

Because strategy never stops...

Infinity Journal



IN THIS EDITION

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A Note From The Editor

Dear IJ members,

Welcome to Volume 2, Issue No. 4 of Infinity Journal.

One of the most profoundly depressing things about being the Editor of Infinity Journal is that you have to watch monkeys throw their faeces at each other.

Obviously this is metaphorical, and I am referring directly to the contents and style of how strategy is popularly discussed. I might have chosen to say that it is like watching a car mechanic do heart surgery, but this would gift the actor concerned with a far higher level of skill and understanding to sustain the metaphor effectively.

Strategy is about using violence/force to gain or sustain political conditions and political behaviours at reasonable or required costs. If killing or threatening to kill is not part of the discussion, then you are not part of this discussion.

We at Infinity know what strategy is. We have sound theory and tools, and we are not confused. There is not much debate as to what gets published and what does not because we can very easily spot articles that are not about strategy, or writers who do not know what strategy is. That is not to say we don't allow some alternative contentions to be printed, because by giving them space we should be effectively enabling discussion and thus education. If nothing else, the peer-review process we use keeps us all honest.

But honesty aside, if you have no theory, no tools, and no agreed definitions then where does one think the insight comes from? The strategic debate is afflicted with a 'new age medicine' level of inclusiveness that says anyone with beads and a kaffan, can be a doctor, thus anyone can write about strategy. The saddest thing of all is that the most confused, seem to be those doing all the writing!

As we have said before, a strategy, a policy, and a concept are not all the same thing. Those least able to make the distinction between the three seem to be those producing most of the writing. Luckily the writing gets printed elsewhere, and not in the pages of Infinity Journal.

William F. Owen

Editor, Infinity Journal

July 2012

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Whence Derives Predictability in Strategy?

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Lukas Milevski is writing his PhD dissertation on the historical evolution of modern grand strategic thought under Professor Colin S. Gray at the Graduate Institute of Political and International Studies, University of Reading. The 2010 winner of the *RUSI Trench Gascoigne* essay competition, his articles have been included in the syllabi of the *Royal College of Defence Studies*, the *US Army and US Air War Colleges*, and *Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School*. He has spoken at numerous academic and professional conferences. His research interests range the full gamut of strategic theory and practice.

Strategy is a necessarily future-centric discipline; all its objectives lie therein. An element of predictive ability is inherently necessary for strategy to work as hoped, lest those who practice it be unable suitably to match ends, ways, and means. Nonetheless, little thought has been dedicated to which aspect of the trinity – ends, ways, means – contributes most to predictability of effect. Ends, ways, and means will each be examined in turn for their contribution to strategic effect, and to the predictability thereof. Ultimately, ends reflect an understanding of effect; ways determine a strategy's quality relative to the adversary and predict effect inasmuch as a chosen strategy is better than the opponent's. Finally, means form the real bedrock of predicting effect because only means reflect the real *physical* limits of action. Although myriad other factors, such as public opinion, may inhibit decision-making as well, they will not be considered.

Predictability and Assumptions

Richard Betts flagged the issue of predictability in strategy when he pondered whether or not strategy was an illusion, and why some people might think it was. His words are worth quoting in full:

"Without believing in some measure of predictability,

one cannot believe in strategic calculation. For strategy to have hope of working better than a shot in the dark, it must be possible to analyze patterns of military and political cause and effect, identify which instruments produce which effects in which circumstances, and apply the lessons to future choices. Unless strategists can show that a particular choice in particular circumstances is likely to produce a particular outcome, they are out of business."^[i]

It is tempting to identify political effect, which is the ultimate purpose of strategy

This is all true, but it is nonetheless problematic. To predict effect, one must know what it is. It is tempting to identify political effect, which is the ultimate purpose of strategy, but this cannot be achieved logically with a single step. Two steps are minimally required for one's strategy to influence the opponent's politics. Conflating these two steps disaggregates predictability from the ends, ways, means trinity by allowing prediction to be based purely on assumptions concerning the political efficacy of force, which as often as not do not reflect reality. If Hitler assumes that the whole Soviet house will crumble at the first kick, the physical limits of his armed forces in action will matter little to him. To draw political predictions from one's own assumptions is clearly unsatisfactory. Predictability must come from what the strategist is actually able to control.

André Beaufre proposes that "[a]ny dialectical contest is a contest for freedom of action."^[ii] The strategist's first logical step is to control his opposite's freedom of action. The details of strategic behavior in war are varied by accident, by design, and by necessity, but the real capabilities of power upon which this variable behavior rests are universal. Colin Gray suggests that strategy may be defined as "the bridge that relates military power to political purpose; it is neither military power *per se* nor political purpose."^[iii] At the risk of perhaps unduly narrowing the concept of strategic (as opposed to political) effect, effect is strategic when it impairs the opponent's bridge, his ability to employ his military gainfully, for offense or defense. Impairment concerns the developing physical situation and opportunities therein,

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newly opened or recently closed. Strategic effect reflects the relative freedoms of action enjoyed by two adversaries and the utility contextually inherent in exploiting that freedom of action. Context is important because the enemy always has a vote in how freedom of action is distributed between the belligerents, and what that freedom means. One purpose of strategy is to minimize the significance of that vote.

The strategist's second logical step is to influence his enemy's policy behaviors. Ideally, this is achieved by limiting the enemy's options for action while exploiting one's own, although history attests to how messy this process becomes. Because strategy is an interactive process, in practice this second step coincides with the first, one reason for their frequent conflation. It is a given that application of one's power changes the foe's policies, but questions abound about how much power, applied where, and for how long. Success in the first step abets achievement in the second; strategists rarely count on gaining strategic and political advantage from tactical and operational failure. Ascertaining the source of predictability of strategic effect within the first step, controlling the opponent's freedom of action, is worthwhile on its own, and may also provide insight into the second step.

Strategy is carried out by properly matching ends, ways, and means against an intelligent foe. Predictability must reside within some aspect of the ends, ways, and means trinity for it to be available to the practicing strategist. Arthur Lykke, one of the first to develop this trinity in detail, offers the following definitions of each of the three concepts:

"Ends' can be expressed as military objectives and 'Ways' are concerned with the various methods of applying military force. In essence, this becomes an examination of courses of action (termed military strategic concepts) that are designed to achieve the military objective. 'Means' refers to the military resources (manpower, material, money, forces, logistics, etc.) required to accomplish the mission."[iv]

Lykke's definitions will form the basis for exploring separately each of the three elements of the trinity to determine how significantly each may or may not contribute to predictability in strategic effect.

Ends

In discussing the 'ends' aspect of the trinity, Harry Yarger plants his flag quite firmly in suggesting that "[i]n strategy formulation, getting the objectives (ends) right matters most! Too often in strategy development, too little time is spent on consideration of the appropriate objectives in the context of the desired policy, national interests, and the environment. Yet it is the identification and achievement of the right objectives that creates the desired strategic effect." [v] He goes on to suggest, "If the wrong objectives are identified, the concepts and resources serve no strategic purpose...In this regard, objectives are concerned with doing the right things. Concepts are concerned with doing things right. Resources are concerned with costs. Objectives determine effectiveness; concepts and resources are measures of efficiency." [vi]

Yarger's position is difficult to accept with regard to a general theory of strategy, however. His discussion of objectives betrays some confusion, for he suggests examples such as "deter war, promote regional stability, destroy Iraqi armed forces". [vii] Two of the identified ends, deterring war and promoting regional stability, are political and behavioral in nature. Yarger confounds objective with desired political effect. There is no direct path a military can take that would allow it to achieve either deterrence or regional stability, no matter what means it deploys or the ways it uses them. Such effects stem from influencing the enemy's behaviors, the logically distinct and unpredictable second step of strategy, rather than the first. The destruction of hostile armed forces is certainly achievable for one's armed forces, but the manner in which the enemy is destroyed weighs heavily on the meaning of that action. The way in which the Iraqi army was destroyed in 2003 was more problematic to the aftermath than the way the German army was destroyed in 1944-45.

There is no direct path a military can take that would allow it to achieve either deterrence or regional stability

Predictability cannot lie solely within the chosen ends. Military ends must ultimately be physical: objectives such as the capture of geographical locations, the destruction of an opposing army, etc. or the physical prevention of the enemy from achieving such aims. Although Yarger's overall argument that objectives must be chosen carefully is correct and well taken, it is more appropriate to suggest that the ends a strategist chooses *reflect* the desired effect, rather than cause it. A chosen objective indicates how a strategist desires to constrain his enemy's freedom of action, and improve and exploit his own. The actual restriction comes from a different part of the ends, ways, means trinity.

Ways

Military objectives must somehow reflect both political interests and stakes, and the strategist's task of constraining, and imposing his will upon, the enemy.

Most of strategy deals with ways. Means are frequently assumed, and may change only slowly. Similarly, political ends are given and beyond a strategist's control. Military objectives must somehow reflect both political interests and stakes, and the strategist's task of constraining, and imposing his will upon, the enemy. Clausewitz defined strategy as "the use of the engagement for the purpose of the war," emphasizing (correctly) the central role of violence in war. [vii] The details nevertheless matter in how and why the violence is brought about and used. Ways are thus usually the focus of strategy and of policy, for they must balance strategic and political needs.

Basil Liddell Hart, a theorist fixated on the ways of strategy, argued, "throughout the ages, effective results in war have rarely been attained unless the approach has had such indirectness as to ensure the opponent's unreadiness to meet it. The indirectness has usually been physical, and always psychological." [ix] The introduction of the operational level of war into Anglo-American strategic discourse by Edward Luttwak and others occurred precisely because they felt that there was a lack of attention being paid to the ways in which military force might be employed. [x] Seeking to find effect in the way their weapons could be used should the need arise, nuclear strategists during the Cold War similarly argued over counter-value, counterforce, and countervailing modes of action.

Many theorists of strategic ways and operational modes prefer to dichotomize the ways available to strategists: annihilation and exhaustion (Hans Delbrück); direct and indirect (Liddell Hart); sequential and cumulative (J.C. Wylie); attritional and relational-maneuver (Edward Luttwak); and so on. The best dichotomies acknowledge that purity of concept in practice is rare, if possible at all, and that actual conduct represents some mixture of both operational patterns. Dichotomies are abstractions conceived to simplify the sheer variety of ways open to a strategist. These strategic theorists either implicitly or, as in Liddell Hart's case, somewhat explicitly conclude that the predictive element of war resides in the way military force is employed and so they deliberately simplify the myriad choices available for the purposes of easing the task of prediction. Luttwak, in explaining the benefits of relational-maneuver, offers a good example: "[i]nstead of cumulative destruction [required for attrition], the desired process is systemic disruption-where the 'system' may be the whole array of armed forces, some fraction thereof, or indeed technical systems pure and simple." [xi] The aggregate discourse on ways in strategy implicitly recognizes that the ends of military action must be physical in some way, although some theorists do extrapolate to suggest further behavioral effects.

Ways concern both effectiveness and efficiency in strategy, in that order. Strategy by definition is adversarial, meaning that any chosen way of fighting an intelligent enemy must first be able to thwart the enemy's own plans before fulfilling one's own. Ways are first and foremost about effectiveness: a strategist must be able to obstruct his foe. Once acting toward a positive objective, ways transition to considerations of efficiency. The strategist's task becomes achievement of his goal as efficiently as possible. This is a necessarily imprecise art because the opponent, although frustrated in his own positive goals, remains intelligent and determined to return the favor, barring behavioral change. This shift in emphasis from effectiveness to efficiency is necessarily rougher and more uneven in practice than in theory. Behavioral insight and political assumptions, although they cannot form the foundation of effect, play a significant role in expediting the achievement of both effect and efficiency because ways in strategy are necessarily adversarial.

Predictability of effect only partially derives from ways. The contingent nature of ways in strategy indicates that they are only effective if they overcome the test of an intelligent adversary, and are thereafter concerned with efficiency. Therefore, the real impact of the chosen way(s) has already been fulfilled once a strategist becomes concerned with

efficiency over effectiveness. Advantage has been gained over the enemy, and all that remains is to press it while simultaneously preventing him from upsetting it. Ways somewhat influence the character of effect achieved against the enemy's strategy bridge, his freedom of action, but ultimately they cannot determine it, as too many other important factors remain contingent even when the chosen way is successful.

Ways somewhat influence the character of effect achieved against the enemy's strategy bridge

Means

The means of strategy are not often discussed in detail. Raoul Castex, commenting on the expansion of definitions of naval strategy to encompass not just wartime but also certain peacetime activities, including the development of means, firmly proscribes strategy's responsibility for such enterprises. "Properly speaking, preparations of this sort constitute naval policy, and their realm borders that of policy as a whole", even though their quality clearly influences the conduct of strategy in wartime. [xii] Although the use of means belongs to strategy and their development belongs to policy, they generally fall in-between the two.

The definition of means employed here is somewhat more expansive than that proposed by Lykke. Instead of discussing "manpower, material, money, forces, logistics, etc", broader brushstrokes are used: landpower, seapower, airpower, etc. The reason for this is to preclude the "deep and abiding confusion between *deploying* a force and *employing* force" to which Sir Rupert Smith draws attention. [xiii] Employing force means fighting. One might deploy manpower and material without having either a way to use them meaningfully or a coherent objective they can fulfill, but a strategist necessarily must employ power in a particular way toward a specific end that is physically definable and achievable.

To consider means in terms of forms of power, rather than the physical resources that make up that power, is to seek their individual strategic significance in and through combat. The individual meanings of landpower, seapower, or airpower are all different because they all have their own physical operational constraints which dictate their mutual interrelationships, in both methodological detail and the limits of achievability. First and foremost in this consideration is that humans live solely on land, and so land will always remain the ultimate center of gravity of conflict. The association of the forms of power to land is the most prevalent set of power relationships in strategy.

One may write about command or control of the ocean or the air with as much meaning as one may write about seizing the initiative on land. The control of any non-terrestrial geographical dimension denies the enemy easy access and freedom of action and improves one's own therein. Yet the ability of seapower and airpower to interact directly with events on land is limited either to destruction, or to logistical support. Success at sea or in the air may also

enable operations on land that may otherwise not occur. Nevertheless, neither seapower nor airpower can take control of events on the ground.

The nature of each geographical dimension determines the possibilities and the limits of combat within that dimension, and of attack from that dimension into others. By defining the boundaries of interaction, the geographical dimensions also delineate the limits of strategic effect, how much action in one dimension can impinge upon freedom of action in another. Physical capabilities ultimately determine everything else. To speak of landpower, seapower, or airpower is not simply to discuss their physical and supportive components, but also to understand what significance these broad forms of power have in holistic strategic interaction.

Conclusion

The ends chosen reflect an understanding of the desired strategic effect, or lack thereof, but the manner in which the ends are achieved influences the character of the resultant effect. Ways determine whether or not a strategist succeeds in his task, but the courses of action open to him, and their limits in practice, depend upon the means available. The means available, varied in their interrelationships, and in their capabilities and significance for mutual influence, determine together the character of strategic effect. Means are the fount of strategic effect, which in turn is affected and shaped through practice by the chosen ways and ends, and their success against an intelligent foe.

The purpose of strategic effect as a discrete notion, imbued by an appropriate and practical conception of what effect looks like, is to provide coherence to strategic discourse. This notion provides a concept adaptable to both military and non-military ends, ways, and means, and to strategic analysis and action. Political effect, although it is the ultimate aim of strategy, cannot provide the necessary coherence as it has no direct logical connection to military action. Tactical success tends to produce strategic success, which tends

to enable political success, but not always. This question of currency conversion will continue to bedevil strategists. The division of strategy into two logical steps—controlling the enemy's freedom of action, and influencing his policy—may be useful for considering the conversion of military means and ways into political ends.

Political assumptions cannot be excised from strategy

Political assumptions cannot be excised from strategy, but they can be drawn away from the role they have heretofore occupied, of generating arguably complacent predictions of effect. Ultimately, this task of prediction remains, but political assumptions must answer a number of questions: what sort of effect matches the enemy's political stake in the conflict? Do we have the means to generate that effect? Do we have the ways to guarantee successful generation? Do we have the political will to continue until victorious? These questions do not pertain to the second step of strategy, but rather the first. It was Sun Tzu who first recognized two logically distinct steps in strategy, having written that "[b]eing unconquerable lies within yourself, being conquerable lies with the enemy." [xiv]

No deterministic, winning formula can be provided. Highlighted, rather, are the holistic, adversarial, and political natures of war and strategy. The use of any particular means does not guarantee strategic, let alone political, success, nor is a specific tool always appropriate for all geopolitical contexts. The adversarial employment of power denotes simply that one belligerent will constrain, or perhaps even remove, the other's freedom of action to the extent that his chosen means allow. This strategic effect is subject to the quality of the way in which power is employed, and to the appropriateness of the ends chosen. The strategic effect on freedom of action from any particular means then becomes predictable. Who achieves the effect, who suffers it, and how efficient it is depends on the other two factors of the ends, ways, and means trinity.

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Air-Sea Battle as a Military Contribution to Strategy Development

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

Colin S. Gray[i]

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

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

While many continually conflate the concepts tied to Air-Sea Battle with strategy, they are in reality a military's contribution to strategy development

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

Air-Sea Battle: A Short History

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

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

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

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

To make matters worse Air-Sea Battle has been conflated with multiple military concepts developed in reference to anti-access and area-denial threats

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

Strategy as a Negotiation

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Air-Sea Battle itself was the initial concept developed to address anti-access threats, and though the initial idea

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

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

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

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

Not Quite There: Issues Identified in Operational Access Concepts

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

the overall discussion of Air-Sea Battle has created:

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

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

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

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

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

Instead of focusing on the threats created by anti-access and area-denial technologies and the capabilities we must develop to overcome them, we should focus more on the human dimension with the support of current and on-the-horizon technologies, including "ideas tailored to the potential in combined arms prowess of new technology [as the] major engine of radical military and strategic development." [xvi] The *Joint Operational Access Concept* trended toward this by directing the integration of capabilities across domains and functions, but more work remains to be done. Above

all, our military concepts and our diplomatic pressure must mitigate against an imbalance caused by basic human misunderstanding; throughout history there has been a fine line between preparedness and provocation.[xvii] Only when a thinking adversary is considered, and political ends are articulated can the Air-Sea Battle and associated concepts be used to best effect in strategy development.

we must ensure that when we use Air-Sea Battle and associated concepts to develop a national strategy that takes into account both the usefulness in these documents and their limitations

Improving Our Tools for Strategy Development

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

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Constitutional stability versus strategic efficiency: strategic dialogue in contemporary conflict

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Executive Summary

The orthodox view of the boundary between 'policy' and 'operational' matters in the context of armed conflict is that it demarcates two exclusive domains: policy makers should stay out of operational matters, which are best left to professionals; conversely, those professionals, military and civilian, should stay out of policy making. The orthodox view is informed by two rationales: first, a constitutional argument that only those who are democratically accountable should make policy; second, a strategic argument that for policy makers to interfere in operational matters is to micro-manage, with harmful consequences. The orthodox view is challenged in this article.

It is submitted that in general terms, during the Cold War both these rationales made sense, so the orthodox view was stable and legitimate. Today the constitutional rationale remains valid, but the strategic rationale is problematic. When conflicts are highly politicised down to the tactical level - as contemporary conflicts tend to be - there is a requirement to incorporate the views of policy's executors, including relatively junior officers, on policy; conversely, policy makers should be encouraged to engage in the political dimension of operational matters, not be shut out. A failure to do this as a consequence of the retention of the orthodox view, has led to strategy that evolves erratically, often in response to failure, rather than through proper dialogue between desire and possibility. In short, if a soldier, for example, can plainly see at

the operational or tactical level that there is a policy problem, but finds that for him to engage in discussion of policy is seen as wrong, the feedback mechanism to correct policy can ironically be (and in the twenty first century, typically has been) the actual occurrence of the strategic failure, or its imminent approach, that the soldier had anticipated.

**policy makers should be encouraged
to engage in the political dimension
of operational matters,
not be shut out**

Strategic Dialogue

The process that produces strategy is a dialogue between desire and possibility; policy and operations; say and do.[i] This article terms this process 'strategic dialogue'. Does one start with what is desired, or what is possible? This is a chicken and egg problem: each much reciprocally inform the other as a circular system, and the abstract idea is not necessarily the start point. Admiral J. C. Wylie argued that the plan produced by strategy is not only 'a vehicle for conversion of an idea to a deed', but also a dynamic process: 'the link between a thought pattern and reality'.[ii] Indeed, the notion of the strategic process as the 'expression of an idea' speaks to strategic dialogue being a circular process, because policy is both the origin, and the destination, of strategy; thus, like any plan, the abstract aim is continually adapted to take into account what realistically is possible; the *end* (a policy aim in the abstract) must be kept in check by anticipation of the *end-state* (a policy aim achieved).

**The process that produces strategy is
a dialogue between desire
and possibility**

Policy is usually seen as the start point in the 'levels of war' model, which is often presented as: policy-grand strategic-strategic-operational-tactical. There is nothing wrong with this model, so long as it is understood that it is circular, not a

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'one-way road' that starts with policy and ends with tactics. Strategic dialogue is thus a dialectical relationship between the desire of policy and the possibility of its execution as operations. Strategy itself, the product of strategic dialogue, is the articulated synthesis of that relationship, connecting operations and policy. In practice, states differ in terms of how they are configured to conduct strategic dialogue; their strategies will vary accordingly. The key variables in terms of how the state organises its strategic dialogue are constitutional and strategic.

The constitutional and strategic rationales for the 'orthodox' policy-operational distinction

When the levels of war model is (mis)understood in the sense of being a one-way road from policy to tactics, the concept of the strategy making process as dialogue is frustrated, as dialogue logically requires two-way flow. This misunderstanding, it is posited, derives from a conflation of a constitutional argument; that policy is the start point, in the sense that it identifies the point of state authentication in a circular strategic process, with a strategic argument, that policy is necessarily the sequential start point in a linear, one-way, levels of war model.

In Book Eight of *On War* (written 1816-1830) Clausewitz deals with 'war plans', in which he discusses what today could be rendered as decisions taken at the policy / national strategic level. Clausewitz stated that 'policy is nothing in itself ... we can only treat policy as representative of all the interests of the community'.^[iii] Clausewitz does not expect to find in reality a situation in which all the interest of the community are reconciled in a clear policy aim; especially the further one moves away from absolute war, as the concentrating effect of an existential threat is often replaced by a host of potential policy ideas amongst those on one's own side, which may indeed compete with, and possibly contradict, one another.

Rather, Clausewitz employs policy as a 'representative' value to mark the point at which the state authenticates the aim of policy in the abstract - the pole of desire in strategic dialogue: 'the aim of policy is to unify and reconcile all aspects of internal administration as well as of spiritual values, and whatever else the moral philosopher may care to add' (his Prussia was a monarchy, but the idea is the same). Following this statement, Clausewitz stresses that the process of constructing policy must move in both directions. That is, strategy's role is not just to translate the intention of policy into operations, but also to adjust policy in light of operations.

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The cabinet must listen to military advice on policy: 'nor indeed is it sensible to summon soldiers, as many governments do when they are planning a war, and ask them for purely military advice';^[iv] indeed he argued that the head of the

army should have a place in the cabinet.^[v] Conversely, the military should not seek to keep policy, and politicians, out of military matters in war: 'when people talk, as they often do, about the harmful political influence on the management of war, they are not saying what they really mean. Their quarrel should be with the policy itself, not its influence'.^[vi] This dialogue between the desire of the state (policy in its abstract form) and the possibility of its operational accomplishment on the ground (policy in its expressed form), is a dialectic whose output is sound strategy.

Critically, the notion that the policy level serves a 'representative' - an essentially constitutional - function, is distinct from a view that sees the policy level as the exclusive location at which policy issues are considered. Clausewitz's point is that sound strategy requires policy's executors to have a say in policy too, even if they are not constitutionally responsible for it.

The temptation, however, is for those at the policy level to confuse their constitutional role as the exclusive authenticators of state policy with the idea that they must necessarily be its originators. The consequences of such temptation can be witnessed in terms of policy that is overly abstract, as the views of those who are best placed to understand how practically possible the policy is on the ground are shut out. This is not what Clausewitz envisaged. For strategy to balance ends, ways and means, there needs to be proper strategic dialogue.

When Clausewitz argues that the military should allow policy to have an influence on war, he reacts against what is identified here as the 'strategic rationale' for maintaining a strict distinction between policy and operational matters. This is the argument that operational matters are a professional area that policy makers should stay out of to avoid harmful and inept micro-management. It encourages, from an alternative justification, the notion of policy as the start of the one-way road to tactical execution in the sense that once policy is set, policy makers should let its operational executors get on with it. In this manner, the strategic rationale is easily confused with the constitutional rationale: they are mutually supporting arguments because they both maintain the same policy-operational boundary, albeit from distinct premises.

John Shy has argued that it was Jomini who popularised the idea that 'interference' by strategically naïve political leaders led to military failure.^[vii] In his *Précis de l'art de la guerre* (1838), Jomini argues that the political and military commander are ideally united in one man, such as Frederick the Great or Napoleon.^[viii] When this is not possible, however, the political leader should resist the temptation to interfere in operational matters, not only because he did not have technical knowledge, but also that geographically distant operations were best not micro-managed.^[ix] Both of these reasons seem perfectly reasonable, and remain so today in the sense of policy makers not interfering in specifically military decisions (and, extending the argument to a contemporary setting, to those areas of technical proficiency of the soldier's civilian counter-parts on operations).

However, Jomini clearly recognises the requirement for interaction, not isolation, between policy and operations. The

first page of the *Précis* states that there are five branches of the art of war that are purely military: strategy [in the sense in which Jomini uses the term, this is more akin to the operational level of war today], grand tactics, logistics, engineering and combat tactics. However, he then goes on to argue that there is a further 'essential' aspect which he claims has been excluded in the study of war thus far: *la politique de la guerre*.^[x] He claims that while this has more to do with human science than the warrior's science, 'since the time at which it was thought to separate the toga and the sword, we cannot deny that, if it [is] useless to a subaltern general, it is indispensable to all generals who are commanders-in-chief: it enters into all forms of war that might be carried out, and into all operations'.^[xi]

He devotes the first two chapters of the *Précis* to the subject. The first chapter '*De la politique de la guerre*' identifies that there is a connection between a war's political aim and the operational means that are required to achieve it.^[xii] Jomini states that this domain (which he alternatively titles '*philosophie de la guerre*'): 'does not belong exclusively to strategy [the operational level of war], nor to diplomacy, and is not less than of the highest importance in the plans of the cabinet, as it is in those of a commander-in-chief of the army'.^[xiii] The second chapter, '*De la politique militaire*' includes extensive discussion of how to configure civil-military relations in wartime.^[xiv] While he discussed a number of possible variations, his recommendation for a leader '*un prince*', at the head of his armies but not fully confident in his own political and military skill, was to appoint two generals; one known amongst '*hommes d'exécution*', that is, operational experts, and one from amongst the '*chefs d'état-major instruit*', that is, an 'educated' member of the chiefs of staff, in this context, meaning versed in policy matters. Jomini actually calls this configuration the ideal 'trinity'.^[xv] So Jomini recognised that the political dimension of operations was very much the concern of the policy maker, and conversely, that there was a political dimension to operations that was the concern of the most senior generals.

Thus when Clausewitz wrote that politicians should consult with military officers on policy he meant that they should get "ground truth"

Thus in Jomini's (and Clausewitz's) time, the political dimension of operational activity was only dealt with at the pinnacle of the chain of command. Thus when Clausewitz wrote that politicians should consult with military officers on policy he meant that they should get "ground truth" – situational assessments from where political and military factors meet - from generals commanding armies, not majors commanding companies.

Yet in contemporary conflict, it is common for many more choices at the operational and tactical levels to involve an element of political choice. In Afghanistan, for example, where to build a road, whether to deal with a given insurgent group violently or not, which areas to recruit the local police force from, to whom to award contracts, where to eradicate poppy, where to stress women's rights, and a host of other issues, involve an element of political choice. These are not

military decisions, but political decisions, and they are taken on a daily basis at a micro level by relatively junior officers. The issue is therefore the discretion they have to make these political choices. In the orthodox view they have none. Yet without such discretion a policy will frequently fail to have purchase on the ground because it can't respond to local circumstances, a key factor when the consent of the population is the campaign centre of gravity, as it was at one point in Afghanistan. This is one of the reasons why it took so long in Afghanistan to tone down the more idealistic aspects of policy that were unrealistic.

This is one of the reasons why it took so long in Afghanistan to tone down the more idealistic aspects of policy that were unrealistic.

It is submitted that Jomini's view, extended to contemporary conflict, should *encourage* a policy maker, while remaining out of decisions of a military nature, to engage with the political dimension of operational activity, and thus also receive policy advice from those at the operational, and potentially also at the tactical level. The key evolution is therefore the extension of strategic dialogue from discussion between policy makers and the commander-in-chief to incorporate the views of those lower down the chain of command.

This has not, however, been the conventional interpretation of the policy-operational distinction in the post-Cold War world. For example, in an article on the operational level of war, Hew Strachan has cited a comment by General Tommy Franks to Paul Wolfowitz, Under Secretary of Defence at the Pentagon during planning for the 2003 Iraq War: 'keep Washington focused on policy and strategy. *Leave me the hell alone to run the war* [emphasis original]'.^[xvi] The result was that 'there was no strategy that united the military and the civilian, the operational to the political, with the result that the operational level of war also became the *de facto* strategy, and its focus meant that a wider awareness of where the war was going was excluded'.^[xvii] How did we arrive at this? The final part of this article posits that the answer lies in the retention of the policy-operational orthodoxy beyond its legitimating Cold War context.

The retention today of the Cold War 'orthodox' view of the policy-operational distinction

In the Cold War, the idea that the military should stay out of policy made both constitutional and strategic sense. This was the argument posited by Samuel Huntington in *The Soldier and the State* (1957), a seminal reference point in the theory of civil-military relations since 1945.^[xviii] The arguments advancing a clear distinction between policy and the execution of war were already established in US military thought prior to the Second World War. Huntington cites a US Command and General Staff School publication of 1936: 'Politics and strategy are radically and fundamentally things apart. Strategy begins where politics ends. All that soldiers ask is that once policy is settled, strategy and command

shall be regarded as being in a sphere apart from politics... The line of demarcation must be drawn between politics and strategy, supply, and operations. Having found this line, all sides must abstain from trespassing'.[xix]

Huntington's constitutional concern was a response to the Second World War, in which he saw a radical departure from this pre-war principle. He argued the Joint Chiefs became so powerful that they were in their own words effectively 'under no civilian control whatsoever'.[xx] He took issue with the fact that by 1945 the War Department was enmeshed in US foreign policy. By the end of the war more than half of the papers of the Operations Division of the General Staff were devoted to matters that went beyond the US army's traditional military domain.[xxi]

Huntington's strategic concern was that the military should keep their finger off the nuclear button; his key reference point was Korea, particularly the stand-off between General MacArthur and President Truman over the expansion of the war and the use of nuclear weapons. In the later part of the Cold War, the symmetry between constitutional and strategic arguments was reinforced by the way operational art developed in the 1980s, which as Hew Strachan argues, could take its geo-political and strategic context for granted, and so focus on battle: 'although presented as a bridge between strategy and tactics, the orientation of the operational level in the late 1980s was towards tactics, not strategy'.[xxii] General Frank's 2003 statement above exemplifies the retention of this perspective beyond the Cold War.

In contemporary conflict liberal powers retain a Huntingtonian constitutional configuration of civil-military relations: the military are theoretically a-political. Professor Vernon Bogdanor, an expert in British constitutional law, in a debate at Oxford University in 2010 on how far the military should contribute to policy making, argued that:

The distinction between policy questions and operational questions is not an easy one to observe, and perhaps especially difficult in military matters. Nevertheless, the chiefs of staff ought to do all they can to maintain it. It is important for the processes of democratic accountability that the dividing line is not blurred.

the result of keeping the military out of policy are inflexible strategies that are lethargic in their response to ground truth, with the resultant risk of failure

In the Cold War the argument that the military were 'a-political' both in the sense that the military should stay out of politics (the constitutional argument) and policy (the strategic argument), pointed in the same direction, and so made sense. The legitimating Cold War context today left behind, only the constitutional aspect remains valid. Conversely, the strategic argument is problematic: the result of keeping the military out of policy are inflexible strategies that are lethargic in their response to ground truth, with the resultant risk of failure. Indeed, the failure to correct the conflation between the two significations of the military as 'a-political' since the Cold War's end has led, and may continue to lead, to campaigns that are excessively driven, particularly in their early phases, by strategies that look back to abstract concepts, not forward to their achievement in reality. In short, the question 'should we do it' is not balanced by 'can we do it'. This anterior fixation, for strategy by default to look up, rather than up and down, for its inspiration (note the constant complaints of there being 'no strategy' coming from the top), confuses the legitimate idea of state authentication at the policy level - Clausewitz's idea of 'representation' - with the strategic idea, problematic today, that sees policy as the start of a one-way road that ends in tactical action.

Conclusion

Liberal democracies are not constitutionally configured effectively to fight contemporary conflicts. For the military and their civilian counter-parts, including relatively junior officers, to contribute to policy but keep out of party politics is a fine line; but it seems the only solution to encourage genuine strategic dialogue within current constitutional arrangements. Conversely, policy makers should keep as close as possible to the political pulse of the conflict on the ground, rather than stay out of operational issues. Counter-intuitive, yes; radical, no: proper strategic dialogue would keep policy grounded in reality.

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Special Operations and Strategies of Attrition

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Public fascination with special operations and the forces that conduct them has never been higher. Once limited to the realm of the enthusiast and conspiracy theorist, special operations are a firm fixture in popular culture. Video games are based around units, real and imagined, to allow almost anyone the visceral thrills of conducting covert and clandestine missions with no personal risk. Members of the public not only want to enjoy the experience of special operations from the comfort of their own homes, they also have a seemingly endless appetite to learn the details of specific missions and units through movies, books, articles, and documentaries that a number of former operators seem only too willing to provide. The equipment, techniques, and procedures of special operations which form the focus of popular attention are an important element to ensure the successful tactical outcome of missions, often performed at high personal risk to special operators.

Remarkable innovations have occurred in special operations tactics, largely as a result of the operational processes and integration of technology to make special operators even more effective at identifying, isolating, and killing or capturing terrorists and insurgents.[1] Improved tactics and processes are a necessary element of the approach to defeat violent

extremist networks (VENs) but, as this article argues, they are insufficient to achieve long-term strategic success. The key to that success lies, as Carl von Clausewitz reminds us, in first understanding the nature of the conflict in which one is engaged and using specific instruments of power such as special operations accordingly. Although special operations and the forces that conduct them have been crucial to success against VENs over the past decade, their strategic effectiveness can only be assessed in the context of contemporary strategy. This article first examines the nature of the strategy and places the current strategy against VENs in its appropriate theoretical context. Next, special operations and their tactical and operational contributions to that strategy are outlined. Finally, this article concludes by identifying the challenges and opportunities of using special operations in the future in a strategy of attrition.

Remarkable innovations have occurred in special operations tactics

The strategic approach against VENs

2011 marked the end of the first decade of the struggle against VENs, and particularly against Al Qaeda, which organized and conducted the attacks against the United States on 11 September 2001. The year was also momentous in that it saw special operations find, fix, and finish a number of al-Qaeda's key leaders and facilitators, but two in particular stood out for their significance. The first was the killing of Usama bin Laden in May, the spiritual and organizational leader of al-Qaeda who had evaded attempts to locate him successfully over the previous decade, in Abbotabad, Pakistan. The second was Anwar al-Aulaqi, an American-born imam who played a prominent role in the group in Yemen affiliated with al-Qaeda, Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). Al-Aulaqi facilitated a number of terrorist attacks, including the "Fort Hood shooter" (Major Nidal Hasan) and "the Underwear Bomber" (Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab), and oversaw the production of the group's periodical entitled *Inspire*. The passing of the first decade since the 11 September attacks, the death of numerous al-Qaeda leaders and operatives, and the lack of significant terrorist incidents in the United States has led some to question whether global terrorism

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still poses a significant threat. The remaining leaders of al-Qaeda have not surrendered or given up armed struggle, and groups affiliated with al-Qaeda have made gains in Mali, Nigeria, Yemen, and elsewhere. The threat posed by al-Qaeda and its affiliates and adherents (AQAA) will continue for at least several more years, if not another decade, until it is supplanted by another cause or other means.

Although the practice and conduct of strategy is infinitely complex for reasons identified by Carl von Clausewitz, Colin Gray, Edward Luttwak, and Hew Strachan, among others, the strategic approaches available to policymakers and planners are limited to two. The first is a strategy of annihilation put into practice, or "operationalized," through maneuver, material erosion, and with the advent of nuclear weapons, and/or firepower. There are many challenges to conducting a strategy of annihilation, not the least of which is having the will to employ available means or to see the conflict through to its conclusion. Another approach is achieving objectives is through a strategy of attrition. A strategy of attrition is designed to erode both an enemy's material capacity as well as their will to continue the struggle over time. Rarely is a strategy of attrition deliberately sought out because it is misunderstood and caricatured as wasteful and inelegant. [ii] A strategy of attrition is also undesirable for policymakers given the time and material costs they impose. However, the nature of the conflict may dictate that such a strategy may be the most likely one to succeed.

Unless one adversary possess as overwhelming superiority in all categories, is able to dictate the tempo of the conflict, and is willing to eradicate its opponent, the successful adoption of a strategy of annihilation is a historical rarity. Conflicts are duels between two thinking, reactive opponents that seek to thwart each other and deny the achievement of their opponent's end. This often lead, by accident or design, to prolonged struggles of attrition until one side determines that the pain of submitting to an opponent's will and demands outweighs the continued political, social, and economic costs of fighting. The nature of this struggle, which is reflected in its characteristics of chance, friction and uncertainty, remains best summed up in Edward Luttwak's pithy phrase "the paradox of strategy." [iii] That paradox suggests that the road to victory is most attractive along its shortest route, but because an opponent is also aware of this fact, that route is likely to be the most heavily defended and costly to travel. Most of the theories we associate with insurgents, such as those espoused by T.E. Lawrence and Mao Zedong, espouse strategies of attrition based on necessity, given relative weakness against an opponent. [iv]

The nature of the sub-state groups and individuals operating under the banner or inspiration of "al-Qaeda," as well as the desire of leaders to conduct a limited struggle against them ensures that the U.S. is locked into a strategy of attrition not of its choice. Core U.S. policy documents and statements do not identify the approach against VENS as such but the conclusion, based on statements contained in the National Strategy for Counterterrorism and the National Military Strategy for the War on Terrorism as well as Department of Defense briefings, is inescapable. Al-Qaeda and its affiliated movements remain a distributed, clandestine network of leaders, facilitators, and operators linked regionally and globally by different yet related causes under the banner of

a single ideology. Like a contagion, the cause espoused by al-Qaeda has spread to the Maghreb, sub-Saharan Africa and the Arabian Peninsula and has reappeared after the U.S. departure from Iraq, attesting to its continuing appeal despite its violence and operational setbacks. Significant resources have been dedicated to denying al-Qaeda the means to conduct large-scale terrorist attacks on U.S. soil. Defending against domestic attacks is necessary but does little to deny al-Qaeda and its affiliates the means to fight or will to continue the struggle. Such actions are the realm of special operations.

Special operations and the strategic opportunities they provide

Special operations are most effective strategically when they are used in a sustained campaign to improve the performance of those forces primarily used in the conflict. In wars that have been more conventional in nature, special operations when used properly have improved the performance of conventional forces, increasing the strategic effectiveness of the latter. For example, during the Second World War Allied special operations by military and paramilitary forces behind enemy lines were instrumental in defeating the operational mobile defense used by the Germans to stymie offensive campaigns against them. In particular, the use of special operations nearly simultaneously in June 1944 on the Western (Operation Overland in Normandy, France) and Eastern (Operation Bagration in Belorussia) fronts significantly improved Allied conventional force performance which had the strategic effect of accelerating the collapse of the Third Reich.

In contemporary irregular conflicts, special operations should be used to improve the performance of friendly host nation forces (Iraq), proxy forces, or those interagency organizations which best address the underlying causes of terrorism abroad (interior ministries, law enforcement agencies, internal diplomacy and development, etc.). In other words, special operations provides short-term gains to increase the odds that long-term efforts can succeed. Special operations contribute to a strategy of attrition by improving the performance of other forces and organizations to erode an adversary's fighting power and will. [v]

Special operations improve the performance of those forces primarily used in the conflict in a number of ways at the strategic and operational level. First, they are capable of creating strategic freedom of maneuver or operational breathing space, in terms of time and/or space, through counterstrokes designed to contest or regain the initiative. The accomplishment of various military and paramilitary special operations during the first phase of Operation Enduring Freedom in November 2001 made coalition airstrikes more accurate and Northern Alliance forces more effective. At the time such special operations provided the United States with sufficient freedom of maneuver to better understand its opponent and take defensive precautions to thwart another attack such as 11 September. Perhaps most importantly the improved performance of conventional and proxy forces, through special operations, denied al-Qaeda its sanctuary, and with it the training camps, operating bases, and other facilities that made its attack on the United States possible.

Another example of creating operational freedom of maneuver has occurred in the Philippines. Special operations as part of Operation Enduring Freedom—Philippines (OEF-P) have been crucial both in improving Philippine conventional and special operations forces, and through such actions providing the government of the Philippines with the time and opportunity to address some of the underlying social, political, and economic grievances that exist in Zamboanga and elsewhere.

Second, special operations are designed to increase friction within the ranks of an enemy organization. Individual special operations raids can introduce shock into an enemy system but more lasting effects are achieved in sustained operations to maintain pressure, and therefore increase friction within the enemy system. Friction cannot be created, but its presence within organizations and decision making, a function of stress, imperfect knowledge, and human nature, can be enhanced by special operations in a number of ways. For example, communication lines can be severed or disrupted, impeding anticipated or effective command and control as was the case during Operation Desert Storm. In other examples, enemy plans or strategies that rest on specific timelines, sequences, or assumptions can be thwarted, forcing them to scramble to adapt. Special operations increased Iraqi friction significantly during Operation Iraqi Freedom by deliberately confusing and denying information to the senior Iraqi leadership as to the real avenue of approach of Coalition forces. One instrumental impact of special operations, in conjunction with conventional forces, was to fix key Iraqi units in place and limit their response to ineffective local counterattacks by militias.

In a sustained campaign against al-Qaeda, its affiliates, and adherents, friction comes as a result of an "inside-out problem" that confronts leaders with a dilemma when special operations are used. Communications and trust-based links are necessary to sustain a network of regional and global clandestine organizations and cells. Such communications and links, however, can become the means by which security is compromised and organizations and leaders identified and tracked. Special operations have contributed significantly to al-Qaeda's "inside-out problem" by improving the ability of other government agencies to corrupt or attack the group's communications and links. Corrupting links between cells and organizations erodes the crucial ties that give distributed networks their power, and bind leaders to followers. Fearful of discovery or penetration by enemy agents, leaders within clandestine networks historically and today have taken action designed to preserve their own safety and security - for example those undertaken by Usama bin Laden at his compound in Abbotabad - at the cost in overall organizational effectiveness. In addition, leaders have resorted to purges of those they suspect to be traitors, further weakening organizations. Time and resources spent on ferreting out such traitors, real or imagined, is taken away from orchestrating more complicated plots, developing creative attacks, and facilitating resource sharing such as information, key components, or specific technical expertise. Special operations designed to attack the links disrupts or denies communication, and therefore coordination and sharing, between groups and organizations. Terrorist and insurgent leaders are forced to make a Hobbesian choice between how much effort they put on preserving their own

security and safety and how much they devote to attacks against their adversary.

Prolonged special operations campaigns can generate additional strategic effects against an opponent. Through sustained action special operations can hold at risk or attack specific enemy capabilities or vulnerabilities. The preceding paragraph discussed one such vulnerability: communications, based on trust, which allows a networked organization comprised of leaders, cells, and groups to coordinate and collaborate. In some cases directly attacking such communications is unnecessary or unneeded. Prior efforts by special operations to attack specific communications, and therefore hold others at risk, has forced al-Qaeda members and affiliates to sink time and resources pursuing other, less effective forms of communication. Similar calculations occur when specific capabilities within an al-Qaeda organization, such as key bomb makers, financiers, facilitators, and other leadership and management, are killed, captured, or held at risk through the threat of future attack. Special operations may make specific capabilities or vulnerabilities critical through their sustained action, or threat of action, against them.

Special operations may make specific capabilities or vulnerabilities critical through their sustained action, or threat of action, against them.

Holding at risk key capabilities and vulnerabilities that allow terrorist networks to function is only one indirect method of special operations strategically. Special operations can be used indirectly to challenge al-Qaeda and its affiliates by enabling and improving the performance of partner nations and proxy forces. Where functioning states exist, U.S. security assistance and related programs such as the Combating Terrorism Fellowship Program (CTFP) facilitated by special operations seek to improve the capability and capacity of the forces of partner nations. Such nations have included Pakistan, Indonesia, and Nigeria and CTFP-funded programs spearheaded by special operations forces, have improved their ability to identify, isolate, and defeat violent extremist threats within their own borders. The results of improving the capabilities and capacity of partner nations are not immediately apparent. In a strategy of attrition against AQAA such results take time and is no guarantee of success given the internal political, economic, social, and military challenges faced by some countries. Where no functioning state exists, or where states refuse to function, special operations can improve the performance of proxy forces through training, equipping, provision of information, and augmenting native capability.

Challenges that accompany the opportunities

Strategies of attrition cut both ways, in that they consume resources for both sides of the conflict. Given the overwhelming advantages possessed by the United States and its partner nations relative to al-Qaeda, its affiliates, and adherents,

one might reasonably conclude that a strategy of attrition against VENs is not problematic. We can regenerate forces much quicker than VENs and material losses are not felt as acutely in a large country as they are in a small, kinship-based network. Such a conclusion overlooks the fact that strategies of attrition contain not only material aspects, in the form of physical resources, but also non-material aspects related to the will (domestic, political, etc.) to continue. Material and willpower dimensions do not erode or attrit equally. T.E. Lawrence, for example, suggested that relatively small strikes could have a highly disproportionate effect on Turkish will given the harshness of the terrain, the tenuousness of their supply lines, and the isolation of individual garrisons.[vi] The political will in the United States to sustain special operations against AQAA is vulnerable to erosion in two interrelated ways.

The first way in which the political will of the United States may erode in this strategy of attrition is related to the need to sustain operations against a clear and present threat to the country. For many Americans, the most significant chapter in the conflict against al-Qaeda ended with the death of Usama bin Laden. Americans took vengeance against the leader behind the 11 September 2001 attacks. It may be increasingly more difficult for policymakers to argue for continued actions, including special operations, against a threat that is seen as "on the ropes" and increasingly strategically insignificant. [vii] The lack of significant terrorist attacks on the homeland, and the seeming ineptitude of those planning plots that have been disrupted, has also diminished the threat in the public mind. In addition, some of the threat assessments of AQAA appear contradictory. For example one recent depiction suggests that AQAA is a "significant threat to our country" and is "resilient, adaptive, and persistent"; yet the examples provided suggest that most affiliated groups are only capable of limited, local attacks. [viii]

The second potential cause for the erosion of political will is related to how the struggle against AQAA ends. At present, those responsible for fighting against AQAA envision the struggle continuing for the foreseeable future. The lack of a definable end point in the struggle may contribute to further public fatigue or disinterest in terrorism, particularly when more pressing individual and public policy matters, such as

the economy, remain foremost in the public mind.

The erosion of domestic political will to continue the struggle against AQAA could have a severe impact on the efficacy of special operations. In particular, the broad authorities that have made special operations so effective in recent years may be increasingly vulnerable to significant change or restriction. Currently the Commander, United States Special Operations Command, envisions a sustained, aggressive approach termed "global pursuit" to find, track, and remove terrorist threats wherever they might be. [ix] Such an approach will be less overt and more clandestine in nature. The laws and frameworks which would authorize such a special operations approach, including the Authorization to use Military Force (the AUMF), legal authorizations for overt and covert action in U.S. law (Titles 10 and 50, U.S. Code), among others, are likely to come under increasing Congressional scrutiny and revision. [x] Questions regarding the legality and morality of so-called "targeted" or "extra-judicial" killings are also casting doubt over the long-term viability of such special operations.

Understanding the nature of the war in which one is engaged is useful to identify potential future challenges. If identified early enough and addressed such challenges may not erode the foundation upon which a strategy rests. In addition, better understanding the role specific instruments, in particular special operations and the forces that conduct them, play in a strategy of attrition ensures they are not misused or undue expectations are placed upon them. Special operations have and continue to be used because of their short-term effectiveness and high probability of success that makes them exceptionally valuable to policymakers. Understanding that the primary strategic effectiveness of special operations is to set the conditions for the success of other instruments of national power, however, would go far to ensure that they are not used for strategic effect in and of themselves. Put simply, just because special operations are easy to use does not mean they are the answer to a national security problem, but they may be a necessary precondition to solve the national security problem at hand.

The views contained within this article do not represent those of the United States government, the Department of Defense, or the United States Air Force.

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Way of War or the Latest “Fad”? A critique of AirSea Battle

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The debates within the armed services have produced, for want of a better term – a series of fads.

In the absence of an identifiable symmetrical threat to the United States, there is no consensus on how to assure its interests are maintained and obtain advantage from its position in the world. Debates within the defense establishment and beyond have not produced consensus on a new American way of war. The “revolutions in military affairs” defaulted to boots on the ground in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere in a form of warfare the Romans would recognize. None of these revolutions seriously considered strategic context, nor did

they envision a fundamentally altered American approach to (way of) war. The debates within the armed services have produced, for want of a better term – a series of fads.

Fads are breathtaking concepts that sprout unbidden from think tanks and the Department of Defense that consume resources without results. Among them, the idea that distant precision guided munitions coupled with digital links would change the conduct of warfare. Net-centric operations and “Shock and Awe” are among the knowledge fads. More recently effects based operations and design held sway. Yet none of these concepts helped improve performance in Somalia, Bosnia, Kosovo, Iraq and Afghanistan.

the Defense Department is investing time, money and people into a concept that is at best incomplete and is not a war winning concept

The latest potential “fad” is AirSea Battle. According to an unnamed official, “Air-Sea Battle is not a war plan, not a [conops] plan, not an operational plan, it’s a framework of design which articulates and describes what the problem is.” [i] Jan van Tol, the author of an authoritative paper on the AirSea battle concept stated, “AirSea Battle, as a doctrine for the operational level of war, cannot and should not be seen as a “war-winning” concept in itself.” [ii] So, the Defense Department is investing time, money and people into a concept that is at best incomplete and is not a war winning concept. Although we believe the concept responds to a genuine requirement for joint operations we offer several criticisms. This criticism is based exclusively on the public record given that we, like the Chinese and the Iranians who seem to be the inspiration for this concept, know only what is in open sources.

The most authoritative public sources on the AirSea Battle concept are two papers written under the auspices of the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Analysis (CSBA): *Why AirSea Battle* and *AirSea Battle: A point-of-departure Operational Concept*. In the former, Andrew Krepinevich argues that AirSea Battle is necessary based on the growing capacity of China and Iran to challenge the force projection capability of the United States. In the latter, Jan van Tol

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proposes an incomplete campaign that attacks the depth of mainland China to wrest control of the air and sea space in order to conduct a distant blockade. Krepinevich and van Tol conflate the terms framework, concept, and doctrine interchangeably. Further, they do not satisfactorily link the development of this capability to a clear strategic priority.

Policy and Strategy

Policy establishes strategic priorities and guides the use of force. Given the existing economic conditions security policy should be made assuming shrinking budgets. For this article we use Eliot Cohen's model for a 21st century strategy, which includes assumptions, ends, ways, means, priorities, sequencing and a theory of victory.[iii] But AirSea Battle is not proposed as a strategy but rather a concept. So what is the purpose of an operational concept?

Observers of our military know there were times when doctrine was written for the force we wished we had "in the motor pool."

Uniformed officers of all services generally understand that the purpose of a concept is to adapt the force for the future. Service doctrine, the product of military theory, education and experience enabled adaptation to the realities of current operations. LTG (ret) L. Don Holder described the difference between concept and doctrine as: "Concepts describe the force of the future; doctrine employs the force in the motor pool." Observers of our military know there were times when doctrine, described as the engine of change, was written for the force we wished we had "in the motor pool." Given the differences between strategy, concepts and doctrine what do we need for the 21st century?[iv]

The Obama administration's answer to this question may be found in "Sustaining US Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense." This document codifies the shift from a Euro-centric defense policy toward the Pacific. "Sustaining Global Leadership" establishes a course that will result in fewer defense dollars and a clearer focus on the future for military planners. Among ten priorities listed for defense, projecting power in the face of Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2/AD) efforts by potential enemies is listed third. Although there is no announced priority among the ten listed, one can infer that power projection is third among them behind counter terrorism and irregular warfare (at least until the United States withdraws forces from Afghanistan) and deter and defeat aggression.

So what questions arise about AirSea Battle in the context of the administration's defense planning guidance? First and foremost the only investment mandated is a stealthy bomber. This makes sense if the danger posed by anti-access is long range anti-shipping missiles. What this suggests is the carrier battle group is a liability and not an asset in the face of anti-access capabilities such as long range anti-ship missiles. Then why keep building super carriers, since they are both enormously expensive and increasingly vulnerable? If, on

the other hand, the F-35 is built, launched from carriers and refueled by Air Force tankers the carrier retains a role, why develop a stealthy bomber, given what the B-2 costs? Is this investment really necessary now? Given the Chinese investment in stealth aircraft and long range air-to-air missiles specifically targeted at US aerial refueling and AWACs, the long range bomber may be the only option for a penetrating manned system. This leads to two obvious questions. First, do we need a manned system for penetration? More important, should we even be conducting penetrating strikes into a thermo nuclear armed state?

More important to solutions to anti-access capabilities are what power is imagined to be projected if the AirSea Battle concept goes forward? The two CSBA AirSea Battle papers and some unfortunate allusions to rebel success in Libya warrant posing this question. Are land forces to be projected? If so what does the phrase "balanced lift" mean when it appears on page four of "Sustaining US Global Leadership?" The CSBA AirSea Battle papers are silent here suggesting that projection will be limited to projectiles to avoid expensive land campaigns. This begs the question of why invest in such a concept if the intent of anti-access is to preclude decision on the ground? If China, Iran or anyone else develops an anti-access/area denial capability, is the threat of bombing sufficient to deter them from attacking our ships if they enter the denied areas? Is the threat of distant blockade and strategic bombing throughout the breadth and depth of the country sufficient deterrence?

why invest in such a concept if the intent of anti-access is to preclude decision on the ground?

What DO we need?

What is needed, given the conditions of our times, is a combination strategy and concept. Our strategy, guided by our security policy, will serve as the framework for the design of campaigns that ensure the United States and its allies freedom of navigation of the global commons; sea, air, space, and cyber.[v] The strategy will be executed by the force in being. Ensuring access to the global commons requires a joint combined arms team of air, sea, land and special operations forces. The size of these forces depends on the policy objectives we establish for ourselves and the amount of risk we wish to assume. The need to defeat current anti-access and area denial weapons systems will be addressed by the current force. AirSea Battle appears to overlook the area denial challenge posed by land and sea mines, guided missiles, artillery (and its host of guided munitions) as well as mortars. This step toward developing a total campaign, even if we choose to not assist in restructuring of post-hostilities governance, will require land operations as well as sea, air and cyber. Although AirSea Battle is not a war winning concept in itself it is a comprehensively stated outline for operations to defeat anti-access/area denial weapons systems in an overall campaign. If the point of denying access is to prevent the introduction of ground forces then the obvious first step for AirSea Battle is to destroy these systems and take away, even if temporarily, that which the weapons defend.

Taken as a concept for the future what we know of AirSea Battle can serve as a guide for a portion of the force we want and need as anti-access and area denial weapons grow in complexity and lethality. The world still requires commerce thus freedom of navigation at sea, in the air and within the ether are all vital interests. The conceptual underpinning of AirSea Battle, as a necessary phase within a total campaign, is vital in providing guidance for developing weapons programs from missile, counter-missile, surface and sub-surface vessels and aircraft, manned and unmanned. For example, if there is a ballistic missile designed and built to destroy large deck aircraft carriers at strategic distances perhaps the era of the current large capital ship is over and we should develop, or resurrect, the "jeep" carriers of WWII. These smaller carriers could carry unmanned aircraft.[vi] We could also explore the possibility of deception measures that would mask the large deck carrier or cause multiple radar images on the ballistic missiles' guidance systems. For that matter, why risk surface vessels at all? Why not invest in submarines that can attack and destroy the anti-access platforms that our enemies might employ.

For that matter, why risk surface vessels at all?

If Iran is not one of the inspirations for this concept then big combatant ships may not be required. If Iran is part of the inspiration the sea component, alone, will not suffice in any case. Before looking for a threat, policy should lead to strategy. A strategic vision will suggest adversaries and thus what forces are required to execute that strategy. This is the critical point. We need to identify the enemies that may use A2/AD against us and build appropriate forces. While we might not need to land on mainland China we do need to keep the Straits of Hormuz open until we find another way to move the millions of barrels of oil per day. That said, it will take a massively more capable force to deal with China than with Iran. Without this process, a genuine concept is not feasible. The purpose of any concept after all is to describe the force of the future.

So while there is a growing capability of anti-access and area denial efforts by potential enemies, there is very little in the public record that suggests a compelling reason to invest large sums to overcome that capability. The Iranian threat to close the Straits of Hormuz is real, but they could easily do that with anti-ship missiles that neither naval aviation nor the Air Force can be sure of destroying. Moreover, there is little clear evidence that an AirSea Battle concept as articulated in the open media is sufficient in any case. When queried as to why defeating anti-access efforts are necessary some AirSea Battle advocates claim what is required is to assure that passage through maritime defiles can be secured. If the problem is penetrating the Persian Gulf, land forces would prove crucial. The geography of the straits is telling. One tanker, if successfully attacked, paralyzes the oil shipping industry by raising shipping insurance rates. In any Straits of Hormuz scenario land forces must have the capability to forcibly enter Iran and take away decisive terrain until a political settlement can be reached. Clearly, the straits must be opened relatively swiftly or the oil-dependent global economy crashes. If the problem is defeating Chinese anti-access threats, it is difficult to see why that would be required

if there is no intent to fight China on land; and that is not envisioned by the proponents. In short, access to the global commons is not an end in itself but the means to an end. Humans do not live in the global commons.

21st Century Strategy

Cohen's strategic outline proposed assumptions, ends, ways, means, priorities, sequencing and a theory of victory. The essential assumption regards U.S. policy. We assume the economic health of the United States depends upon freedom of navigation and freedom of commerce; a vital national interest. Therefore a threat to control maritime defiles is a threat to a vital national interest of the United States. Other assumptions can be developed but for our purposes this one will suffice.

In support of our policy of assuring freedom of navigation our strategic end is a restoration of that freedom to global sea traffic. The central way of the strategy is the application of the joint military power of the United States in coherent campaigns designed to remove that threat, and the means the U.S. will use are our existing and future military forces. The priorities of such a strategy are budgetary, as well as based on adversary analysis.

Think tanks (e.g. the Center for New American Security and the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Analysis) propose refocusing on American air and naval power in light of a requirement to operate in the global commons. In the aftermath of two protracted land wars it is time for a strategic re-evaluation and, perhaps, some shift in budget priorities. A pragmatic assessment of real and potential adversary capabilities clearly must be a part of the strategic review. For example, if our air bases are vulnerable to Chinese intermediate range ballistic missiles then perhaps an investment in Patriot anti-missile equipped brigades is necessary. However, the concern about forward bases may be overdrawn. Throughout the Cold War our bases in Europe lay well inside the range of the weapons systems of the Warsaw Pact. The same is true on the Korean peninsula. Why then is this new threat more compelling than the one which the United States and NATO confronted in Europe and the US and South Koreans still endure? China does possess thousands of missiles that are accurate enough to hit selected targets. Thus, by choosing to operate bases within the range fan of these missiles—and we will have to use these bases—we need a range of options for defense to include hardening and rapid recovery. Frankly, the case is yet to be made that the threat from either China or Iran is so compelling as to require large investments to mitigate.

Nonetheless, AirSea Battle is a cogent articulation of a *phase* of campaign to reduce or eliminate an adversary's ability to deny the use of a maritime defile or preclude the United States from assisting a friendly nation in repelling an assault. The current Joint Staff campaign phasing model addresses the sequencing of the use of military power throughout a campaign; the shift from defense to offense and the priority of effort. Coupled with the exercise of diplomatic and information power a coherent strategic outcome could be the removal a threat without a direct clash of arms. Demonstrated capability underpins deterrence, complicating the strategic

calculus of potential adversaries. This coherence and unity of effort supports the theory of victory a strategy for the 21st century demands.

Demonstrated capability underpins deterrence, complicating the strategic calculus of potential adversaries.

Whither AirSea Battle?

So what are the major criticisms of AirSea Battle? First, anti-access/area denial is not a new problem. To check the assertions examine the investments in mine clearing in the last four decades. If AirSea Battle is required to assure the integration of Air and Sea assets, what does this suggest about the utility of Goldwater-Nichols and the shibboleth that the Department of Defense has made about "jointness." What are the strategic imperatives that necessitate this concept which addresses a single phase of a joint campaign? If this is not about Iran and China who then is it about? Is this about Somali pirates? If this is, as it surely must be, about China and Iran, once we have defeated their anti-access efforts, then what? This is one of the critical questions. In what strategic context is this concept essential or is it a lesser included offensive within a larger joint concept or way of war? Frankly, answers to these questions cannot be found in open sources. Congress should demand answers before it authorizes and appropriates resources and re-apportions the defense budget to meet the requirements the Air Force and Navy seem to contemplate.

Although it is possible a peer competitor will seek to deny access and use one or more of the global commons to its advantage this does not make the AirSea Battle concept a war winner. Before AirSea Battle is taken seriously as a useful joint concept it is necessary to articulate the strategic context, as noted, this is the critical question, and to examine whether this is a serious attempt by the air and sea services to deal with a legitimate problem, or an institutional response to the threat of reduced budgets. Critical review of the claims of each of the services must be taken. Institutions do not willingly reduce their consumption of resources nor do they typically stray far from their culture and institutional prejudices. Nowhere can this be seen more clearly than in

the Air Force Association's October 2011 presentation: "Air Power Advocacy." As Lt Gen Paul Van Riper said, "Meanwhile in a most 'non-joint way' two services offered up the concept of Air-Sea Battle (ASB), which they plainly developed more to support weapons programs than as an actual operating concept." [vii]

Given that the Air Force Association is unlikely to take positions that are not tacitly supported by the Air Force this presentation suggests how the Air service is thinking. "Air Power Advocacy" renews the vision of Giulio Douhet, promising a clean, decisive fight with few casualties if only the Air Force gets a larger share of the budget. This argument is supported by, to say the least, shallow analysis of recent campaigns.

With fewer than 300 ships the Navy quite reasonably contends that it will need more vessels. How many and what kind of vessels are needed is the question? If the Navy is serious about defeating anti-access we should be looking for investment in demining capability and very long range anti-ship and land attack missiles. In a Navy staff briefing to Undersecretary of the Navy Robert Work on 26 October 2010 one chart was titled, "At its core, AirSea Battle is about winning a guided munitions salvo competition." Congress should ask hard questions about why the United States should continue to build super carriers at the current rate of approximately \$13 Billion a piece.

Finally, look carefully at how the Army balances the need for combat brigades with the need for capability to shape future theaters of war and the capacity to expand rapidly. This will indicate if the Army organizes for an ambiguous future or for the last war, exclusively counter-insurgent. AirSea Battle may well be necessary to wage future campaigns but it is unlikely to be sufficient. As noted earlier, this is one of the key issues.

The Congress should be wary of any concept proposed by the services or the Department of Defense that requires large investment in the absence of clearly articulated strategic requirements which are not forthcoming publicly where, in the end, the case must be made. No matter what the threat is, the projected \$487B in defense cuts over the next decade will affect the capability we are likely to require. Thinking through the problem vice protecting service "rice bowls" is essential in an era with fewer resources, and no clearly identifiable symmetrical threats to the United States.

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The Making of Strategy and the Junior Coalition Partner: Australia and the 2003 Iraq War

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Introduction

Australia has always gone to war as a member of a coalition, and then always as a junior partner. The Australian Army, and the broader Australian Defence Force (ADF), has never had the opportunity, or capacity, to fight a war on its own. Instead, Australia provides capabilities that fit within a senior force's requirements. In acknowledging its subordinate role, Australia has also accepted that it will have limited input into considerations of strategy. This has always been the responsibility of the coalition leader or leaders.

The Iraq War was different, however. Unusually, strategic calculation was at the forefront of the Australian Government's senior political leaders and their military advisors. The Australian Government of Prime Minister John Howard saw the War in Iraq as an opportunity to advance a long-held security objective, one that had little to do with events in the Middle East. For Australia, the policy goal for its participation in the Iraq War was the opportunity to enhance its relationship with the United States. In achieving this objective Australia identified factors by which a junior coalition partner can set and attain its own policy goals, and, importantly, avoid creating a conflict with the objectives of the coalition-leader. Australian experience suggests that for middle powers, it is possible to find a middle path

Australia's Strategic Objective for Iraq

The Australian Government never subscribed to the US purpose for going to war with Iraq. At no point did the Howard

Government adopt the US plan for regime change in Iraq as its own, nor did it ever maintain that the remaking of the Arab world was its reason for joining the US-led Coalition. These were the policy goals of the United States and its President, George W Bush. Instead, the Australian Government justified its participation in the Coalition on international co-operation grounds, namely the need to enforce United Nations Security Council Resolutions (UNSCR) 1441 and 687. In particular, Howard sought the disarming of Iraq of its weapons-of-mass-destruction (WMD) which he believed posed a direct threat to Australia if Saddam Hussein was to make them available to terrorists.[i]

The Australian Government never subscribed to the US purpose for going to war with Iraq.

Even so, the enforcement of UNSCRs and the danger represented by WMDs were not the ultimate purpose behind the Howard Government's decision to participate in the war. Rather, they were the enablers of a larger purpose. In much the same way that Bush's objective of removing Saddam Hussein was the first step in the achievement of his own government's larger purpose — the remaking of the Middle East — Howard defined a secondary goal, one that, in fact, took primacy. Shortly after taking office in 1996, Howard had established as a long-term security goal the reinvigoration of Australia's bilateral security relationship with the United States. His predecessors had gradually allowed this relationship to be taken for granted; never a good state of affairs for a country's key national security arrangement. At his Government's first Australian-United States Ministerial Consultation (AUSMIN), Howard's Foreign Minister Alexander Downer identified the enhancement of Australia's security relationship with the United States as a key policy objective. [ii] Iraq provided Howard with the opportunity to advance Australia's relationship with the United States. Thus Australia's final, and true, purpose in joining the Coalition against Iraq was to support the United States and, in doing so, use the war as a means to strengthen the security relationship between the two countries. In pursuing this purpose Howard was remarkably successful, as is demonstrated by the close ties that exist between the two countries today.

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The determination that Australia sought the opportunity to enhance its relationship with the United States will not come as a shock to anyone familiar with the broad sweep of Australian national security policy. Australia's ultimate defence is dependent on the agreement of a great power. The US-Australian Alliance is frequently identified as the foundation of Australia's national security and its importance is highlighted in Defence White Papers and other official public announcements.[iii] For example, in his 2011 National Security Statement the then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd described the alliance as 'fundamental to Australia's national security interests':[iv]

The announcements following the 2011 AUSMIN talks in San Francisco show how far Australia has exceeded itself in re-energising the relationship with the United States. In fact, so close had the relationship become that one commentator described the meeting's Joint Communiqué as a 'joint plan of action':[v] The evidence of the depth and warmth of the relationship was on display when President Barack Obama visited Canberra in late 2011 and addressed the Australian Parliament.[vi] Obama announced expanded military ties, including the rotation of US Marines on Australian soil, starting with a modest 250 personnel but building to 2500.[vii]

Yet, what makes the formulation of Australian strategy for the Iraq War interesting is not that Howard used the war as a means to advance the nation's security interests. After all, the protection of sovereignty is one of the core responsibilities of the state. Rather, the importance lies in identifying the means by which the country achieved this end-point. It is the 'how' not the 'what' that is of significance and it is to this that this article will now turn.

The Junior-Senior Coalition Partner Dynamic

The Australian experience of the Iraq War suggests that there are a number of factors that enable a junior partner to implement the means by which to obtain a policy objective distinct from that of its coalition leader. The means Australia used to accomplish this can be summarised as:

- All of a junior partner's key decision-makers must understand the policy objective and be unified in its pursuit.
- The force structure of a junior partner's contribution to a coalition, and the capabilities and risk acceptance of this participation, must be defined early and then held to.
- A junior coalition partner must understand the senior partner's political-military dynamic if it is to negotiate successfully the potential competing claims for support by the senior partner's political and military leaders.
- Whatever forces a junior partner provides to a coalition must be capable of performing their assigned task. This is more important than the size of the contribution.
- The junior partner's strategic objective must be compatible with the senior partner's, and, perhaps most importantly, it must be modest.

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These factors will be more closely examined in turn.

The Australian scholar David Horner commented on a junior partner's need for strategic clarity in his book *High Command*, which considered Australia's role in Allied strategy in the Second World War. Horner concluded that if a small power 'is to extract the maximum advantage from its relations with a great power, all parts of its decision-making machinery must work in harmony':[viii] This did not happen in the Second World War, and Prime Minister John Curtin and his senior general Thomas Blamey often worked at cross-purposes, to the country's detriment. Moreover, the US Commander in the South West Pacific, General Douglas MacArthur, exploited Australian divisiveness to his own ends.[ix]

By contrast, such Australian political-military divisiveness was not evident in the Iraq War. Howard and his senior general, the Chief of Defence Force General Peter Cosgrove (and later Air Chief Marshal Angus Houston) acted as one in regards to Iraq. Cosgrove understood the Government's purpose and worked towards that goal. To keep the ADF on target the CDF tightly controlled the mission and kept the Prime Minister informed of its progress. Contemporary military theory contains numerous references to the effect of the "strategic corporal". In Iraq the influence of the junior ranks was minimal as Cosgrove aspired to be the "tactical general". Throughout the Iraq War no issue was too unimportant for the CDF's strategic-level oversight. The commander of Australia's headquarters in the Middle East also served as Cosgrove's strategic-level theatre representative. He had direct access to the CDF — outside the formal chain of command — and kept Cosgrove alert to all activities across the Coalition that might have an effect upon Australia's ability to secure its goals.

In advance of going to war, Howard had outlined to Bush the limits of Australian participation. The political and military leaders of the United States knew and understood these limits and welcomed what Howard was willing to offer and how it was to be used. The United States also knew that Australia had committed only to the invasion phase of the war and never intended to participate in Phase IV activities. When the war's invasion phase came to an end, Cosgrove resisted any thoughts of remaining in Iraq to assist with the country's occupation, and returned to Australia most of the deployed force as quickly as lift could be arranged.

As is known, Australia was only partially successful in limiting its Phase IV role and the ADF did have to deploy some additional personnel and capabilities. Some of these were of relatively short duration, such as the air traffic control team that served at Baghdad International Airport; others would become long-term commitments such as the recently wound-up security detachment that protected the Australian Embassy and staff in Baghdad. Eventually, Australia did choose to further increase its ground commitment by deploying a training team and a small overwatch battle group. However,

these too were not open-ended commitments and they had clearly defined roles which greatly constrained the tasks that the Government would allow them to undertake. The priority task was, in fact, force protection.[x] This is reflected in the Australian Government's selection of the provinces in which it allowed the training and overwatch battle groups to operate. From a threat perspective, Al-Muthanna and Dhi Qar were among the most benign provinces in the country.[xi]

although Australia maintained several types of task groups in Iraq over the course of the occupation, their mission was never to fight the insurgency

It should also be noted that although Australia maintained several types of task groups in Iraq over the course of the occupation, their mission was never to fight the insurgency. That was someone else's job. Even in Al-Muthanna and Dhi Qar Provinces, Australian soldiers were not responsible for taking the fight to the enemy. Their job was training and overwatch, the latter a task that they were never called upon to perform. In fact, the only Australians with a direct role in the Iraq COIN fight were those personnel embedded in Coalition headquarters – such as Major-General Jim Molan who served as General George W Casey's Chief of Operations – and perhaps those personnel serving in Ballad as part of the Australian medical detachment or the even smaller team in Taji working at the US COIN Center.[xii]

Australia was able to limit its role so effectively because it had a good understanding of the distinction between the political and military requirements of the US's war effort. In the face of significant international opposition to the war, the Bush Administration was content with knowing that Australia was willing to commit forces at all. In fact, at the political level, there was no need for Australia to make a more robust commitment. Senior US military leaders in the Pentagon or at CENTCOM might have liked a larger Australian contribution, but their desires were of distant importance when compared to those of the Bush Administration. It could be argued that the United States political leadership would have been content with an even smaller commitment from Australia, as long as it was visible. In balancing aims and means with policy perhaps Australia's commitment was in fact not small enough.

In balancing aims and means with policy perhaps Australia's commitment was in fact not small enough.

Howard and Cosgrove were able to exploit the US political-military divide because they recognised that for Australia the war's centre of gravity lay in Washington, and to a lesser extent Canberra, not in Baghdad or Tampa. Howard's and Cosgrove's understanding of this dynamic underpinned all Australian decisions regarding the conduct of the Australian

Defence Force in Iraq. It was the opinion of Washington's political decision-makers that mattered most to Howard and Cosgrove. Of second importance to Howard was the opinion of the Australian domestic audience and he recognised the necessity of minimising casualties. In this the Prime Minister successfully managed a potentially divisive issue. Events in Iraq, by comparison, were considerably less important to the achievement of Australia's policy goal.

In making its modest contribution, Australia did make sure that it was a capable one. This is another key tenet by which a junior partner can maximise its exposure in the eyes of a Coalition's senior partner. While the ADF did not send much to Iraq in numbers, and while it took on limited tasks, what it did send was very capable of fulfilling the mission that the two countries agreed upon. This is a great benefit for a Coalition leader. All too often Coalitions contain some national forces whose military contribution may be more negative than positive, who bring support requirements and capability dependencies that are so great that they offset their military benefit, although such contingents may still have political benefit. In Iraq, Australia may not have taken on a large task but it was one that US forces no longer had to perform, or even think about.

Australia was successful in securing its goal in going to war in Iraq because its agenda aligned itself with that of the United States

Lastly, it appears that Australia was successful in securing its goal in going to war in Iraq because its agenda aligned itself with that of the United States. Although different, the Australian purpose remained compatible with the US purpose. In seeking to secure its own goals Australia was still supporting its senior Coalition partner's goals, if only by its presence. In going to war, Australia's strategists knew that in Coalition operations restraints remained on the ambitions of a junior partner. Australia was careful not to go too far in setting a distinct policy goal. Middle power leaders must remember that when defining a strategic purpose of their own, a key factor in securing its achievement will be how well it fits with that of the great power.

Conclusion

Throughout the conflict Australia demonstrated skill in linking aims with means, but it remains to question whether the desired policy goal was worth the effort and cost of going to war. All powers, not just middle ones, should not embrace war lightly. They should carefully weigh the value of using force to achieve a policy goal with the anticipated cost, and then make a judgement on whether or not the effort – if successful – results in a net benefit. For Australia the question to ask is whether the pursuit of an enhanced security relationship with the United States was a legitimate rationale for the nation's participation in the Coalition, and whether doing it would produce a beneficial outcome that exceeded the costs.

That Australia sought through its participation in the Iraq War

to strengthen its security relationship with the United States was eminently sensible. Australia's alliance with the United States is sometimes derided by commentators as some form of 'insurance policy'. Yet, as insurance policies go this one is not too bad, and not too onerous. It is indeed better than the other options.

For the Australian people to forsake their traditional reliance on a great power protector either of two changes in attitude would have to occur. The first is that they accept that war has ceased to be a part of the human condition, thus allowing Australia to no longer fear threats to its territory or interests. Such a conclusion may be comforting, but there is little evidence to support it. Instead, the reality expressed in the title of Colin Gray's 2005 book on the future of war appears more accurate, *Another Bloody Century*, he called it. [xiii] The other option for Australia is to go it alone and for the Government to increase significantly defence's share of the national wealth. However, as such a commitment has never found favour with the voting public.

Australia managed to negotiate the strategic process - that is the linking of means with aims - not only successfully but also at very modest cost

That Australia managed to negotiate the strategic process - that is the linking of means with aims - not only successfully but also at very modest cost is of note. In achieving its purpose in going to war with Iraq, Australia suffered just two non-battle fatalities. The cost in treasure was also modest. In comparison to other countries, the price Australia paid in Iraq to advance its security at home was cheap indeed.

Therefore, from the perspective of a national security cost-benefit analysis, Australia's decision to participate in the Coalition against Iraq was the correct one.

Still there is need for Australia to avoid being too self-congratulatory in the achieving of its strategic purpose. Those who inhabited the corridors of power in Washington understood the game and it would be inconceivable that they were unaware of and or intolerant of Canberra's separate agenda. But Washington had an agenda of its own and the securing of Australia's participation was a priority for the Bush Administration.

It would also be sensible to recognise that a key factor in Australia's success in achieving its political purpose was that this purpose was relatively modest; its task so much easier to achieve than that of the United States. In strategy the balance of aims, means and goals is a vital consideration, and in Iraq Australia got it right. There is no cause for self-congratulation, however, nor reason to assume that Australia's politicians and military leaders are unusually skilful. Rather, their main skill was in limiting themselves to an achievable goal; they correctly sensed the limits of the nation's power. Australia's leaders did not have to consider how to win the war; they did not have to deal with problems of anything near the same degree of complexity or danger as their US opposites. Nor did Australia have to consider the steady drip of casualties whose sacrifice should not be forgotten. US political and military leaders were operating in a realm that far exceeded Australia's considerably more limited ambitions and abilities. The United States may have failed to achieve its purpose in Iraq, but in part that was only because it was too grand in the selection of its political aim in going to war in the first place.

The views expressed in this paper are the authors and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Australian Army, Australian Department of Defence or the Australian Government.

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