and time. It also provides us with the distinction between tactics and military strategy; tactics direct the use of armed force in the engagement, while strategy deals with the use of engagements for the object of the war.” [xii]

Another concept that leads us back to the heart of the matter is the *engagement*, which is a single act of combat.

Finally, it refers to military strategy, with political (or grand) strategy's goal as the accomplishment of the political purpose or end and the return to peace. [xiii] This political strategy uses the military victory as a means in addition to other sources of power (for instance economic/diplomatic assistance) to achieve a final peace.

Taken together Clausewitz provides us with a framework with which to contemplate strategy, the rational application of the *means* (fighting) by different *ways* (the military methods mentioned above) augmented with non-military approaches/sources of power to achieve a *military aim/objective* which allows us to then achieve a *political purpose* with the possible augmentation of other non-military sources of power to gain the peace settlement. It is the role of the political leadership to make sure the military aim supports the political purpose. In short, they are responsible for strategy/grand strategy, with the assistance of the military commander. [xiv]

To round up the discussion of Chapter 2, it is important to consider some assumptions Clausewitz makes in regard to strategy.

Firstly, there is a clear distinction between war and peace. War is the exception, whereas peace is the norm.

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Secondly, the two sides are apparent to each other and form the focus/context of the respective military aims/political purposes. One cannot wage war against a method, such as *terror*, but only against a political community, which resists by way of organized violence.

Thirdly, Clausewitz assumes that linking political purpose to military aim is universal, done by all cultures at all times in history.

Fourthly and finally, politics is a broad concept that refers to power relations within and between political groups. Policy should be rational, but politics can be irrational, as when state policy is superseded by domestic political interests during a war. Politics also includes a deterministic element,

since it is for Clausewitz changing political conditions, not new technologies, which usher in new eras of warfare. [xv]

Conclusion

I would like to conclude this paper by putting the General Theory and Clausewitzian strategic theory within a larger intellectual context. Clausewitz based both his General Theory and art of Napoleonic warfare on his experiences and the history of those wars. Alexander Svechin further developed elements of the General Theory while at the same time developing his own art of war based on the history of the First World War and the Russian Revolution. Mao, who studied and taught seminars on Clausewitz, based his theories of guerrilla warfare on his own experiences. [xvi] Thomas Schelling's *Arms and Influence* was developed in part from the history of the Korean War, and the Berlin and Cuban Missile crises. More recently, Sir Rupert Smith's *The Utility of Force* was based on his experiences in Bosnia.

All these are examples of the Clausewitzian school of strategic theory, and all are retrospective developments/refinements of this theory based on either military history or praxis. All are compatible with the General Theory, and expand Clausewitzian strategic theory.

Whereas strategic theory can tell one where a policy/military aim went wrong, it can not tell one what to do to win

This is both a strength and a weakness. Whereas strategic theory can tell one where a policy/military aim went wrong, it can not tell one what to do to win; the actual *nature of war* as a social interaction subordinate to politics is simply too complex and contingent to predict accurately. Yet, too many look at *On War* as a guidebook to action, or as something to support their own doctrinal speculations. Strategic theory is fortunately nothing of the sort.

Clausewitz's is rightly called the political theory of war and this links his General Theory and his school of strategic theory with a much broader approach: the *classical realist* perspective. This sees politics as power and political relations as the history of the acquisition, use and retention of power by and within political communities. This is not to be confused with the crude version that goes under this label today, since *classical realism* is also a tragic perspective where good intentions can turn into a monstrous reality, or where hubris can lead to a complete downfall. [xvii] Clausewitz thus fits within a wider range of political thought going as far back as Thucydides, but including modern thinkers such as Max Weber, Reinhold Niebuhr and Hans Morgenthau.

Clausewitz and those who have followed in his footsteps have much to impart to us today, but it is necessary that we understand *the language* in which they are speaking, and the basic message with its limitations they are attempting to get across.

References

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- [ii] See Andreas Herberg-Rothe, *Clausewitz's Puzzle* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005), pp 143-4. Perhaps the first to recognize the existence of the General Theory was Herbert Rosinski in the 1920s.
- [iii] I would argue that in addition to the General Theory and Art of War theory, Clausewitz also has a political theory. See Joseph M. Guerra, "The Clausewitzian Concept of Cohesion as a Theory of Political Development", Clausewitz.com, - <http://www.clausewitz.com/readings/Guerra-Cohesion1.html>
- [iv] This is very much in line with what Hugh Smith presented in his article "Clausewitz as Sociologist", *Infinity Journal Special Edition, Clausewitz and Contemporary Conflict*, February 2012, pages 12-15.
- [v] This is an interesting link to Sun Tzu, since essentially the concepts described in *On War* enjoy the ability of expansion and refinement, much as the commentaries compliment Sun Tzu's original *Art of War*.
- [vi] Carl von Clausewitz, *On War* (translated by Peter Paret and Michael Howard, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1993).
- [vii] It is important to remember that Clausewitz is talking about moral elements, that is, human characteristics of organized conflict, and not material ones, which would make each conflict distinct. The General Theory pertains not only to states, but also to all political communities.
- [viii] See Michael I. Handel, *Masters of War* (London, Frank Cass, 2001) Appendix D.
- [ix] *On War*, Book I, Chapter 2.
- [x] Christopher Bassford describes the remarkable trinity rightly as the capstone of Clausewitz's entire work. See <http://www.clausewitz.com/readings/Bassford/Trinity/TRININTR.htm>.
- [xi] See Book I, Chapter 1, Sections 16 & 17.
- [xii] See Book II, Chapter 1.
- [xiii] See Book II, Chapter 2.
- [xiv] See Book VIII, Chapter 6B
- [xv] See Book VIII, Chapter 3B.
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