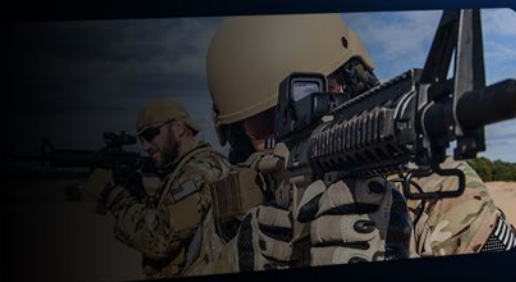**Because strategy never stops...**

Infinity Journal

IN THIS EDITION

Colin S. Gray | Antulio J. Echevarria II | Lukas Milevski

Kevin C.M. Benson | Eado Hecht | M.L.R. Smith | David Martin Jones

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A Note from the Editor

It stands as a credit to the work of this journal's publisher, Dr. A.E. Stahl that I as Editor have been gifted with a particularly strong issue this quarter. Indeed, this may have to exist as the gold standard. All six authors, which are Colin Gray, Antulio Echevarria, Lukas Mileveski, Kevin Benson, Eado Hecht, and MLR Smith are proven hands in their fields. They all definitely qualify as "safe" in terms of men who can be relied upon to start with the right approach to the subject which this journal addresses, but it is to one issue I am going to focus the rest of this editorial. It may well be that only one article addresses this matter specifically, but all are reliant to a greater or lesser extent on the subject concerned, and that is "Strategic History."

For greater insights, read the all six articles to form an opinion, but there is a simple and overwhelming truth here which might be said to be so simple and so obvious it does not require stating, but given the banality and inaccuracy which the internet feeds daily to the discussion of strategy it may well need emphasizing to an unusual degree. All we know about war and warfare, thus strategy, is given to us by recorded history, yet the lens of strategic history seems rarely applied by historians. The idea that military historians understand "strategy" is not a safe or proven assumption. Indeed, that assumption may lead to considerable errors. Military history is increasingly what entertains and what sells, not what provides insights to the applications community.

OK, so what?

As I have complained somewhat endlessly, finding the right material for IJ is problematic. Strategic studies and strategic theory completely lack discipline as fields of study, so our journal can only persist by adhering to our own self-imposed standards. Strategic history does provide another tool in helping us support those standards. Theory only has to meet two tests. First that it explains extant phenomena, and second that it enables a degree of prediction. Thus, being able to draw a distinction between Strategic Theory and Strategic History should be almost impossible, yet while many have wrestled with and pontificated upon the supposed problematic nature of Strategic Theory, only a few have focused any effort upon Strategic History as being that body of evidence which can give rise to true theory.

Strategic History is essentially military history for those seeking insight and not entertainment. As strategy can only do done as tactics, it should seamlessly fuse the influence policy seeks with consequences and outcomes of violence, or the threat thereof.

There may be more to say here, but it is probably best that you turn the page and read on.

William F. Owen
Editor, *Infinity Journal*
August 2018

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Strategic History

Colin S. Gray

United Kingdom

Dr. Colin S. Gray has lived in three countries and has performed official advisory duties in both the UK and the USA. Of recent years he has focused on policy and strategy at both ends of the spectrum of violence, Special Operations and Nuclear ones. His most recent book *Theory of Strategy*, was published by Oxford University Press, in May 2018 (UK) and July 2018 (US).

Concept

The two familiar words that comprise this concept rank high among misunderstood terms. Both noun and adjective are as popular as they often deceive. In a book published a few years ago I offered the following effort at definition:

> *Strategic history is the history of the influence of the use, and threat of use, of politically motivated force.*[i]

These words are tolerable, provided the reader understands, first, that strategy is about ideas for action, not action itself. Second, the reader needs to appreciate the true meaning of history. Historians write and interpret what commonly is miscalled and misunderstood as history, but actually is not and cannot be. History and the past are of course different. All communities, nations and tribes, tell tales about themselves that are, in varying measure, untrue. History books worldwide are shot through with inaccuracies, myths and legends. This is the case even when our tribal educators strive to be accurate. The problem is fundamental and insoluble. The past cannot be recreated, no matter how hard and honestly we try. Plainly this cannot be welcome news for the bold strategic theorist grappling with the concept of strategic history. The best advice this strategic theorist can offer is that we should note, even admit, the weakness in the key words of our preferred definition(s), but ought not to discard highly potent ideas just because they have limitations. What does matter profoundly is that the limitations should be well understood. Notwithstanding the difficulties that beset the concept of strategic history, it is rewarding to understanding to pose the fundamental question - why? Why is the idea of strategic history important? Scarcely less important is the ancillary question, why have neither scholars nor military practitioners adopted this concept in order to see whither it might take them?

The intellectually respectable, if less than glittering, answer most probably is so obvious that it has hidden successfully in plain sight. Strategic theorists have lacked an openness of mind to unfamiliar concepts, especially to those that did not enjoy significant popular endorsement. If scholars appear happy enough with the intellectual content of the ideas that they inherited, where else can they begin their studies? They are not likely to launch intellectually exciting, but perilous, expeditions in quest of novel concepts to attempt to tame and employ. Among other hazards, intellectual novelty in the broad fields of defence and security might even be dangerously imprudent. A concept like strategic history is almost frightening in what its use, even its abuse, might suggest and possibly reveal.

The very concept of strategic history has an inherent bias away from the time horizon in which politicians and journalists feel comfortable, the present day and very recent past are their temporal focus, because their employment is about today and not much later than that. Also, the jobs of politicians and journalist critics are tied to the conduct of political affairs. The experts who must manage current and near-term future affairs are, by analogy with the military hierarchy of higher command, locked into a world of tactics, with occasional operational level forays. Probably contrary to appearances, this is not to be super critical of busy officials and politicians. In their jobs they are more than fully employed with tactics and operations. Quite obviously there is little time left available for policy and its strategy. It is not hard to understand why the concept of strategic history has little or no appeal to overly busy officials and politicians. Sadly, it can be said that the concept has what exceedingly limited appeal it does enjoy in good part because it sounds so grand, while remaining beyond practical utility.

It is probably sensible to dampen what could prove to be undue enthusiasm for the concept of strategic history simply for the reason that now it is much too soon to be either optimistic or pessimistic on the vital matter of its utility.

On one important claim we can be entirely certain about our interpretation of the past: specifically, whatever its

geopolitical and therefore geostrategic scope may or may not have encompassed, we can be certain that all human communities, in all periods of the past, had and were aware they had, a strategic context within which they were (and are) obliged by necessity to operate. Human beings gather in communities for security. This gathering requires political activity, which inevitably leads to anxiety about rival communities. Thus, the need for strategy is born, always and everywhere. World history includes a ubiquitous strategic theme. We have always had a strategic context.

History – The Plot

A vital, indeed essential, function of theory is to help make sense of what, in its absence may be largely a confused and confusing muddle. Possible players as well primarily as those acting bystanders tend to merge, even fuse, into an inchoate mass. Rulers, actual as well as merely aspiring, typically escape our contemporary ability to look back with much understanding, let alone empathy. All too obviously, meaning in history (or the past, more accurately though less manageably) is beyond reliable control by the aspirant historian.[ii] Frustration looms as we strive to make sense of our past. Possible evidence we have, but how should we proceed in an attempt to corral and probably then categorize, the sheer mass of yesterday's happenings? The scale of the challenge is not easily met even were we to enjoy a quantity and quality of access to the past that is quite beyond us now. Although we enjoy a fair quality of access to much that has happened of recent years, that comprises only a notably modest fraction of total human experience. In order to locate and study our strategic history, obviously we require theory in order to allow us to discriminate between strategic and non-strategic matters.

Fortunately, we have readily to hand the logical basis necessary for the unlocking of all human doors upon strategic behaviour. What is more, there is no need for historical personnel to intend such behaviour. In order to penetrate human behaviour what is necessary is ruthless application of the elementary, indeed elemental, logical formula comprising at its core just four elements: Ends, Ways, and Means, together with the help and hindrance of Assumptions. Logically as usefully reliably inclusive as the Thucydidean triptych of fear, honour, and interest, these fundamental four enable us to endeavour to explain happenings long in the past concerning which reliable records are conclusively missing.[iii] As students of Carl von Clausewitz, we are not confused about the stakes in strategic history.

We can and probably should go beyond the Prussian's theorizing and agree that the threat or actual use of military power always has political meaning, both that intended at the time of its employment and also that which follows, either wholly or only partially as a consequence.[iv] As the better histories recognize, a great deal that happens is almost certainly largely the product of fortune, good and bad. The general theory of strategic history I advance here makes no demands for accurate fine-grained detail. I grant freely that states and their functionally partial predecessors in pre-modern times frequently misbehaved in strategically incompetent ways. Also, I recognize, of course, that in the real world of whichever time and in whatever geography,

strategic leaders were obliged by often frustrating necessity to do the best they were able, given the contextual realities which only rarely they could design and execute for optimum effect. In other words, whether it was Ancient Rome striving for the security of the frontier of empire beyond the Euphrates, or American policymakers two millennia later endeavouring (ineffectively) to oppose the maturing of Russian influence in Syria, the story is really the same strategically.[v] Whether it is Rome with approximately thirty legions, and a like number of auxiliary units, or the United States today spending $600 billion annually upon the defence function (understood broadly), it is perhaps a cause of some surprise that so little of fundamental significance bearing upon human security has changed over millennia. The scholar eventually may surrender conceptually and even morally to the highly controversial argument that the strategic history of the human race essentially is a unity that can be accommodated fully, if not always comfortably, under the tent provided by one general theory. Regarded properly, which means functionally, it is not really hard to grasp the unity of all human phenomena.

Strategic history worthy of the bold and unfamiliar title fits over the conceptual quartet of Ends, Ways, Means, and Assumptions, a thoroughly functionally reliable guide. Societies cannot, indeed also historically could not, compete, sometimes militarily, for security without their employment of whatever local mix of real-time, real world, actualities that were, or are, to hand and available. The conceptual quartet fits all actors in all periods. Of course, every political player makes mistakes from time to time, but the logic of strategic necessity is inexorable and unavoidable, except by accident. The strategic historian has no difficulty seeking and occasionally finding unusual tactics, possibly bizarre operational intentions, and even cases of largely unmerited strategic advantage. Strategic history does not make extravagant demands, and its probable course and consequences are rarely surprising. Really it qualifies as superior existential truth. In any and every period of history, the political actors had chosen policy goals, and they were obliged to find strategies to make effective use of the military and other means available to them. The theory's austerity, free of detailed advice, means that it can, and should, serve as the basis for specific theory that does privilege particular strategic choices.

Continuities

No matter how advanced our social sciences are becoming there should be little reason to doubt that geography will never be removed from the top table of contributors to global anxieties, even actual mayhem. In the wise words of the great Dutch-American geopolitical theorist, Nicholas J. Spykman:

> *Because the geographic characteristics of states are relatively unchanging and unchangeable, the geographic demands of those states will remain the same for centuries, and because the world has not yet reached that happy state where the wants of no man conflict with those of another, those demands will cause friction. Thus at the door of geography may be laid the blame for many of the age-long struggles which run persistently through history while governments and dynasties rise and fall. [vi]*

Although it certainly has proved to rank highly among the influences that produce discord and worse among peoples, geography, both physical and what needs to be termed cultural, has always found generous support provided by public anxiety and, of course, inevitably politics. As best we are able to tell from what passes as evidence, albeit only minimally at best in some cases, strategic history has not altered in kind, at least not in ways that should count as being truly exceptional. This may appear a shocking thought to some of the readers of the journal. Under serious consideration here is the relevant hypothesis: Notwithstanding the libraries that have been written on the subject of the 'new', at least the different, I am exploring the possible merit in the proposition that little of fundamental importance for human life and happiness has shifted in times of record. This proposition obviously is absurd unless I pause promptly to explain exactly what I am, and more significantly, what I am not claiming.

Both material and ideational cultures have registered significant changes many times now past. However, what is particularly interesting is to notice the major contributions that do not appear to have altered in fundamental ways. If we focus on categories of behaviour rather than individual items, we discover that strategic history lends itself readily to organization for disciplined analysis and, hopefully, understanding. The argument here can be reduced to the necessity to comprehend the necessary relations among only three vital qualities: security, politics, and strategy. These three are structurally adequate to support a general theory of strategic history. As always, no advance can be secured unless the central concepts are defined rigorously and subsequently applied as appropriate.

First, for a rather unsatisfactory conceptual launch, it should be recognized that **security** is an idea beyond definitional settlement. It is always both variable with contextual meaning and also notably subjective. Just as individuals have very different levels of tolerance of risk, so security is a feeling that varies among people, probably at different times of day, let alone in different days of the week!

Second, security always is arranged, sometimes prearranged by **politics**. All places and all times of necessity have had resort to political process. It is not always pretty, or even constitutionally legal, but we need to appreciate this process in functional terms. The purpose of politics, everywhere, at all times, and in a myriad of behavioural forms, is ever about the gaining of influence. The purpose of the political activity, the reason why influence is sought, does not concern us in the crafting of a general theory. It is sufficient for our current purpose simply to know that we humans have always done this.

Third, unsurprisingly, strategic history mandates the paying of attention to the full and proper meaning of the concept of **strategy**. Strategy commands the third position in the trilogy of ideas necessary for this general theory, because it is necessary for our general theory to have extensive, indeed strictly limitless temporal reach. Although security and politics flag necessary beliefs and activities, only the purpose that should be indicated by the consequences of behaviour conveys the necessary sense of movement to behaviour that otherwise may appear all but locked. Of course, there is no

law requiring a matching of effort expended to contextual change. Habit and tradition can disappoint would-be innovators, in both material and cultural fields.

Those who care deeply about the physical geography that continues to figure prominently in our thinking about strategic history, cannot be insensible to the frequency with which particular terrain has been organized for all too familiar reasons bearing on aspirations for regional hegemonic sway. Not only have people in all periods acted similarly, they have done so in approximately the same places geographically. Any doubts we may entertain in this matter should readily be quelled by reflections on the seemingly endless high strategic significance of three rivers: the Rhone, Danube and Euphrates.

Strategy and History

All history is strategic! This extravagant seeming claim reads as if it might be a final-year university examination question. Naturally, if this was a British exam, the key instruction, 'discuss' would be added. The concept of strategic history seems strange, but this appearance is easily recognized as deriving almost wholly from its unfamiliarity. With strategy understood properly as referring strictly to the consequences of force or the threat of force, difficulty with strategic history does not long endure, let alone prevail. One helpful way in which to approach the subject is with the null hypothesis. If all theory about strategic history is misguided at best, and almost certainly seriously in error, what would we be saying about the terms of human existence? Given that by widely agreed definition strategy is about the use made of force and the threat thereof for political reasons, it would be absurdly challenging to remove a strategic element from all categories of political life, domestic or foreign. This is in no sense a moral judgment, rather is it simply a strictly accurate reflection of how things are, how they have always been, and therefore, we must say prudently, how they will be in the future. There are, of course, excellent reasons why our history is so steeped in strategic concerns and judgments. The only reason why one needs to make this argument is because it is not understood as it should be.

At some modest scale of risk of overstatement, it should be recognized that we always live in a historical context that has strategic quality. If we are fortunate that quality will not be pressing or coercive. Nonetheless, the contexts of our lives are more or less heavily impregnated by menace of a strategic kind. Bearing in mind the true meaning of strategy in terms of the consequences of action, it is not hard to comprehend the relevance of strategic issues for the theory and practice of Political Order. This idea has gained some traction of recent years among leading public scholars, but generally it is deemed too vague and general to be useful in statecraft and strategy.[vii] That said, one retains the suspicion that the very high concept of "Political Order" is really, inherently, much too important just to ignore. In the competitive world of states and strategies, it is not self-evidently inappropriate to harbour the prudent suspicions that the ignoring of apparently unfriendly moves abroad may render the gathering of friendly elements too little and too late. It was not for nothing the great French scholar Raymond Aron specified prudence as the cardinal virtue required for sound statecraft.[viii]

There is no small difficulty in persuading people to attempt to reason in search of approximate historical parallels, rather than for strict analogies. It would seem to be the case that we all were educated by the warning that "history does not repeat itself, only historians do that". Alas, this advice has rarely been reliable for levels of contention above the tactical and operational. At the elevated levels of conflict termed policy (and its politics) and strategy, repetition appears more usual than not. However, when we proceed in search of lessons that history, meaning historians, may be able to teach us, we should not allow ourselves to be detained seriously by a quest for historical analogies. Accurate and fully appropriate analogies do exist, but they are so rare that effort ought not to be expended, and therefore almost certainly wasted, in their futile pursuit. The basic, indeed eternal, reason why historical analogy is usually only fool's gold, is because of the abundance of reasons that can apply to human decision-making, not excluding the seemingly trivial and possibly even accidental.

No matter how knowledgeable they are, historians cannot reliably reconstruct a process of past decision-making because they cannot know reliably what the decision-makers of the time in question knew and believed. Nor can they know how strongly they believed whatever it is we are striving to unravel. This does not, perhaps should not, mean that we are always fatally disabled as historians. However, it does mean that our knowledge and understanding is necessarily terminally truncated. For example, consider the unduly proud knights who rode to face oblivion as a result of their tactical and operational folly in the battle at the Horns of Hattin in 1189. We know for certain that they were led by prideful stupidity, but we know also as a complication that typically their religious certainty was amply supported by distinctly terrestrial ambitions, both for honour and profit. The point only is that we human beings, in all periods and every kind of terrain, commonly have distinctly mixed motives that contemporary scholar historians are not able to identify with anything akin to certainty. Admittedly, much strategic behaviour does not appear to be mysterious. For example, the profoundly consequential Battle of Hastings in 1066 was waged tactically in the manner entirely traditional as the Saxon way in battle, anchored on a strong shield wall. This was as predictable as it proved hard to beat, even though William's Normans eventually succeeded, on balance with dire and horrific strategic consequences for England.

Seriously consequential decisions are made for such a wide variety of reasons, often with an intensity that we do not know, that our knowledge and understanding of the past is rarely to be fully trusted. Of particular concern to us for reason of their possibly decisive significance, are motives that are not well articulated publically. In other words, we may well know with tolerable reliability what Julius Caesar said, but we are not likely to be as confident that we understood why he said it. Today, as then also, we know that action and inaction have many motives, morally praiseworthy or otherwise. We understand that moral virtue or blame is usually notably culture-specific. Tribal loyalty is nearly always deemed virtuous, to other members of the tribe at issue. Even the discovery or revelation of apparent tribal guilt, as for example in the making and exercise of yesterday's British Empire, attracts apologists. People short on historical sense have no little trouble simply acknowledging and accepting what was

thought and done in the past, insofar as we can tell, simply as the way things were, true to their own time, frequently meaning only expedient.

Students of strategic history must leave their contemporary standards of belief and behaviour behind when they dare venture into the seriously foreign country that is the past.

Strategic history is a mode of study and understanding exceptionally permissive of an often meretricious determination to evade capture by prejudices of times past. We will certainly fail, but we should be at least somewhat capable of accepting past thought and behaviour on fair terms. Admittedly, this is often close to impossible. This author is certain that no historian, popular or scholarly, can explore what occurred in Europe in 1914-18, without his or her certain knowledge of the events in the 1930s and 40s casting an influential shadow over the process of research and writing. Even the smartest scholars in 1919 did not, indeed could not, know what we know today about the 1930s and beyond. It is often quite a challenge for us to understand that today really is yesterday's tomorrow. It is probable that strategic history will encourage a bias in favour of giving privilege to the most senior of our categories for understanding the past. Of course there is high value in a distinctly tactical level of historical research and writing, but it is almost certainly more rewarding to grasp the meaning of historical events when they can be studied, in the first instance, contextually. Strategic history is a level of scholarly approach that maximises the prospect of the researcher avoiding capture by tactical details, even undoubtedly important ones.

By way of a brief illustration of the argument advanced above, I will cite the historical case of the Battle of Britain conducted by the RAF against the Luftwaffe in August/September 1940. The historian should have little difficulty appreciating that the RAF's strategist, Air Chief Marshal Hugh Dowding, was bequeathed a strategic problem by Britain's context. Dowding appreciated that the victory he sought would be, simply, denial of the air superiority over southern England that the Luftwaffe required as a key enabler for invasion.[ix] The RAF would win if, in German assessment, it did not obviously lose. So long as RAF fighters rose to be able to deny the Luftwaffe's right to fly at will over the likely invasion beaches, Dowding would have won; he recognised that avoidance of defeat would translate as victory. The RAF's victory in 1940 was an essential strategic enabler of all that followed for the eventual defeat of Nazi Germany. Many scholars who have given excellent tactical-technical, even operational, level analyses of the Battle of Britain have failed to understand how and why Dowding commanded as he did, strategically. The strategic historian needs to understand the technology and consequent tactics of the cases in point. However, the vital tactical detail must not be permitted to obscure the reasons why and how combat was waged. The Battle of Britain, 1940, is particularly instructive for the argument here, because Dowding was able to use RAF Fighter Command on the smallest scale tactically and operationally, yet consistent with his dominant strategic objective. That goal was to convince the enemy they were not winning and indeed could not win.

Strategic history should have little difficulty making sense of the tactical and technical realities of the time. Admittedly,

this is rather top-down history, which is not much favoured by those who might wish to climb into the cockpit of their history interpreting machine to teach Germans the errors of their ways. However, strategic history is really entirely supportive of a tactical focus, while appreciating that all strategy is made, can only be made, by tactics and operations. It is these that result in the consequences we understand as strategic.

A Road Forward

The subject here is so extensive as to pose a severe challenge to the researcher and theorist. To help make sense of strategic history I offer four major claims and arguments. These should be considered aids to further research. Given the relative novelty of the concept of strategic history, this essay may justly be regarded largely to be an early work of enquiry requiring much follow-up effort.

1. Ubiquitous and Eternal. Strategic history is not a mere phase in the human story. It is my contention that save for the few very rare cases of true community isolation, the whole of our history everywhere has been blessed and cursed with strategic context. Even when there has been no proximate adversary abroad, all human political communities have found it essential to be able to pose threats of forceful sanctions in cases of culturally unpopular, possibly deviant, behaviour. A domestic context wherein coercive threats are either visibly present or soundly assumed as quietly present in the background, are both evidence of strategic context.

2. Wide Variation The theme in the past for which we search can take any form, provided only that the threat or use of force is a factor of some live, if possibly quiet, moment. The historical context of interest will always be found to have particular features with meaning for the actual or potential threat or use of force. The strategic historian may not be so much interested in particular deeds and characters, as rather more in the evidence, major or minor, of strategic concerns on the part of both individuals and whole communities. For example, he will want to understand what it was like to endure in Saxon England with the terrifying prospect of Norse (Viking) raiders, a highly credible contemporary menace. One day, perhaps, our descendants may wonder at our ability to bear a contemporary strategic context of nuclear danger.

3. Functional Commonality As explained tersely above, we have ready to hand the essential bare architecture needed for theory. We may know a great deal, or possibly little, about particular courses of events in a historical narrative. However, we do know what we have to discover in order to construct a credible narrative. All strategic phenomena, ubiquitously, and eternally functions by following these steps: (1) policy ends are decided politically (2) strategic ways are chosen in order to select the method(s) for accomplishment of the ends; military (at least, coercive) means are provided to execute the strategy of choice – assumptions are made concerning much of all of this, since it is in the realm of "futurology". Of course the particular details of every historical case will be, to a degree, exclusive to itself. That freely granted, the austere framework just mentioned – with its ends, ways, means, and assumptions, can work usefully to aid scholars in the analysis of historical matters concerning which we have only incomplete knowledge. Very often, we find that good answers to historical conundrums are inaccessible. The responsibly truthful scholar does not indulge in unduly speculative analysis. Popular historical fiction will not hesitate to retro-fit modern ideas back into the Roman Empire, but we will strive hard to deny ourselves that satisfaction.

4. Parallelism I have argued against the harmful practice of analogical pursuit. Even when analogy seems highly likely, indeed credible, its temptations should be rejected. There is always just too rich, and to a degree unknowable a causation, about our decision-making for us to be confident that one historical episode truly is twin to another. Nonetheless, it is sensible to look for features that are reasonably common, although they may have occurred in quite different times and places. It is sensible to be alert to the differences, great and small, that appear to frame occurrences as entirely individually true to themselves alone. To that prudent thought, however, we ought not to betray the understanding gained concerning the permanently strategic quality inherent to all our history. Functionally considered, as they should be, there is need to escape and evade the tyranny of a tactical focus. For strategic historians attempting to be faithful to their calling, it will matter little whether a tyrant is poisoned, shot, or deposed legally. And rather more only that he ceases to rule. Strategic historians have to learn when it is prudent not to over-indulge in the mastery of secondary detail.

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[i] Colin S. Gray, War, Peace, and International Relations: An Introduction to Strategic History, 2nd edn. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), p.350.

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[iii] Thucydides, A Comprehensive Guide to 'The Peloponnesian War', ed. by Robert B. Strassler (New York: The Free Press, 1996), p.43.

[iv] Carl von Clausewitz, On War, Michael Howard and Peter Paret trans. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), Chapter 1.

[v] For example, see Freya Stark, Rome on the Euphrates: The Story of a Frontier, (London: Tauris Parke, 2012).

[vi] Nicholas J. Spykman, 'Geography and Foreign Policy', The American Political Science Review, Vol. 32, No.1 (February 1938), p.29.

[vii] See the ambitious study by Francis Fukuyama, The Origins of Political Order: From Pre-Human Times to the French Revolution (London: Profile Books, 2011).

[viii] Raymond Aron, Peace and War: A Theory of International Relations (New York: Doubleday, 1966), p.585, offers what should be judged the definitive words on the subject of prudence in international relations.

[ix] I have addressed the Battle of Britain strategically in, 'Dowding and the British Strategy of Air Defense, 1936-1940', in Williamson Murray and Richard Hart Sinnreich, eds. Successful Strategies: Triumphing in War and Peace from Antiquity to the Present, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp.241-279.

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On Schelling and the Fallacy of Positive Doctrines

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Professor Antulio J. Echevarria II is the editor of the US Army War College Quarterly, *Parameters*. He holds a doctorate in modern history from Princeton University, and is the author of five books: *After Clausewitz* (Kansas 2001), *Clausewitz and Contemporary War* (Oxford 2007), *Imagining Future War* (PSI 2007), *Reconsidering the American Way of War* (Georgetown 2014), and *Military Strategy: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford 2017) as well as numerous articles and monographs on strategic thinking.

History has rightly praised the Harvard economist and Nobel laureate Thomas Crombie Schelling for developing the foundational concepts of bargaining and strategic coercion. Each of these concepts has inspired numerous others. The bargaining model gave rise to attempts to understand how parties weigh the costs and benefits of armed conflict, even as they prosecute such conflicts, and why they choose to settle when they do.[i] Similarly, studies of coercion have examined Schelling's theories of compellence and deterrence in efforts to increase our understanding of them and to make both more effective.[ii]

Unfortunately, as seminal as they were, Schelling's concepts of bargaining and coercion represent the type of "positive doctrines" Carl von Clausewitz eschewed. "We must remind ourselves," said Clausewitz, "that it is simply not possible to construct a model for the art of war that can serve as a scaffolding on which a commander can always rely on for support."[iii] This statement has been taken to mean the Prussian opposed theories that prescribed the steps to be taken for success. But it also reflects his abiding disdain for oversimplified models, those that focus on one causal factor over others, such as chance, uncertainty, fear, warlike passions, talent, and genius. Such theories clearly neglected reality. The best role for theory, he concluded therefore, was to analyze the relationships between ends and means, effects and their causes, and then to convert the insights gained from those analyses into subjective (personal) knowledge, or skill.

Schelling's error was not so much that he developed theories to predict rather than to explain, though he is guilty of that to a degree, but that he oversimplified war by attempting to reduce it to a rational sequence of decisions, a decision-logic. In effect, he deliberately excluded war's irrational factors, much like the many theories Clausewitz rejected nearly two centuries ago, to gain a better understanding of what thought processes contributed to an individual's decision to concede. In so doing, however, he fell victim to the analyzer's paradox: isolating elements to gain a better understanding of each individually distorts the role they play collectively. Still, Schelling's theories hold lessons for the contemporary strategist; this essay discusses some of their strengths and weaknesses.

Schelling's curriculum vitae

Schelling was born into a US Navy family in 1921. But unlike his well-known contemporaries, Bernard Brodie and Robert Osgood, both of whom served in stateside (and largely safe) assignments during the Second World War, Schelling had absolutely no military experience. Both the US Army and US Navy declared him physically unfit for military duty; hence, Schelling worked instead for the US Bureau of the Budget as an analyst. He obtained a bachelor's degree in economics from Berkley in 1944. After the war, he became involved in administering the Marshall Plan, and served as a foreign aid advisor to the Truman administration. He completed a doctorate in economics with Harvard in 1951, and by 1956 he had joined the Yale faculty.

Shortly thereafter, he published two important articles on bargaining: "An Essay on Bargaining" and "Bargaining, Communication, and Limited War."[iv] The latter essay, especially, is said to mark the beginning of his transition from an economist to a strategist, a transition some critics contend he never successfully made.[v] Schelling sent a prepublication copy of the latter essay to Brodie who, unimpressed, replied he had already addressed many of the same issues several years earlier.[vi] Despite an inauspicious start, the two maintained what Brodie later described as a "rugged friendship" in which each commented candidly on the other's draft manuscripts.[vii]

By 1958, Schelling had connected his theory of conflict

behavior to game theory, then heavily based on the works of John von Neumann, by arguing for a complete "reorientation" of the field toward "bargaining."[viii] Shortly thereafter, he joined the faculty at Harvard and began a consulting tenure with the RAND Corporation. Through his relationship with RAND, he became an advisor to Assistant Defense Secretary John McNaughton regarding the strategic direction of the Vietnam conflict, especially the 1965 bombing campaign known as "Rolling Thunder."[ix] The full extent of Schelling's involvement remains unclear, but presumably his theories of coercive bargaining helped shape McNaughton's expectations for the campaign.[x] In 1970, Schelling terminated his capacity as policy advisor in protest over the Nixon administration's expansion of the war into Cambodia.[xi] Thereafter, he turned his attention to applications of game theory to endeavors outside war.

Schelling later claimed his theories never directly influenced US Cold War policies. Admittedly, influence can be difficult to prove and policymakers rarely give credit to others in any case. Yet Schelling clearly left a lasting impression on game theory and on the concepts of bargaining and coercion, all of which informed American Cold War policy in important, if sometimes subtle ways. In addition, his most important works, *Strategy of Conflict* (1960) and *Arms and Influence* (1966), remain foundational to the disciplines of international relations and strategic studies.[xii] Nobel Laureate Roger Myerson recently went so far as to declare *Strategy of Conflict* a "masterpiece that should be recognized as one of the most important and influential books in social theory."[xiii]

The Bargaining Model

Like most of his contemporaries, Schelling drew a sharp distinction between limited and all-out war. He equated the latter to a zero-sum game—one party gains all, while the other loses all. The former, in contrast, constituted a non-zero-sum game—each party achieves an acceptable outcome. He further claimed the "maneuvers and actions of limited war" amounted to a "bargaining process." A bargain is struck, he said, whenever "someone makes a final, sufficient concession," that is, a rational decision to stop unfavorable things from happening, or to enable favorable things to begin happening.

Bargains normally take place by means of "tacit agreements" and "explicit negotiations," and generally pertain to the following categories: (1) the conduct of the war itself, which includes agreements over what types of weapons could be used, who could participate in the fighting, and how, etcetera; (2) the details of the armistice or surrender document that specifies the conditions for halting the conflict; (3) the status of the enemy regime, or regimes, and their fates after the fighting; (4) the disposition of the territories involved in the fighting; (5) long-term agreements, such as disarmament or inspection protocols, to preserve the peace; and (6) the status of countries, nations, alliances, and coalitions necessary to satisfy the conditions of peace.[xiv] Bargaining, thus, underpinned not only how limited wars ended, but also how they unfolded, as well as their direct and indirect consequences.

If bargaining is prevalent in limited wars, argued Schelling,

then the way strategy is thought about requires a reorientation, if not a revolution. Strategy is less about destroying an opponent's material and psychological capacity to resist than it is about modifying the opponent's behavior—whether through "threats" or "threats and promises"—until the desired concession is obtained. Strategy is, thus, an interactive process because the "ability of one participant to gain [its] ends," depends "to an important degree on the decisions that the other participant will make."[xv] In addition, the strategy of conflict, Schelling maintained, applies not only to war, but to virtually any form of conflict or competition that is not a zero-sum game.

Schelling later admitted that ambiguity and uncertainty can obscure the bargaining process. Bargaining could proceed in fits and starts, he said, or be carried out by people who had little experience with it, or who were under strict time constraints or other pressures, or who might look upon the idea of bargaining as a form of "appeasement" or of "collaboration with the enemy."[xvi] Nonetheless, he believed such frictions did little more than modify an individual's decision-logic: "Why does [a competitor] concede?" he asked; the answer was "Because he thinks the other will not. I must concede because he won't. He won't because he thinks I will. He thinks I will because he thinks I think he thinks and so [on]."[xvii]

Because it was deductive in nature, this focus naturally appealed to the rapidly growing field of game or decision theory.[xviii] But, at the same time, it excluded explanations that approached decision-making in terms of organizational, emotional, or sociological behaviors. While subsequent generations of scholars would fault Schelling's *Strategy of Conflict* for this shortcoming, it was already duly noted by contemporary reviewers.[xix]

Schelling's bargaining model has other faults as well. He admitted that friction might obscure the bargaining process, but he still assumed all parties would act rationally, they would allow themselves to endure only so much pain and would prefer to negotiate rather than pay too much for what they wanted, or risk not getting it at all. He excluded irrational forces, such as warlike passions, and the possibility one party might be willing to pay any price for what it wanted, regardless of the likelihood of success. As he later said of the Viet Cong, "We wanted to convince them that we could tolerate more pain than they could, but they weren't rational."[xx] In short, if one or both warring parties did not behave as if they were in a bargaining situation, did bargaining exist?

Two other problems are worth mentioning. First, Schelling's model assumes strategy is interactive in nature, but that is not always the case. While strategy's variables are indeed interdependent, they do not all depend on the actions of the adversary. Some of strategy's activities are noninteractive in nature, that is, they occur independent of a foe's actions or decisions because these are not known; or they occur in relation to achieving greater security but not in relation to a specific foe. Strategy, therefore, has the potential to be interactive but also the potential to be insular. Second, zero-sum games and non-zero-sum games can coexist even in limited wars. An example is the repatriation of prisoners of war in the Korean conflict. Both sides saw that issue as nonnegotiable, hence, as a zero-sum game, in a conflict

that was a non-zero-sum game in most other respects.[xxi] A theory of armed conflict that cannot accommodate a mixture of zero-sum and non-zero-sum games cannot accommodate real war.

Despite its faults, Schelling's bargaining model advanced modern strategic thinking by reinforcing the critical, but easily overlooked role of negotiations in bringing wars to a close. It also served as a reminder that the parameters of war themselves are continuously shaped by implicit and explicit agreements.

Coercive Strategies: Compellence & Deterrence

Published one year after the 1965 Rolling Thunder campaign, Schelling's *Arms and Influence* explored the ways in which one might use military force coercively, that is, through threats or threats and promises, to make an adversary concede. He assumed that making rivals *give up* something differed qualitatively from forcibly *taking it* from them. The former relies on intimidation, or potential harm; while the latter involves actual harm. The threat of more harm to come offered more leverage, in his view, than harm already inflicted. "[B]rute force succeeds when it is used," Schelling wrote, "whereas the power to hurt is most successful when it is held in reserve." Moreover, "the power to hurt is bargaining power;" whereas exploiting that power is diplomacy, "vicious diplomacy," to be sure, but diplomacy nonetheless.[xxii]

To illustrate the difference between intimidation and brute force, Schelling offered a number of historical examples, in particular the US military's campaigns against Native Americans in the nineteenth century. "To hunt down Comanches and exterminate them was brute force," he said; whereas "to raid their villages to make them behave was coercive diplomacy, based on the power to hurt." To be sure, "the pain and suffering to the Indians might have looked much the same one way as the other." But "the difference was one of purpose and effect." If Indians were killed because "authorities despaired of making them behave" that was "pure unilateral force." But if "*some* Indians were killed to make *other* Indians behave, that was coercive violence—or intended to be, whether or not it was effective."[xxiii]

Schelling identified several prerequisites for the use of force coercively: (1) the situation had to afford both sides some negotiating space and, thus, could not be a zero-sum game; (2) the potential harm had to be sufficient to make the costs of noncompliance discernably higher than its benefits; (3) the threat of harm had to be credible, that is, within the capability and willingness of the coercer to apply it; (4) the promise of relief if the foe complied also had to be credible; and (5) one had to provide the adversary a specific but adequate timeframe within which to comply.[xxiv] Obviously, these conditions presupposed the ability to control not only one's own force, but also much of the general situation.

Because Schelling saw deterrence as coercive, he coined the term "compellence" to refer to coercive strategies that were active or offensive in nature. Compellence meant "inducing" an opponent to take an action, such as withdrawing its forces from an area. Deterrence, then, referred to coercive

strategies that were passive or defensive. Compellence usually required administering punishment until an adversary took appropriate action; deterrence required inflicting punishment only if an opponent did not comply.[xxv]

This construct appealed to game or decision theorists because it separated two logical trains of thought for the development of branches and sequels. It also appealed to limited war theorists because it created the impression that coercive pressure could be applied in graduated ways, either to compel or to deter. Presumably, one could influence a rival's behavior without committing more military force than necessary.

By the 1980s, however, critics had begun to scrutinize the dual theories of compellence and deterrence more closely. As a result, some of the accepted differences between were called into question. It was not necessarily valid, for instance, to assume that because compellence was more active than deterrence that it was also more difficult to achieve.[xxvi] Nor was it clear that proving a positive, like compellence, was any easier than proving a negative, like deterrence. [xxvii] As Henry Kissinger, Schelling's contemporary and fellow Harvard alumnus, once explained, deterrence "can only be tested negatively, by events that do *not* take place;" however, it is "never possible to demonstrate why something has not occurred."[xxviii] Years later, it is still not clear why Rolling Thunder failed to compel Hanoi to negotiate; or what finally compelled Slobodan Milosevic to comply with NATO's demands in 1999.[xxix]

Conclusions & Implications

Understanding the strengths and weaknesses of Schelling's theories brings us back to Clausewitz's issues with positive doctrines. The same theme—the presumption of definitive causes or explanations—runs through the bargaining model as well as his concepts of deterrence and compellence. To ask why certain strategies have not worked, a common habit of late, is to presume they should have worked. That presumption encourages us to continue to refine our explanatory models and, ultimately, if unconsciously, to construct positive doctrines: if we determine in one case that X caused Y, then we will naturally expect X to cause Y in the future.

A positive doctrine also assumes we can get at primary sources (recordings, notes, memos, interviews, etc.) that will pinpoint what a decisionmaker's exact reason was for taking a specific action. However, such sources are often not available until years, if not decades, after the fact. Even when they become available, they offer little genuine assurance that what they reveal, in fact, reflects what was on the decisionmaker's mind when the critical moment arrived. This is true even when data is abundant, as is the case with the Cuban missile crisis (1962) and the Mayaguez incident (1975).[xxx] In each case, key elements such as the US presidents' estimate of the foes' intentions, his understanding of the potential costs and benefits of military action, as well as of the impressions such action might have on American and world opinion, among other factors, all combine to make it impossible to isolate an individual's decision-logic

without distorting it in the process. This, again, is the classic analytical paradox: taking something apart prevents us from appreciating how the whole may be greater than the sum of its parts.

Certainly, drawing precise cause-effect relationships in war is problematic in any case since multiple actions are underway at any given time. We cannot necessarily determine exactly which action, or group of actions, caused an opponent to act, or to refrain from acting. Nor did Clausewitz necessarily intend for us to do so. Rather, the point is to avoid taking analysis too far, to refrain from pushing it until we discover the so-called definitive cause. Inductive analysis suggests war and strategy have neither independent nor dependent variables, only interdependent ones. Any examination of strategy, accordingly, must be capable of accommodating interdependence.

To return to Schelling's example of the US government's campaigns against Native Americans—in practice, the US government's strategy fell into a cycle consisting of threats, negotiations, attacks, renegotiations, renewed threats, and so on. Several strategies were used at different points in the sequence. Among these were attrition, exhaustion, terror, and dividing-and-conquering (turning some tribes against others), all of which formed an overall synthetic strategy that compelled some actions and deterred others. The loss of loved ones and of charismatic leaders, fear for the future of

the tribe, weariness and a sense of despair, the lack of food and shelter in a harsh climate, balanced against promises of relief—all likely had a bearing on why the Indians complied. Attempting to distinguish which strategy was most important, therefore, risks losing the fact that they might only have been effective in combination with the others.

The answer, therefore, lies more in attempting to preserve the synthetic nature of any strategy we study, rather than reducing it to what we presume to be its decisive element. Equally important, our strategies must work even in environments characterized by ambiguity, uncertainty, and imprecision. Hardly a strategist today would reject Clausewitz's concept of friction or dispute how its many types impede thought and action in war. Yet, so often irrational and nonrational factors are politely set aside as if they only affected practice, not theory. Instead of repeating that error, we must construct theories that allow for and anticipate, rather than seek to exclude, such forces. In a word, our theories must embrace interdependence.

Even though Schelling acknowledged the importance of uncertainty and other forms of friction, his theories could not actually accommodate them. While they remain popular among students of decision and game theory, theirs is the only world in which positive doctrines work. Let's not mistake it for the real world.

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Choosing Strategy: Meaning, Significance, Context

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Choosing to practice strategy, the initial unilateral resort to armed force, is generally a deliberate act. The explicit decision to push inter-actor relations in this direction and risk an equal response leads to Clausewitz's definition of war as the continuation of politics with the addition of (but not wholesale replacement by) other means. As Clausewitz notes, "[w]e deliberately use the phrase 'with the addition of other means' because we also want to make it clear that war in itself does not suspend political intercourse or change it into something entirely different."[i] Making this choice for strategy inherently diverts the tone and tenor of the inter-actor relationship in a certain direction, from which there is no necessarily easy path of return.

The choice to practice strategy, to resort to violent means, has inherent meaning and significance. It is not intended as "signaling", of actors trying to show resolve, or intent, to one another as some Cold War-era strategists, particularly game theorists, imagined strategy to have become under the aegis of nuclear weapons and the notion of war as bargaining. Thomas Schelling was one of the classic advocates of this perspective. "Thus strategy – in the sense in which I am using it here – is not concerned with the efficient *application* of force but with the *exploitation of potential force*."[ii] As he continued:

> To study the strategy of conflict is to take the view that most conflict situations are essentially *bargaining* situations. They are situations in which the ability of one participant to gain his ends is dependent to an important degree on the choices or decisions that the other participant will

make. The bargaining may be explicit, as when one offers a concession; or it may be by tacit maneuver, as when one occupies or evacuates strategic territory. It may, as in the ordinary haggling of the market-place, take the *status quo* as its zero point and seek arrangements that yield positive gains to both sides; or it may involve threats of damage, including mutual damage, as in a strike, boycott, or price war, or in extortion.[iii]

At least within strategic studies, this particular perspective on war and strategy largely perished as discredited during the Vietnam War, although it remains unfortunately prevalent beyond strategic studies.

The inherent meaning and significance of deciding to embark upon war is reflected in real political will, real determination, and the decision-makers' own real perception of the inter-actor relationship—regardless of whether the opponent notices and understands these factors or not. Even without any specific reciprocal recognition, the choice still has meaning. This is just as true for overly optimistic decisions made without full appreciation of the levels of will and determination needed to achieve one's goals through force, which can change with the tides of war, let alone of the enemy's own level of resolve.

This article examines the meaning and significance of choosing strategy deliberately and in context. It establishes politics as the fundamental context for strategy and war and considers how the character of politics is reflected in the choice for strategy. The influence which strategy and war themselves have upon politics is then considered. Concluding reflections upon the intended final impact of strategy upon politics indicate that the underlying meaning of having made the choice for strategy matters, because it influences the viability of the opponent's own policy options.

Politics: The Fundamental Context

The fundamental context for choosing strategy is necessarily politics—in Harold Lasswell's words, who gets what, when, how—since it is from the political milieu that the seeds of conflict arise.[iv] Politics is often negligible, often cooperative, often competitive, sometimes even conflictual, but not usually openly adversarial within the context of all existing

political relationships. When defined through contact, it can be negligible if two parties rarely interact despite a political relationship between them, which largely lies dormant and unnoticed. Politics can be cooperative, competitive, and conflictual because all political actors have goals, some shared and others not, which they may achieve together or separately through a variety of measures. The pursuit of policy satisfaction may even lead directly to disputes between or among parties employing diplomatic means or even coercive methods short of war, such as the threat or actual imposition of economic sanctions. This all constitutes relatively normal politics, with the increasing presence of coercive measures representing more extreme interactions.

To choose strategy implies political interests which the responsible decision-makers believe to be incompatible with the other party. As Dan Reiter has noted,

> War is about politics, and politics, especially in this context, is essentially about the allocation of scarce goods. Goods are phenomena valued by political actors. Goods are scarce if there is not an optimal or infinite supply of the good, meaning that all actors cannot simultaneously consume or possess an optimal or infinite supply of the good. Territory, natural resources, and the composition of a national government are all examples of phenomena viewed by international actors as scarce goods.[v]

Reiter also highlights one feature about "scarce goods": the issue of divisibility. Can this scarce good be simultaneously shared, or not, by the involved parties? However, he then suggests that "[i]n practice, issue indivisibility is unlikely to play a central role in war initiation or war termination."[vi] This conclusion seems partially inappropriate. The question of divisibility necessarily plays a role when actors are competing, even conflicting, over a particular valuable. Even in division, decision-makers may be dissatisfied with their relative share. Moreover, in history one may identify wars fought, at least in part, over issues considered divisible. France desired to regain Alsace-Lorraine during the First World War, not merely part of Alsace-Lorraine. Similarly, Germany hungered after an expansive lebensraum carved out of the Soviet Union in 1941, not just the bit of geographical space afforded by the conquests of Poland or even of half of European Russia.

The choice of strategy therefore is a reflection of two particular features to which decision-makers adhere when in competition or conflict over an issue. First, strategy reflects a determination to settle the issue in one's own favor – albeit not necessarily at any cost, if cost is considered at all in the heat of the decision (as the outbreak of war often coincides with an outbreak of optimism regarding the future wages of war). Optimism itself may poison one's strategic perspective and decision-making and lead to a misperception of one's own ultimate resolve to make the needed sacrifices for whatever is to be gained through war.

Second, strategy reflects the belief that the involved parties cannot or will not find any acceptable degree of compromise. This denotes competing political priorities resulting in a zero-sum appreciation of the political interaction in at least one actor. Whether the zero-sum perception is shared by all involved parties, just one, or some other subset of the whole, it is necessary for only one to make the choice in favor of

strategy to change the tenor of the shared relationship for all involved as well as possibly even for those not directly involved. War, after all, is an act of force to impose one's will upon the enemy. If the other party can be brought to accept one's will short of violence, then war is unnecessary. If decision-makers believe this to be impossible, then violence is one of the few remaining practicable choices.

Strategy and War Influencing Zero-Sum Politics

The choice of strategy reflects not only pre-existing political beliefs, whether fully grounded in reality or not. It may also feed into and exacerbate the zero-sum political understanding. This is especially true if the choice to practice strategy actually leads to war, which is not always the case, for, as Clausewitz reminds us, "[t]he aggressor is always peace-loving (as Bonaparte always claimed to be); he would prefer to take over our country unopposed". Analytically speaking, the defender is responsible for the initiation of war.[vii] The meaning of strategy is inherent in the choice for strategy, but the exacerbation of the zero-sum mentality derives predominantly from the consequences of engaging with a defense and actually waging war. One must therefore distinguish between the two.

The initial choice in favor of strategy reflects not only a zero-sum appreciation of the immediate political situation on the part of the aggressor. It also reflects his political determination to achieve his goals, which involves an initial acceptance of certain potential means, methods, and the costs associated with them. Any aggressor may, like Napoleon, claim to be peace-loving, but no aggressor can safely assume that his choice to practice strategy will proceed in peace because that decision is in the hands of the party which is aggressed. By choosing strategy he must assume that he will be waging war, practicing its actual violent means and methods, and accepting their actual costs, not just the prospect of such costs, such as body-bags returning home. Although relatively rare in strategic history, armed invasions not leading to war are not unknown. One can at least identify the Anschluss of Austria by Germany in 1938, the Soviet invasions of the three Baltic States in 1939-40, the Warsaw Pact's invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, and the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014, all involving overwhelming military might on one side only. The invaders were prepared for the worst, for war, yet in these cases this contingency never occurred. Nonetheless, the meaning of strategy remains the same – the determination to succeed in a real or perceived zero-sum political situation, even at some cost from military action, existed in each instance, but was not tested by the defeated and therefore did not exacerbate the zero-sum aspect of politics. Even without exacerbation, the meaning inherent in choosing strategy suggests that less coercive means on the part of the aggressed will be ineffective at changing the intentions of the aggressor.

In a sense, once strategy has been chosen, the only effective choice is to reciprocate in kind – as long as one values the issue at stake more than the potential costs of war, not all of which are foreseeable, and as long as one possesses the capability to resist. Not all do, which affects political decision-making. The Baltic republics in 1939-40, for example, did not wish to suffer the costs of war which would have

occurred had they tried to resist Soviet invasion; they hoped that through acquiescence to Soviet demands they might preserve national, political and other structures. That this was a miscalculation does not detract from the logic that they valued peace over political autonomy, even though ultimately they got neither and lost the symbolically meaningful gesture of having resisted. The choice for or against the practice of strategy is ultimately a political decision beyond the realm of strategy and strategists.

The decisions made during the Russian annexation of Crimea as well as the later campaign in the Donbas are indicative of the inherent meaning of strategy. Russia invaded Crimea with ambiguously uniformed troops and took the initiative to place Ukrainian army bases on the peninsula under siege while not actually attacking, thereby putting the political and strategic onus for violent escalation of the situation upon Ukraine. This was a rather Moltkean operation, combining the strategic offensive (invasion) with a tactical defensive, further leavened by an imaginative understanding of the political meaning of action. The Russians were politically and tactically prepared for Ukraine to react violently, but ultimately Ukraine did not. Moreover, nothing short of force could or would have dissuaded the Russians from their goal of annexing Crimea. The West's barrage of diplomacy, of words, had no chance of achieving any revision of Russian intentions, actions, or ultimately results.

The outcome of the Crimean campaign contrasts with that of the Donbas campaign. Here again the West employed diplomacy, and went further to impose sanctions upon Russia in response to the downing of MH17, when Russian-backed separatists and mercenary proxies shot down a Malaysia Airlines airliner with a Buk surface-to-air missile, killing 298 passengers and crew, including 193 Dutch citizens. These courses of action had little, if any, effect upon the Russians, their ambiguous interveners and mercenaries, or their separatist proxies. Instead, the critical variable which changed the outcome is that, in the Donbas, Ukraine fought back – although in truth we cannot truly know what the Russian endgame regarding the Donbas was, whether it was to establish a frozen conflict or whether there were grander geopolitical ambitions which were sent awry by Ukrainian resistance. Nonetheless, in each case the Russian recourse to strategy reflected the political will and determination to achieve some desired result which could not be swayed by anything short of reciprocal force. The West as a whole either did not appreciate this, or made the political choice to pursue objectives which did not require the necessary level of escalation to reverse Russian ambitions. Ukraine chose similarly in Crimea, but reversed course and made a much stronger political decision later, in the Donbas.

The resort to war is distinct from the resort to armed force; the latter is merely unilateral whereas the former is reciprocal and determined by the victim of aggression. Recourse to war to reciprocate an aggressor's choice of strategy, unlike the aggressor's initial commitment to strategy, clearly exacerbates the zero-sum appreciation of politics because that appreciation is now shared by both parties. Since analytically speaking the defender starts the war, the decision to defend cements the zero-sum element in the political relationship between adversaries because both attacker and defender now share, and are acting upon, this

understanding with mass organized violence. The initiation of outright hostilities thereafter engages more strongly the numerous forces in war discussed by Clausewitz: his wondrous trinity, particularly the irrational element inherent in passion, enmity, and hatred, and reciprocal violence with its prospect of both potential and real escalation in war.

Reason plays a major role as a source of adversariality and zero-sum political thinking which lead to the choices for strategy and war. Yet reason is only one element of Clausewitz's trinity. A second facet, chance and probability, may play an uneven but fundamentally neutral role. The third, however, has the capacity easily to exacerbate zero-sum thinking by infusing it with emotion – this is the primordial aspect of passion, enmity, and hatred. Although this element always exists to some degree, as do chance and reason, the violence inherent in war itself escalates the passionate engagement. As Clausewitz notes, "[e]ven where there is no national hatred and no animosity to start with, the fighting itself will stir up hostile feelings: violence committed on superior orders will stir up the desire for revenge and retaliation against the perpetrator rather than against the powers that ordered the action. That is only human (or animal if you like), but it is a fact." [viii] As violence escalates, the zero-sum political thinking derived through reason is reinforced by sheer emotional hostility, further separating the strategic actors involved from negotiations and a compromise solution.

The ultimate recourse to war introduces the final new factor, the question of reciprocal violence and its potential escalation. When violence is reciprocal, the involved parties fall into a true adversarial situation with its unique thinking emphasizing how one may hurt or damage the other, and how the other may do so to oneself. "So long as I have not overthrown my opponent I am bound to fear that he may overthrow me. Thus I am not in control: he dictates to me as much as I dictate to him… If you want to overcome your enemy you must match your effort against his power of resistance… But the enemy will do the same". [ix] Strategists strive for victory and fear defeat; they strive to overcome the resistance of their opponents and are wary of the potential ways in which the adversary can retaliate to break their own resistance. This represents the very depths of zero-sum thinking. One cannot negotiate or compromise, only win or lose, impose one's own will or be imposed upon by the enemy. The adversarial competition is, or is considered to be, all or nothing.

Once a situation dominated by such factors emerges due to the interaction of opposing strategies in war, two competing political determinations are displayed. Negotiation and compromise were not considered possible by at least one party prior to war, but once caught in the dynamics of war, they are no longer even a consideration. Each belligerent is trying to break the opponent's will through force. Almost nothing short of violence can alter this state of affairs. When violence is being actively and reciprocally employed, words are all but useless as agents of change. The political stakes and determination, the reciprocal strategic engagement, and the emotions stoked by violence all prevent weaker methods of coercive potential from exerting much influence. Battle, the violent engagement, becomes the central focus for the belligerents. Yet despite its centrality battle is not the *only* concern: other forms of power retain some relevance and

utility in strategy, but only inasmuch as they may influence battle itself, in the future if not in the present.

The Syrian Civil War is another example of how strategy reflects a level of political determination, which is then exacerbated further by the reciprocation of violence and engagement of enmity and hatred. Bashar Assad's original recourse to violence to put down the peaceful protests represented a political will to survive which could not be swayed by Western denunciations. The escalation into outright civil war cemented reciprocating determination, fueled by both reason and emotion, that there could be no compromise and the desire to impose one's own will upon the enemy. The result has been a long and grinding war of attrition among Assad's regime, supported by Russia and Iran; innumerable rebel groups, some of which are variably supported by the United States; and ISIS, which has been universally identified as a target for everyone. Nothing short of violence has been able to sway Assad in his determination to preserve his regime, and the force which has been arrayed against him has thus far proven insufficient to the task.

The Intended Final Impact of Strategy on Zero-Sum Politics

Some scholars suggest that strategy continues forever. Everett Dolman argues that "[t]he strategist can never finish the business of strategy, and understands that there is no permanence in victory—or in defeat."[x] Although the latter half of his statement is true, it has no bearing on the first half, which is not. Even this journal implies in its title, and explicitly states in its tagline, that strategy is eternal. Yet to the contrary, strategy is in a certain sense unsustainable, and when classically understood, is not meant to be otherwise. The active recourse to battle by belligerents cannot endure forever, nor should any strategist wish for this. For strategy to persist without end is a sign of failure, an augury portending that the strategist is unable to impose his will upon the enemy, that he is unable actually to achieve the basic function of strategy.

Ultimately, the whole purpose of strategy as classically understood is to negate itself, to bring about a situation in which it is no longer necessary – whether one calls that victory, peace, justice, or some other term – because one belligerent

has successfully imposed his will upon his opponent, who has acceded to terms of some sort, even if those terms may be unconditional. The choice of strategy reflects, and through subsequent war exacerbates, the belligerents' zero-sum perspective on the political issue at hand. Yet, perhaps ironically, the purpose of strategy as an activity and as a function in war is to destroy the zero-sum understanding of the opponent.

This nexus is where most discussion and consideration of strategy occurs. It is, after all, strategy proper. Here people debate endlessly the relative virtues of attrition, annihilation, exhaustion, maneuver, sequential and cumulative operations, and so forth. This is the "how" of strategy, of imposing one's will, of control, of forcefully breaking the adversary's zero-sum outlook upon the conflict. These are all various ways of saying the same thing – how to convince the enemy, through violence as that is the only language to which he is paying attention during war, to give up the fight and settle. The settlement itself is usually achieved with, through, and ultimately by words, but without the necessary violence to break the enemy's will none of those words matter.

This is where the non-linearity of war and strategy are felt most keenly. Belligerents embark upon war with an understanding of their own resolve as well as that of their enemy. However, one or both appreciations of political will and determination to succeed through violence may be inapt. Such mistakes do not invalidate the original meaning of choosing strategy, but instead merely condition the durability of that meaning in the face of the costs of war, especially if the results of war are poor. Strategy succeeds therefore only when it more quickly changes someone's mind (or fails, if one's own mind is changed) about the viability of achieving policy results through war versus peace, or at least of limiting the damage received by returning to peace.

The choice for strategy has inherent meaning because it reflects a particular zero-sum understanding of the political situation, which causes all attempts to change the strategist's mind short of reciprocal armed force to pale in significance. Yet strategy itself must necessarily be finite, as its purpose is to break through the analogous zero-sum appreciation held by the enemy and force him to recognize that his interests will be better served by returning to a more peaceful state of interaction rather than continuing to rely upon war.

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It Is Our Fault: "No Overarching Strategy"

Kevin C.M. Benson

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In the 11 December 2017 edition of TIME magazine, commenting on the use of Special Operating Forces in Africa, Brigadier General (retired) Donald Bolduc, former commander of US Special Operations in Africa, stated "There is a leadership problem because there is no overarching strategy."[i]

Bolduc stated there was a leadership problem and he is certainly correct. How did the general and flag officers of the US military allow a situation like this to develop? Indeed, if there is no "overarching strategy," as Bolduc stated, it is the fault of the officer corps of the military. Have we forgotten Clausewitz, "war is an extension of policy through other means"? Wait, the chorus will say, there is no real policy guidance. In a talk at the Association of the US Army convention on 13 December 2017 General Raymond A. Thomas III, commanding general of US Special Operations Command, stated, "We special operations forces live – some would say thrive – in a world that is often out ahead of policy."[ii]

Never ask higher headquarters a question without telling it what the answer ought to be was advice from my Advanced Military Studies Program seminar leader COL Gary Griffin, AMSP seminar leader in 1991/92. The same advice I offer applies to the link between policy and strategy. If there is no strategy then take the bull by the horns and develop one. I do not state this flippantly. Of course, the exigencies of the political situation always play a central role in the development and refinement of policy as well as the development/refinement and execution of strategy. Sequestration and uncertain consistency of funding for military programs and operations, as well as readiness are also considerations in the development of strategy. One must ask though, when was this NOT the case in American history?

Military strategy is derived from policy guidance. Military strategy connects operations designed to attain the conditions needed to reach policy objectives. Strategy and the operational art give purpose to tactical actions, ensuring tactical success is not squandered and the occasional tactical failure does not completely upend a campaign. There is policy guidance aplenty upon which to base military strategy. On 21 August 2017 President Trump gave a speech at Fort Myers in which he articulated three conclusions about the policy direction for Afghanistan. He also outlined four pillars for US strategy toward the country. The president stated, "A core pillar of our new strategy is a shift from a time-based approach to one based on conditions." He went on to say it is counterproductive for the United States to announce in advance the dates of the start or conclusion of military operations, numbers of troops committed or plans for further military activities. He specified conditions on the ground, not arbitrary timetables, will guide American strategy.[iii]

Subsequent to this speech Trump announced a new National Security Strategy (NSS) on 18 December 2017. The new NSS outlined four major policy objectives for the security of the United States. The National Security Strategy "lays out a strategic vision for protecting the American people and preserving our way of life, promoting our prosperity, preserving peace through strength, and advancing American influence in the world." The strategy outlines priority actions for each major objective and includes a section on major regions of the world. Even before the Trump administration the Obama administration published similar documents with broad policy objectives and even some specific objectives. The student of strategy and the military art must ask, what more is needed for the development of a strategy?[iv]

The nature of war has not changed as we are motivated by greed, passion, fear, and honor. Clearly though the conditions of war do change. Strategists must recognize this fact. Strategists must also give the enemy/opponent/adversary his due. We must keep in mind the enemy too develops policy and strategy. Given these conditions and what policy there is; tweets, speeches and the newly released National Security Strategy, do we not have the material for an "overarching strategy" we need to confront 21st century enemies and conditions? The tried and true model of ends-ways-means alone apparently no longer provides the answers required for 21st century strategy. I suggest the model first voiced by Eliot

Cohen best fits the need for the 21st century.[v]

Cohen proposes a consideration of assumptions, ends-ways-means, priorities, sequencing and a theory of victory. I substitute risks for priorities as a change to his model. Risk is ordinarily considered as risk to personnel and risk to mission. Strategic risk must also consider risk to the nation, its standing in the world, and perception of its ability to act in a determined and useful manner. Development of strategic assumptions is the first step.

Assumptions are used in place of facts to continue planning. In developing strategy assumptions also serve as forcing functions during the unequal dialogue with policy makers. This drives home the point that war is an instrument and continuation of policy not merely an extension of policy. Policy makers often turn to the use of force in response to the pressure of "DO SOMETHING." Even under conditions of restrained budgets the military will retain units and weapons optimized for "doing something" and doing it "now." The use of assumptions as forcing functions gives the strategist a tool to use in the dialogue and thinking which must precede action. The tried and true ends-ways-means remain useful as a part of the model. The strategist must demonstrate how forces (means) conduct operations/campaigns (ways) to achieve the ends of policy. The use of an assumptions check, asking what if our assumptions do not become fact, must be included in the development of assumptions. A consideration of broad strategic risk naturally follows as step two.

Strategic risk ranges from risk of mission failure to national standing and prestige. Risk consideration includes friendly and enemy actions in the cyber and information domain. Thinking about how the portrayal of our actions would assist or hinder operations is well spent effort, as is thinking about the converse. A caution though, we must be realistic in articulation of risk, the word is over-used and lost meaning. Clear understanding of risk underpins the need for sequencing operations.

The conduct of globally integrated operations considers the sequencing of the range of operations necessary for successful execution of strategy. Strategic sequencing includes deciding on the construct of the theater of war or operations. This decision cues diplomatic, information, military and possibly economic efforts which assume continued access to territories in the theater, over-flight permissions, and air and sea port of debarkation and resupply access. Strategists consider the sequencing of action in the cyber and information domains. Strategists consider how to exploit enemy weaknesses in these domains, the broad conduct of actions over time and so on. Articulation of the "theory of victory" is the final step in developing a strategy.

Cohen wrote the theory of victory could be simply stated as "why do we think this (the strategy) will work."[vi] "If the US commits force in accord with the strategy developed then we will be victorious because," demands constant strategic level work and interaction with policy and decision makers. We

know and must tell others victory does not merely happen, it is the result of hard work linking tactical success and effect to attaining strategic and policy objectives. Attaining policy objectives is victory in this century of 24/7 media, polarized populations, and dated authorizations for the use of force. [vii] I propose including a pre-mortem analysis of the theory of victory and the overall strategy as a necessary step of development.[viii]

As Kori Schake recently wrote, "The purpose of national security strategies is to outline for the American public a presidential administration's thinking about our national interests, the threats to those interests, our means to protect and advance our interests, and ways of stringing those means together expeditiously and cost-effectively."[ix] If the officers we select for advancement to flag rank accept the lack of strategy then we must ask how are we selecting them for these positions of responsibility and how are we educating them along the path of schooling and assignments. Indeed, the recently released summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy calls to question professional military education and talent management.

Secretary of Defense Mattis stated, "*Professional Military Education (PME)*. PME has stagnated, focused more on the accomplishment of mandatory credit at the expense of lethality and ingenuity." Concerning *talent management* he also wrote, "Talent management. Developing leaders who are competent in national-level decision-making requires broad revision of talent management among the Armed Services, including fellowships, civilian education, and assignments that increase understanding of interagency decision-making processes, as well as alliances and coalitions."[x]

Our Army should incorporate the Cohen model into professional military education. It should be taught at the School of Advanced Military Studies and the Army War College. Our Army should also write this model into our doctrine and most importantly practice using the model as strategy is developed. If there is no strategy subordinate headquarters must suggest what the pertinent strategy should look like to their higher headquarters. Professional Soldiers must not tolerate the condition of "no overarching" strategy.

The Cohen model for developing 21st century strategy is straightforward enough a start point for developing strategy and reenergizing critical thinking in the officer corps.[xi] BG Bolduc stated there a leadership problem because there is no overarching strategy. Solving this leadership portion of our strategy problem does not cost money, it is an investment in taking a hard look at how we as an Army develop strategy and the process of linking tactical success to attaining policy objectives. It is also time, as Mattis highlights, to take a critical look at how we educate and select our commanders. Indeed, if there is no "overarching strategy" because we collectively ACCEPTED this condition, this lack is our own fault. It is also well within the capability of the officer corps to address this condition and act to correct it.

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War on the Northern Front

Eado Hecht

Israel

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Introduction

The expectation for another major war between Israel and Hezbollah waxes and wanes periodically as the two conduct a continuous very low intensity war between them. In the background a 'Cold War' is simmering between Israel and Hezbollah's patron Iran. The purpose of this article is to examine the probable rival strategies if the fighting escalates.

Why?

Strategy serves policy, so the first issue to be addressed must be: Why another major war between Israel and Hezbollah?

Israel has no political objectives vis-à-vis Lebanon other than maintaining the quiet it achieved in what Israelis call the 'Second Lebanon War'. Israel has admitted to conducting occasional strikes on Hezbollah assets in Syria over the past five or so years, mostly to deny passage of advanced weaponry from Iran via Syria to Hezbollah, but also in response to a number of Hezbollah attacks on Israel's border with Syria, but it has no political interest in escalating the fighting. Therefore, the political initiative for another major war rests solely with Hezbollah or, more likely, its patron – Iran, though the military initiative might be an Israeli pre-emptive operation.

A religious political Lebanese movement – in that order, Hezbollah was created, organized, funded, equipped and trained by Iran. It therefore holds two allegiances – to Iran and the ideology that drives it and to the Lebanese Shiite population from which it mobilizes its manpower and political base in Lebanon. Though it now has some independent sources of funding (including involvement in the narcotics trade from South America to the USA), its main source by far is still Iran, and without Iranian financial support it would lose much of its appeal to the Lebanese Shiite population that gradually shifted its support to Hezbollah from the secular AMAL movement. AMAL had been the dominant Lebanese Shiite party in the 1970s and 1980s, but had not been able to compete with Hezbollah's ability to fund welfare, education and health-care programs, provide jobs to the Shiite community and compel the Lebanese government to fund more. In the late 1980s, when AMAL still held a political and military advantage, it defeated Hezbollah in an intra-ethnic war, but was forced by Syria to desist from destroying Hezbollah and to give Hezbollah carte-blanche in southern Lebanon.[i]

Hezbollah's political objectives vis-à-vis Israel are ideological – an off-shoot of the religious ideological movement that rules Iran. One of the precepts of that movement is that there should not exist a Jewish state in the Middle East.[ii] Ever since the revolution that brought it to power, Iran's religious regime has repeatedly declared that one of its goals is the eradication of Israel. In a public speech in 2015 Iran's supreme religious and political leader, Khamanei, even set a dead-line for achieving that goal: by 2040 there will be no Israel.[iii] In 2017 the Iranian regime set up a clock in a public square in Tehran counting down the days to the fulfillment of that goal. In many of his televised speeches, Hezbollah leader, Nasrallah, has committed his group to a similar objective – though not yet to the deadline.[iv]

The exact match that will light the fuze to the next war is not predictable. The Second Lebanon War in 2006 was ignited by a Hezbollah raid on an Israeli border patrol. By the end of that skirmish 10 Israelis had been killed, the bodies of two had been taken by Hezbollah. Other than the number of Israeli casualties in a single day, this attack was not unique – from the Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon in May 2000 Hezbollah had conducted at least 200 attacks on Israel (artillery fire, cross-border raids, proxy-terrorist attacks inside Israel),[v] however, this time the Israeli government decided on a large-scale air-strike in response. Hezbollah responded with rocket fire into Israeli villages and towns and the tit-for-tat gradually escalated into a medium-intensity war which ended 38 days later. Neither side had decided to fight a war. In fact, both had initially been certain the fighting would cease after only a limited exchange of fire.

A future conflagration could be set off in just as unanticipated a manner. Over the years since the end of the Second Lebanon War a number of important Hezbollah personnel have been killed in covert attacks Hezbollah blamed on Israel. Also, as noted above, Israel has repeatedly struck Hezbollah convoys carrying new weapons from Iran via Syria airports to Lebanon in accordance with the declared Israeli policy of not allowing certain "game-changing" weapon types enter the Lebanese theater. So far, Hezbollah has not retaliated openly to these Israeli actions except on one occasion. While eschewing action on Israel's border with Lebanon since the end of the Second Lebanon War, in 2013 – 2014 Hezbollah exploited the Syrian Civil War to initiate a series of attacks on Israel's border with Syria. Israel countered by attacking the Hezbollah personnel involved. In January 2015 one Israeli strike killed a number of high-ranking members of Hezbollah and Iranian officers organizing these operations. Hezbollah responded to these deaths a couple of weeks later by firing a number of anti-tank missiles at Israeli military vehicles driving near the Lebanese border – the first and, so far, only overt Hezbollah attack on that front since 2006.[vi] 2 Israeli soldiers died. Israel's military response was low-key, a brief bombardment on a number of Hezbollah bases in Lebanon, and both sides decided not to escalate. No more Hezbollah attacks have occurred from either Lebanon or Syria. However, in the continuing cycle of small strikes and small counter-strikes, any one of these actions, by either side, has the potential of again creating a reciprocal escalation as in 2006. Moreover, this dynamic may actually be exploited deliberately to justify an escalation while hiding the underlying decision to initiate a full-scale war.

So, given its political objective of maintaining the quiet border with Lebanon, why might Israel decide to initiate a war there? Given Israel's security doctrine and past behaviour, the probable reasons would be either a response to a Hezbollah instigated escalation of attacks from Lebanon or Syria, in order to break the trend, or a pre-emptive attack following an intelligence alert of an intention by Hezbollah to conduct a large-scale attack.

As to a Hezbollah/Iranian initiative – though many Western analysts often downplay religious and other ideological motivations as merely window-dressing, Middle-Easterners often do decide to act for these reasons. That does not nullify rational or pragmatic thinking in implementing the ideology, neither in appraising the chances for success nor in choosing the method of implementation. Iran has certainly proven that though it believes its actions are ordained by Allah, it conducts them according to sober political and military calculations. Israel has defeated more powerful coalitions than the current military capabilities of Hezbollah (even with the assistance of the Lebanese army), the Syrian regime and Iran's expeditionary and proxy forces in Syria. So an Iranian decision to initiate a major war with Israel would not be likely be made off the cuff. Two likely options are that this would be a response to an attempt by Israel and/or the USA to physically destroy Iran's nuclear armaments program,[vii] or be part of a longer-term strategy, a major war waged for limited gains – inflict a psychological blow against Israel, very similar to the Egyptian President Sadat's concept in 1973, aimed at making Israelis lose faith in the viability of living in Israel. Israel cannot afford Pyrrhic victories.

One important factor is the nuclear weapons issue. Iran, like most of the world, believes Israel has nuclear weapons and will use them if faced with a certain level of threat. Iran is pursuing its own nuclear weapons to match. The nuclear agreement with Iran ostensibly stopped this program. In fact, at most, it only delayed it. In any case, Iran is unlikely to try to manufacture a single nuclear warhead before it has the capability of 'burst'-manufacturing a large number and has the capability of mounting them all on reliable delivery systems. Once such a capability exists the likelihood of more aggressive Iranian actions against Israel increases. Until then, it is likely that Iran will prefer to be more circumspect in its direct actions.

Hezbollah/Iranian Strategy

Historically, Hezbollah's main offensive weapon against Israel for major confrontations has been artillery rockets. The number currently in its arsenal is estimated to be approximately 130,000. Though the vast majority can reach only into northern Israel, there is a growing proportion of longer range types, including some that can reach right across Israel to its southernmost tip. Also, though the vast majority are unguided, Hezbollah is acquiring a growing number of guided rockets that enable hitting specific installations with high accuracy. Nasrallah has declared that all of Israel is vulnerable and Hezbollah can destroy national infrastructure – including stockpiles of dangerous industrial chemicals that can create deadly chemical clouds across adjacent inhabited areas.[viii] In addition to the artillery rockets, Hezbollah has accumulated an arsenal of shore-to-sea missiles that can be used to attack Israel's newly built gas-extraction rigs in the Mediterranean and threaten commercial shipping sailing to and from Israel's ports. At least one of the air strikes Israel allegedly conducted in Syria was to destroy a convoy of Yakhont shore-to-sea missiles, that from Lebanon could cover Israel's entire coastline. So, in addition to bombarding Israel's civilians as it has in the past, Hezbollah can now also strike Israel's economy – shutting down its sea and air communications with the world, directly and indirectly cutting a major portion of its electricity production, damaging factories and other essential economic facilities. In essence, Hezbollah can, with rocket artillery and missiles in lieu of aircraft, conduct a strategic bombardment à la Gulio Douhet.

Israel's anti-rocket defences proved very effective against Hamas bombardments numbering from 100 to 150 rockets per day, but Hezbollah is assessed to be capable of launching up to ten times that – 1,000 to 1,500 per day,[ix] and, if its launcher teams and stores are not destroyed by Israeli offensive action, can maintain fire for a few months. Israel would need to purchase tens of thousands of the very expensive interceptors to counter this capability or find an alternative solution.

In recent years Hezbollah chief Nasrallah, has been declaring a new component to Hezbollah's offensive strategy: liberating the Galilee, the northern third of Israel.[x] A notional plan was even released to Lebanese newspapers, describing a force of 5,000 men, organized in five infantry brigades, invading northern Israel and their geographical objectives.[xi] This suggests that, contrary to the Second Lebanon War, in the

next, Hezbollah is planning to attack Israel not only with long-range rockets, but also on the ground.

When it was established by Iranian mentors in the early 1980s Hezbollah's military capability amounted to few hundred part-time fighters, highly motivated but poorly trained. The number and quality grew over time – during the 1990s Hezbollah maintained perhaps 500 permanent, Iranian trained, soldiers reinforced as needed by a militia numbering a few times that number. Though often termed guerrillas, many of the operations of the permanent force in the Israeli Security Zone, were similar in fact to special-operations raids conducted by professional armies. By 2006, increased funding, training and equipment had increased the manpower to approximately 10,000, of whom about 3,000 were permanent troops and the rest had begun reorganizing from a militia into an army-reserve. As of summer 2017 Hezbollah military forces amounted to 45,000 men, approximately half permanent-service and half reserves. Setting aside a portion for administration and logistics, Hezbollah can probably, for a limited time, field a maximum strength of 30,000 combatants – the numerical equivalent of the combat troops of five typical infantry divisions, albeit without most of the administration and logistic personnel typical to Western infantry divisions.[xii]

Hezbollah began practicing large-scale offensive actions in 2012 at the latest,[xiii] and has gained considerable practical experience in conducting such actions via rotation of its commanders and troops in the Syrian Civil War (at any one moment approximately 5,000 to 8,000 Hezbollah troops were deployed in Syria). In at least some of the battles in Syria, Hezbollah commanders and staff-officers actually employed forces equivalent to divisions in size – combining units from Hezbollah and the Syrian army.[xiv] They have gained practical experience in planning air-strikes with Syrian and Russian aircraft and operated tanks and other armoured vehicles. These are less useful skills in connection with a war in Syria, but provide them insights on the advantages and disadvantages of these weapons, which are central to Israeli doctrine. Hezbollah has also developed a drone-based airforce capable of reconnaissance and light tactical bombing missions.

However, fighting against the Israeli military will not be the same as fighting against the various anti-regime forces in Syria. Therefore, hyperbole aside and though the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) seem to be taking this threat seriously,[xv] in the foreseeable future a Hezbollah ground offensive is more likely to attempt shallow gains against Israeli towns and villages adjacent to the border, with perhaps small units infiltrating further south to conduct terror and commando attacks in order to disorient and dishearten Israel's public, government and military. The chief objective would be less to "liberate" land occupied by the Zionists, than to inflict as many casualties as possible and gain a psychological victory that would continue to reverberate in the Israeli public's mind even after the IDF retakes any ground taken by Hezbollah.

Rather than offensive ground operations, it seems more likely that the majority of Hezbollah's ground forces would be involved in defensive operations against an expected IDF ground offensive into Lebanon. The main objective of these forces would be to prevent the IDF ground forces from interfering with the strategic artillery bombardment of Israel's civilian rear.

The terrain of southern Lebanon is characterized by steep-sloped ridges, some narrower some wider, separated by deep ravines. The population lives mostly atop the ridges, thus blocking virtually all the natural travel routes with a couple of hundred built-up areas of varying size: small villages, large villages and towns. In many areas there are buildings scattered along the roads connecting the separate villages, gradually joining them together into one contiguous built-up area. The population of southern Lebanon is mostly Shiites – Hezbollah's people. Hezbollah has been preparing almost every Shiite village in southern Lebanon (approximately 160 in total), to serve as fortified areas – digging shelters underneath the houses to provide protection for men, equipment and munitions, preparing combat positions, accumulating combat and logistic stores.[xvi] Each village is manned by varying numbers of men – from 30 to 200 each – depending on its location and tactical importance.[xvii] In and around these villages are scattered thousands of rocket launchers and tens of thousands of rockets. To command these forces Hezbollah has divided southern Lebanon into three regional commands.[xviii] Given the objective, to prevent access to the rocket-launcher units, and the way they conducted this mission, fairly successfully, in 2006, one can assume that Hezbollah forces will fight to hold each village and deny passage through it. Defence of each village will be aggressive and mobile, utilizing underground shelters and positions, moving from house to house and counter-attacking whenever possible. However, Israeli control of the air will make the transfer of troops from one fortified village to another a very slow, possibly very expensive, process.

To this point I have focused on Hezbollah and Lebanon, however, the next war will not necessarily be confined to that front alone. Hezbollah is not alone. Iranian forces and even more so, other Iranian proxies are available in Syria in large numbers. As time passes, and assuming no sudden turnabout in the current trends of the wars in Syria and in Iraq, the availability of these proxies to fight against Israel will increase and so will their numbers. Iranian proxies in Iraq are gradually carving a direct ground route controlled by them from Iran to Syria. Syrian forces are gradually fighting towards this route from central Syria towards Iraq.[xix] Though there is no doubt that the Hezbollah forces are the most capable of the Iranian proxies, the addition of more forces and a second front, even if less powerful, will require Israeli attention. Assad, after surviving mainly due to Iran's support, will be hard-put to deny them access to the border with Israel and might even find it necessary to participate actively in the ensuing conflagration. Given sufficient time, there is no reason to suppose that the Iranians cannot accumulate enough rocket artillery and proxy forces to conduct a similar strategy from Syria as they have Hezbollah conducting in Lebanon.

There are however two main differences between Lebanon and Syria. The first – political: the latter has a sizable Russian presence and Russian interests could be impacted by a war there, so the Israelis and the Iranians and Assad will have to take that into account. The second – tactical: the terrain in Syria, especially near the border with Israel, is much more open and easy for massed mechanized maneuver, thus making the defending of the rocket artillery much harder.

A third front that Israel will have to take into account is Gaza. Despite their religious differences – Iran the Shiite power and Hamas a member of the rival Sunni movement – Hamas and Iran have found common ground in the common enemy, Israel. Iran supplied Hamas with funds and weapons until 2012, when Hamas publicly supported the Sunni rebels in Syria. Recently, as Hamas struggles to recover from the blows it has suffered after the fall of its Muslim Brotherhood benefactors in Egypt, its multiple defeats by Israel and the fiscal restrictions imposed on it by the Palestinian Authority government, controlled by its rival Fatah, there have been reports of Hamas swallowing its ideological pride to attempt rapprochement with Iran.[xx]

Given its past experience, would Hamas go so far as to escalate the intermittent fighting along Gaza's border with Israel to a level requiring Israel to invest considerable forces on this front too? Hamas's current artillery capabilities, perhaps one tenth that of Hezbollah and of considerably lower quality,[xxi] would add very little to Hezbollah's, but, given the length of the Gaza front and the size of Hamas combat forces (up to 30,000 men)[xxii] and of other Palestinian organizations in Gaza (some thousands more), a solid Israeli ground defence would require the IDF to reinforce that front, reducing its available forces facing the northern fronts. Given its past experience and probable lessons-learned, Hamas strategy will probably still be focused on an artillery bombardment of Israeli towns and villages near the border with Gaza, but there is probably going to be an increased emphasis on attempting cross-border raids. No obstacle is perfect, but the anti-tunnel obstacle being built by Israel along the border will require Hamas to dig much more expensive, therefore fewer, offensive-tunnels or find an alternative means of conducting cross-border raids into Israel. Thus, for example, after the 2014 war, Hamas greatly reinforced its naval-commando unit.[xxiii]

To sum up.

In the event of another major war between Israel and Hezbollah, for whatever reason it breaks out, it is very likely to be a multi-front war, with Iran assisting Hezbollah with other proxy forces, perhaps also Iranian forces and Syrian forces, on the Syrian front. In addition, Iran will very likely tempt Hamas to exploit the opportunity that Israel's military attention is focused elsewhere, in order to open a third front.

The details of the strategy employed will of course vary with the immediate political goal and the characteristics of each front, but in all likelihood the main strategic effort will be to **Psychologically Exhaust** Israel's civilian population with an artillery bombardment aimed at residential areas, civilian infrastructure and economic targets all across Israel. [xxiv] Banking on massed salvos and a massive store of rockets to penetrate and eventually exhaust Israel's anti-rocket defences. Military targets will probably include Israeli air force bases to reduce the effectiveness of the air force, with higher headquarters and similar installations mostly as symbolic achievements. As a secondary effort, a portion of Hezbollah's ground forces will attempt to attack into northern Israel – not as squad or platoon level raids, but with much larger forces, aiming to capture entire villages near the border and perhaps infiltrate smaller teams further south to inflict casualties and mayhem in support of the artillery offensive. Despite bluster on 'liberating' the entire Galilee, for

the foreseeable future these ground operations will be fairly shallow and more for the in-war and post-war psychological effect than for actually retaining the captured areas.

Israeli Strategy

Whereas Iran and Hezbollah aspire to the complete demise of the state of Israel, basing their strategy on gradual psychological exhaustion of its population, Israel's policy and strategy are the reverse – aspiring to exhaust the Iran's and Hezbollah's belief in their ability to achieve their political goal (as happened to Egypt and Jordan) by inflicting physical defeats in each encounter with their military forces. These physical defeats are to be achieved either by a rapid destruction of a significant portion of the opposing forces in the field (as achieved against Egypt, Jordan and Syria in the 1967 Six Day War) or by attrition over a longer period in time (as achieved in the Second Lebanon War against Hezbollah and Operation 'Protective Edge' against Hamas).

Israel cannot annihilate Hezbollah and it certainly cannot annihilate Iran or any of the proxy organizations threatening it, just as it could never annihilate any of the other enemies it has faced in the past and is still facing today or in the foreseeable future. It has neither the political nor the military capability to achieve a result similar to that of the Allies against Germany in the Second Word War. Therefore, in all its confrontations, small or large, Israel's political objective has always been the same: defeat the aggressor time after time and gradually convince the enemy that they cannot destroy Israel, or that to do so would be prohibitively expensive for them – in brief, create or recreate **deterrence**.

Each confrontation must end in a result that improves Israel's security not only relative to the particular threat that induced the fighting, but also in the eyes of other potential aggressors not involved in that particular confrontation. So, for example, while fighting Hamas in Gaza in Operation 'Cast Lead' (December 2008 – January 2009), some of Israel's actions were in fact aimed at Hezbollah viewers – the message: see how we have corrected the tactical weaknesses revealed in the Second Lebanon War (July – August 2006).

Deterrence is a fickle objective. It can be measured only in hindsight – something you did not want to happen did not happen…

Deterrence is rarely, in Israel's case – has never been, complete. Deterring one foe might not deter the other and deterring from a particular behaviour might not deter from another. There has never been a period in Israel's history in which it was not under attack,[xxvi] the attackers at any one moment varied as did the intensity of the attacks from sporadic small attacks on civilians and military targets to all-out offensives of large forces. Furthermore, deterrence is contextual – an action that might create deterrence in one context, might create the opposite effect, escalation, in another. Thirdly, deterrence is a perishable commodity – it has an expiration date, but, unlike groceries or medication, that date is not known in advance. The expiration date is discovered, often only at the last minute, when a hostile activity suddenly escalates.

Therefore, Deterrence must be created, maintained, enhanced and recreated.

Defeating the immediate threat to its civilians and recreating deterrence will be Israel's goals also in the next war with Hezbollah and its allies.

Apart from the obvious defensive deployment along its borders and hinterland, Israeli strategy for achieving these goals has employed two separate but inter-related offensive activities – a series of small raids by ground and air forces, punctuated occasionally with major offensive operations. The emphasis on air or ground forces in dominating offensive actions has varied over time to adapt to the political and military contexts, but since the mid-1980s, for a variety of reasons beyond the scope of this article, there has been a growing emphasis on the use of air power and reduction in the use of ground forces. Some Israelis advocated a steep reduction in the size of the ground forces as well as reorganizing them into what is basically merely a counter-guerrilla or counter-terror force only. Peaking in the late 1990s and early 2000s this trend faltered in the 2000 – 2006 War with the Palestinians. However, it took the Second Lebanon War to reignite the debate in the IDF on the necessity of redeveloping major offensive capabilities in the ground forces. In summer 2015 the IDF published, for the first time, an unclassified version of its current strategic doctrine.[xxvii] After describing Israel's strategic environment, this document reiterated the need for a large offensive-capable ground force.The 'Gideon' force build-up program that followed, replacing in mid-stride the previous 2013 program which still advocated reduced ground forces with less regular warfare capability and more emphasis on aerial, commando and cyber capabilities, does not reverse the reduction of the ground forces, but it does emphasize more their ability to conduct major offensive operations by improving their equipment and training.[xxviii]

Given the political goals, the IDF now recognizes again that achieving them in a major confrontation, especially in the Hezbollah-Iran context, will not be possible with air power and commando raids alone.A decisive defeat of Hezbollah forces will require also a major ground offensive – if only to reach a large proportion of the launch sites and thus drastically reduce Hezbollah's short-range rocket capability, which is still the vast majority of its arsenal, and inflict prohibitive casualties to Hezbollah's combat units. However, achieving this will require time and during that time Hezbollah's strategic artillery will bombard Israel's population and infrastructure. Therefore, whereas in the major wars from 1956 to 1982 the IDF was able to concentrate almost only on offensive action, the next war will require also a large defensive component.

The strategy to achieve these goals will probably include four separate but complementary operations – two defensive and two offensive:

a.   Anti rocket defences based on the Israel's unique rocket interception systems, with or without assistance from the United States.[xxix] Active defence is complemented by passive defence – bomb shelters built into most buildings in Israel.In the Second Lebanon War and Operation 'Cast Lead', prior to Israel's fielding of its rocket interception systems, about a quarter of the thousands of unguided rockets fired into Israel exploded in residential areas.

During Operations 'Defensive Pillar' and 'Protective Edge' a similar proportion would have exploded in residential areas had the Israelis not employed their new Iron Dome interception system. Iron Dome reduced the actual number of strikes in residential areas to less than 5% of the total number launched. Given the total number of rockets likely to be fired by Hezbollah and its allies and the addition of thousands of guided rockets to their arsenal, it is very likely that the percentage of successful rocket launches will increase significantly. Ultimately, the success or failure of the anti-rocket defence will be impacted, even determined, by the success or failure of Israel's offensive operations – see below.

b.   Ground defence of Israel's borders with Lebanon and Syria. Given the length of the borders, the complexity of the terrain (especially the scrub covered mountainous terrain of the Israel-Lebanon border) and the proximity of Israeli villages and towns to the border (many of them literally within hand-grenade tossing range or dominated by high ground in Lebanese territory), preventing penetration of Hezbollah infantry forces into northern Israel will require a much larger complement of ground forces deployed defensively along that border. The population of those villages will have to be evacuated both for their own safety and to enable freedom of action for the Israeli forces – releasing troops from defensive to offensive missions and allowing freer rules of engagement.[xxx]

c.   An aerial offensive operation aiming to strike two complementary target sets:

  1. Hezbollah's artillery forces in order to reduce the amount of rockets being shot into Israel.

  2. A wide variety of strategic targets to illustrate the cost of the war to Hezbollah's local supporters.

In 2006 the Israeli Air Force's first mission was the destruction of Hezbollah's entire medium range rocket arsenal. This was achieved almost completely – much to the surprise and consternation of Hezbollah's leaders who had thought the storage locations were secret. Striking the long and medium range arsenal will be the first mission in the next war too – whether Israel's intelligence picture is as good as in 2006 is the decisive unknown. Strategic targets include Hezbollah headquarters, national infrastructure (electricity, bridges etc.) serving the Hezbollah and its supporters. In 2006 the IDF ordered the populations living above or near Hezbollah facilities and combat positions to move out to diminish civilian casualties, but the buildings themselves were demolished in air strikes attacking the facilities inside or beneath them.[xxxi]

d.   A ground offensive aiming to break through the Hezbollah defensive system to locate and destroy as many of the rocket launchers and rocket arsenals as possible. The time factor will be essential, so the IDF will deploy as many ground forces as possible to try to 'blanket' as much of southern Lebanon as possible in a short a time as possible.

To sum up.

In the event of another major war between Israel and Hezbollah, for whatever reason it breaks out, Israel's strategy will most likely focus on Physical Destruction of a large a portion of Hezbollah's combat forces as is possible. Merely outmaneuvering Hezbollah forces will not suffice – they are organized and trained to fight as 'islands'. Total destruction of Hezbollah is impossible, but, if a large enough proportion can be destroyed, Hezbollah leadership will be pressed to concede the war and prefer a ceasefire. In 2006 this point was reached when Hezbollah casualties accumulated to more than 10%, perhaps more than 15%, of its total force. [xxxii] How many will be required to achieve the strategic and political objectives in the next war is moot. In 2006 the IDF spent 38 days to achieve this goal and throughout that time Hezbollah continued to bombard Israel's northern towns and villages. Given the extremely reinforced bombardment capability of Hezbollah (they can fire in four days what they fired then in 38), the IDF will very likely attempt to reduce the time, and that would require a very large force conducting a simultaneous attack across all of southern Lebanon. However, another important factor is the ratio of casualties – what it would cost Israel and how this would inhibit Israeli commanders.

I have focused on the Lebanese front because, given that Hezbollah is the main military adversary, its geographic focus and its strength relative to other organizations allied to it, even in a multi-front war it will be the main front. Operations on the other fronts, Syria and perhaps Gaza, will be smaller versions of operations on the Lebanese front and the measure and timing of efforts there will depend on what the IDF thinks it needs to defeat Hezbollah and what it has left over from that mission.

Endnote

A final word of caution: prediction is difficult and predicting the future is even more difficult, quipped Danish scientist Niels Bohr. The above analysis is based on a narrow set of current trends, any of which might undergo a drastic twist, changing a few, many or most of the underlying assumptions.

References

[i] From 1976 till 2005 Syria maintained a sizeable military presence in Lebanon and dominated the political scene there.

[ii] The official term is 'Zionist State', but since Zionism means the existence of a Jewish Nation-State, that is merely a ploy to hide the meaning.

[iii] Islamic Republic News Agency, 9 September 2015, http://www.irna.ir/en/News/81753808

[iv] For a typical example: https://www.memri.org/reports/hizbullah-secretary-general-hassan-nasrallah-al-quds-day-israel-must-be-wiped-out-existence

[v] From June 2000, after the Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon, until, but not including, this attack in July 2006, more than 20 Israelis had been killed and more than 100 had been wounded by Hezbollah attacks into Israel. The exact number of Hezbollah attacks and Israeli casualties is difficult to ascertain since some were conducted by Palestinian proxies and blended into the approximately 26,000 attacks by Palestinians during this same period.

[vi] There have been a handful of other attacks by other groups, almost all Palestinians in Lebanon, but apparently Hezbollah was not involved except, perhaps, in turning a blind eye to these actions.

[vii] http://jcpa.org/article/hizbullah-threatens-to-strike-strategic-israeli-targetsin-response-to-an-attack-on-irans-nuclear-facilities/

[viii] See for example: http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/en/interview-granted-hassan-nasrallah-intended-reinforce-deterrent-message-towards-israel-emphasizing-hezbollahs-military-capabilities-especially-high-precision-missiles-enabli/, http://www.foxnews.com/story/2010/02/16/hezbollah-warns-retaliation-if-israel-strikes.html, http://www.thetower.org/2971-nasrallah-threatens-attack-on-israeli-chemical-plant-which-could-kill-tens-of-thousands/

[ix] http://www.jpost.com/Arab-Israeli-Conflict/The-third-Lebanon-war-scenario-406193, https://www.upi.com/Top_News/Voices/2017/02/20/Israel-boosts-missile-defenses-against-Hezbollah/6251487596746/

[x] See for example: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fkEdgrK5AdM

[xi] http://jcpa.org/article/hizbullah-discusses-its-operational-plan-for-war-with-israel-missile-fire-on-tel-aviv-and-conquest-of-the-galilee/

[xii] The typical infantry division has about 5,000 infantry combatants and another 1,500 to 2,000 combatants from other arms (artillery, engineers, scouts, etc.). Note that while Western-style Divisions typically have a ratio of approximately two administrative or logistics personnel per one combatant, Soviet Divisions had a ratio of only one per one combatant. If it conducts mostly static battles, Hezbollah will be able to pare down this overhead.

[xiii] http://news.walla.co.il/item/2560837 (Hebrew).

[xiv] The Battle for Al-Qusayr in 2013 was probably the first such example, https://ctc.usma.edu/the-battle-for-qusayr-how-the-syrian-regime-and-hizb-allah-tipped-the-balance/

[xv] http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4700232,00.html, http://www.homelandsecuritynewswire.com/dr20161122-israel-fortifies-northern-defenses-against-future-hezbollah-attacks

[xvi] http://high-level-military-group.org/pdf/hlmg-hizballahs-terror-army.pdf pg 12.

[xvii] https://www.haaretz.co.il/news/politics/1.1210853 (Hebrew).

[xviii] https://wikileaks.org/gifiles/attach/15/15025_HezbollahBackgroundPresentation.ppt, slide 21.

[xix] https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2017/dec/5/irans-shiite-crescent-across-middle-east-nearly-bu/

[xx] http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/app/uploads/2018/01/E_007_18.pdf

[xxi] Numerically Hamas may have succeeded in replenishing its pre-2014 stock, but not with the more advanced and longer ranged rockets it used to acquire from Iran. Smuggling such weapons into Gaza has become much more difficult because of the hostility of the current regime in Egypt, so Hamas has to make-do with the shorter range locally manufactured models. https://news.walla.co.il/item/2940541 (Hebrew).

[xxii] Hamas published this number officially in 2014 – https://www.memri.org/reports/izz-al-din-al-qassam-brigades-weapons-and-units; and again in March 2018 - http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/en/hamass-military-wing-conducted-large-scale-military-maneuver/. Even if it was an exaggeration then, it is very likely to be approximately accurate today. This does not include the organization's administrative and logistic personnel – many of whom are meshed into the civilian governmental infrastructure.

[xxiii] https://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-4692519,00.html (Hebrew). During the 2014 war Hamas frogmen conducted two amphibious raids into Israel. Both were defeated, but apparently Hamas believes in the potential of this tactic.

[xxiv] Psychological Exhaustion does not mean there will be no casualties, only that Hezbollah expects the Israeli population to break psychologically from the anxiety and having to live in bomb-shelters long before casualties accumulate in large numbers.

[xxv] For all the tactical failings of the IDF in 2006, it achieved its strategic objective, and the political goal it was serving, albeit, because of the tactical failures, for a price higher than acceptable to the Israeli government and public.

[xxvi] Since 1920 there have been only 5 years in which not a single Israeli Jew was killed by hostile Arab action, the last of those was 1935.

[xxvii] For a translation of the document into English see: https://www.belfercenter.org/sites/default/files/legacy/files/IDF%20doctrine%20translation%20-%20web%20final2.pdf. For an analysis of the doctrine by a retired Israeli Brigadier-General see: http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/new-idf-strategy-goes-public

[xxviii] https://www.idf.il/מאמרים/כתבות/שנתיים-לחתו-יצחו-לרתש-גדעו/ (Hebrew).

[xxix] Active American participation in Israel's anti-rocket defences was practiced in a recent exercise. https://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-5150725,00.html

[xxx] https://www.mako.co.il/news-military/security-q2_2016/Article-d9a70e7e6f45551004.htm (Hebrew)

[xxxi] Not everyone moved out, resulting in civilian casualties though at least half the 1,200 Lebanese fatalities published by the Lebanese government were actually Hezbollah combatants.

[xxxii] The exact casualty figure is not known – some 600 Hezbollah personnel, perhaps more, were killed (Hezbollah denies this figure, but the IDF has the names of most of them), and it is safe to assume that the number of wounded was at least the same, probably more than that.

What Carl Might Have Said About Terrorism: How Strategic Theory can Enlighten an Essentially Contested Debate

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'Terrorism' as a topic of public concern has never been more widely debated. 'Terror' defines our angry and anxious age. Media coverage and government agencies refer to 'the current terror threat level'[i], or the likelihood of a 'terrorist attack'.[ii] In this manner, public and academic discourse invariably characterise terrorism as a tangible reality, but is this actually the case? Is such terminology accurate or even useful?

Academic discussions of terrorism usually begin with declarations that the term – either as an idea or a method of inquiry – is essentially contested. As a result, studying terrorism and terrorists remains a long way from acceptance as a legitimate object of social scientific inquiry.

Since 9/11 'terrorism', as a term, has encapsulated instances of violent, often suicide related, attacks carried out by jihadist fighters sharing a non-negotiable interpretation of Islam. In this context, terror is a euphemism that avoids identifying the actual protagonists perpetrating violence: namely, fighters in a globalised Islamist movement. Governments and the mainstream media repeat this euphemism *ad nauseam*. Yet, it is ambiguous to imply that terrorism exists simultaneously as both a definite object and also a disputed and elusive phenomenon. If we are unclear about what the term means in common usage, this implies uncertainty about what it involves in practice. Consequently, public reaction and policy responses are often confused.

In other words, the use of the term 'terrorism' and its cognates, conflate a number of not necessarily related violent acts. As a basis for coherent inquiry this will not do. To make sense of this confused and contested area, we might pose the question, what might Carl von Clausewitz have said about terrorism? Although the notion of 'terror' as a political instrument is held to have entered the European vernacular around the time of the French Revolution, the word 'terrorism' would probably have been unknown to him. Had it been as prevalent in early nineteenth century public discourse as it is today, one might have thought he would have brought his methodical, and sceptical, eye to bear.

Clausewitz's appreciation of the means of war as an objective tool of policy has enabled commentators ever since to theorise about war in a dispassionate manner. His modern interpreters often see his ideas as the foundation of modern strategic theory, that is, the analysis of ways, ends and means. Influenced by the detached intellectual style he brought to matters of armed force, what might latter-day Clausewitzians – strategic theorists – derive if they place 'terrorism' under the spotlight? We contend that a strategic theory approach can help clarify much that is currently lacking and incoherent in understanding the concept and analysis of terrorism.[iii]

War, Ways and Words

Readers of *On War* will note that Clausewitz was very careful about the terminology he used to understand the realities of war. One of his key observations was that the first duty of any decision maker is to be clinical in their comprehension of the kind of conflict in which they are engaging; 'neither mistaking it for, nor trying to turn it into something alien to its nature'.[iv] Fundamentally, that means describing things from first principles and establishing an accurate vocabulary with which to apprehend the world around you.

As a phenomenon, terrorism has been described as a threat of 'absolute cosmic significance'.[v] Recourse to such hyperbole suggests that the 'terrorism' is something that is all pervasive. Terminologically, this implies that ideologically disparate movements share only a felt need for the violent act.

These movements might include, *inter alia*: jihadists, ethnic and nationalist groups, animal rights, and environmental activists, as well as *antifa* militants. Amorphously attributing terrorism to these actors leads to concept stretching.[vi] At the same time, the label 'terrorism' also entails a value judgement, further distorting a locution that contains no intrinsic moral value. The locution 'terrorism' as a speech act has come to assume a pejorative illocution as well as an allocution warning against such acts. Thus, the concept of 'terrorism' is stretched, encumbered by moral assumptions that compromise the term's analytic utility, combining moral and linguistically separate notions as if they were one and the same thing.[vii]

Confusing terrorism both as a performative act and a moral judgment is not just a problem in speech act theory.[viii] It has practical implications for government policy. First, the illocution that engagement in terrorism is emotionally or morally disturbed informs the convention that such an act is irrational. The secular social science and official governmental perspective considers terrorist violence an aberration. This has been a common trope in terrorism studies for over 40 years. [ix] The post-9/11 era, which witnessed suicide bombings and mass casualty attacks on soft targets, reinvigorated the view that such violence was nihilistic, and devoid of coherent political meaning.[x] Summating this perspective in the aftermath of 9/11, one scholar contended that the attacks 'recklessness and indifference to consequences' suggested that 'this was an apolitical act' containing no 'rational military purpose'.[xi]

Diagnosing terrorism as irrational and apolitical invites a medical and psychiatric policy response to such mental derangement. In the wake of seemingly random 'sole actor' or 'lone-wolf' attacks after 2014, Western governments found this perspective particularly attractive. Thus, carefully planned and coordinated attacks on civilian targets across Europe between 2015 and 2017 were invariably described as 'spontaneous',[xii] 'triggered by mental health issues'[xiii] and personality disorders.[xiv] Rather than addressing the clearly stated political intent of violence, 'experts' claim that the violent actor 'may simply be using the method of a terrorist attack – under whatever ideology – to excise personal demons'.[xv]

Treating a violent act as a form of mental illness is symptomatic of a more insidious facet of post-9/11 terrorism discourse. [xvi] This assumes that second order non-political factors like grievance, social alienation and psychiatric disorder, rather than ideological or religious conviction, inspire the violent deed. Focusing on second order factors also implies that terrorism has 'root causes' that may be treated. The outcome is often a nebulous policy to curb or 'prevent' the 'terrorist threat'.

Causality, of course, is endlessly disputable and infinitely divisible.[xvii] This is particularly the case with discussions about terrorism's supposed 'root causes'. In the late nineteenth century, for example, European criminologists attributed the causes of anarchist inspired terroristic violence to factors ranging from vitamin deficiency, brain size and air pressure to moon phases.[xviii] As the elusive field of terrorism studies expanded in slightly more sophisticated directions during the wave of non-state violence during the 1970s,

analysts would identify the 'causes' of international terrorism in both communism and nationalism. Terrorism studies in this era lumped together a number of otherwise disparate conflicts – in the Middle East, Latin America, Western, Europe, Japan and North America – solely on the basis of tactical similarities. Regardless of geographic or political context – merely because protagonists resorted to bombings, kidnapping, and assassination – this rendered them liable to be described as instances of terrorism. Such analysis rarely yielded much in the way of insight.[xix]

More recently, neo-Marxist critical theorists have discovered their preferred 'root causes' of international terrorism residing in the exclusionary practices of the modern Western liberal state, with its associated sins of racism, sexism and patriarchy. [xx] Variations on this theme lead scholars and policymakers to identify relative deprivation and social grievances causing violent extremism. Accordingly, Stella Rimington, a former director of MI5, Britain's domestic security service, stated in 2004 that 'Terrorism is going to be there for a long time. It's going to be there as long as there are people with grievances that they feel terrorism will help solve'.[xxi] Rimington's statement exemplifies the malleable, contestable, and divisible understandings that the language of terror facilitates. Whether expressed in terms of 'a war against' or 'root causes' the infinitely stretched concept renders its study untenable.

Considering Clausewitz: Applying Occam's Razor

Clausewitz, we might surmise, would have very little time for such distortions. Strategic theory, however, offers a plausible way out of this essentially contested dilemma. It requires, in the first instance, applying the principle of Occam's Razor to the word terror.[xxii]

Occam's Razor, or more accurately the law of parsimony, is the problem solving principle that when faced with competing hypothetical answers to a problem one should opt for the one with the fewest assumptions. Applying this principle the term terrorism may be reduced to its basic meaning, namely, that terror denotes an acute or extreme form of fear.[xxiii] If we combine this assumption with the basic postulate of strategy – the 'use of available resources to gain any objective',[xxiv] we achieve a parsimonious definition of terrorism: that is, the employment of fear to gain an objective. This parsimonious definition affords the basis for a logic of inquiry, which, as we shall show, refutes a variety of misleading assumptions that continue to distort contemporary discussions of terrorism.

Exposing Terrorism's Fallacies

Terrorism is not hard to define

There are over 250 definitions of terrorism in circulation[xxv] and the apparent absence of consensus suggests a discipline that lacks an understanding of any kind of testable parameters.[xxvi] Therefore, the literature on terrorism studies assumes problematically that terror is 'nearly impossible to define'.[xxvii] This is the first of many fallacies. Following the logic of strategic theory, however, terrorism can be defined clearly and falsifiably as the employment of fear to achieve

an objective.[xxviii]

Terrorism does not achieve an independent social reality

Terrorism, understood as the creation of fear for a purpose, functions grammatically as an abstract noun. Abstract nouns, by definition, are not concrete. They define ideas, qualities and states that cannot be seen, heard, tasted, smelled or touched. Therefore, it is incorrect to apply the noun terrorism to observable phenomenon that terms like a 'terror threat' imply. Equally incorrect are statements to the effect that 'terrorism is going to be around for a long time'. Once constructed abstract nouns, like happiness or hate, are usually around forever.

Terrorism has no causes

Abstract nouns, as we have suggested, are perceptions and conceptions of the human imagination. The meanings invested in abstract nouns – such as goodness, bravery, or terrorism – have no independent existence beyond the properties ascribed to them. Abstract nouns therefore can have no causes and to look for them is a fool's errand. More particularly, to attempt to identify the 'root causes' of terrorism, as many analysts still do,[xxix] as if they possess a special insight into the human condition is therefore misleading.

Terrorism can only be a tactic

By logical extension, if terrorism is an abstract noun denoting the creation or employment of fear to gain an objective then it must entail a conscious act. Therefore terrorism is a tactic, or means to achieve an end. Moreover, if terrorism entails an act of violence to engender a condition of fear, this conforms to Clausewitzian understandings of the role of tactics in war and politics. As Clausewitz observed, war is a continuation of politics by other means and where the deed of violence itself is '*an act of force to compel the enemy to do our will*'.[xxx] Given that war is an act of violence in pursuit of a political purpose it follows that terrorism – the creation/employment of fear for a purpose – is qualitatively no different from any other practice social actors may choose to achieve their goals.

Terrorism is a rational tool of policy

Given that terrorism is a conscious practice, it follows that the tactic has been intentionally selected to achieve or fulfil a purpose. It does not matter if the act succeeds in attaining the precise goal determined for it, because, like all future orientated action, its success or failure is unknowable in advance. Social actors nevertheless, calculate the risk involved in an action, together with its conformity to the actor's values in the hope of achieving a desired outcome. It is, however, the intention behind the deed, which shows that an actor has decided to induce an extreme form of fear. [xxxi]

Terrorism is not a mental problem

As terrorism is a rational act intended to attain particular objectives, *ipso facto*, it is not a psychiatric disorder. Social actors choose the tactic of terror with a conscious expectation that it will promote their goals. It is a rationally purposive act.

To attribute mental and behavioural dysfunction to those engaged in acts of terrorism, and any wider cause that such acts are designed to further, is therefore misconceived.

Terrorism is not a basis for moral judgement

Medicalising terror in fact functions as a form of disapproval or disgust.[xxxii] Assigning insanity to a purposeful act signifies incomprehension rather than serious diagnosis. The psychiatry of terrorism is thus isomorphic with treating it in terms of moral disapprobation. When this happens, commentators are making normative assumptions about the immorality or insanity of an actor's means. Media and political denunciations of the 'evil of terrorism' evince this tendency.[xxxiii] It is strategically incoherent to conflate a term that denotes a tactic with a moral judgement. Like any tactic, terroristic violence may be used for good or bad. Deciding what constitutes a morally good or bad act is a wholly separate activity from evaluating the utility of a particular tactic.

Terrorism does not require non-state actors

An equally popular, but misleading, fiction is that those who practice terrorism are non-state actors.[xxxiv] If terrorism is a tactic, then there can be no discrimination between state or non-state actors who practise it. The strategic theorist Thomas Schelling recognised this when assessing the Cold War balance of terror. 'The concept of 'massive retaliation', he wrote, 'is terrorist'. He added that he meant 'nothing derogatory or demeaning about strategic nuclear forces by emphasizing the traditional expectation that their primary use is to deter or intimidate, and thereby influence behavior, through the threat of enormous civilian damage'.[xxxv] In other words, any social entity, from the individual to the state might, for any number of reasons, choose the means of terror if it is deemed suitable for their ends.

Terrorism is not a weapon of the weak

Assumptions rarely travel singly. They come in pairs. Terrorism as a 'weapon of the weak' invariably accompanies the notion that it is a non-state activity.[xxxvi] Yet just as terrorism has no innate connection to normative judgements or non-state actors, neither does it have any necessary or obvious relationship with military inferiority.

There are no terrorist organisations

Public commentary regularly identifies 'terrorist' organisations.[xxxvii] Taken literally, a terrorist organisation implies a movement entirely dedicated solely to the tactic parsimoniously understood of creating fear to achieve a specific end. Yet, actors prepared to use violence rarely operate in this way. They select tactics they consider appropriate for advancing their goals at a particular point in time. A political organisation cannot therefore be usefully defined by the means it might happen to use at any one stage. Hence, there is no such thing as a terrorist organisation.

The notion of a 'terrorist' is erroneous

If it is misleading to speak of 'terrorist organisations' as if they were merely the sum of their tactics, it is equally misguided,

both semantically and analytically, to talk in the same manner of 'terrorists'. Certainly, we may describe, for example, certain soldiers in armies by the military functions they perform – machine gunner, artilleryman, engineer, signaller, etc. – but the tactics they might employ (and the specific military and political effects such tactics are intended to achieve) will very likely vary with each contingent engagement. To refer to a political actor as a terrorist is a species of tautology akin to referring to a soldier as a 'small arms combatant'.

One person's terrorist is not another person's freedom fighter

If there is one saying that captures the linguistic incoherence of terror discourse, it is the clichéd phrase that 'one person's terrorist is another person's freedom fighter'. The phrase represents a classic category mistake: confusing a description with a moral judgement. The first part of the phrase alludes to the description of a tactic (someone seeking to create fear for a purpose), whilst the second part concerning the 'freedom fighter' contains a positive moral judgment. Yet, as we have seen, deciding what constitutes a morally good act is a wholly separate task to evaluating the utility, or otherwise, of a particular tactic. Depending on how an analyst might evaluate the contingent moral and political setting, it is perfectly possible to commit an act of terror in 'a good cause'. One person's terrorist is therefore not another person's freedom fighter, not least because, depending on the moral calculus, it is entirely possible to be both at the same time.[xxxix]

Talking Terror Strategically

Applying strategic theory enables the analyst to avoid loading the term terrorism with assumptions that cannot be inferred from the premise that it concerns the creation of fear. Speaking strategically avoids emotive, capricious valuations that hold, among other things: that terrorism is a weapon of the weak (not necessarily); involves the intentional killing of innocent civilians (an arbitrary moral judgement); is an act undertaken only by non-state groups based on ethnic, religious, nationalist, socialist or other ideological causes (a truism that, taken literally, implies all political acts are terrorist); and that terrorism is an observable existential reality. The epistemic confusion in contemporary terrorism studies arises primarily from assigning subjective moral judgements to an abstract noun.

Strategic theory, by contrast, avoids moral judgement. As a method of inquiry it evaluates how well the chosen means achieve stated ends. This understanding applies to all instrumental acts of violence. While this may seem callous, it is a necessary prerequisite for any dispassionate attempt to understand political decisions and actions. As Schelling explained, this is for two reasons: first, strategic 'analysis is usually about the situation not the individuals – about the structure of incentives, of information and communication, the choices available, and the tactics that can be employed'.

[xli] Second, strategic theory 'cannot proceed from the point of view of a single favoured participant. It deals with situations in which one party has to think about how the others are going to reach their decisions'.[xlii]

Analysing terrorism in instrumental, rather than judgmental, terms, as a strategy to obtain particular ends, separates the normative assumptions enveloping terrorism from the distinct attempt to assess its utility in the eyes of those who choose to employ its methods.[xliii] The intellectual effort therefore focuses upon whether a particular actor's intent is directed at creating fear to attain ostensible goals rather than apportioning blame, guilt or judgement. The latter may constitute a legitimate basis for ethical inquiry, but it is a distinct, and unconnected, undertaking from that of assessing the precise intention of an act.

Approaching terrorism strategically allows for the dispassionate examination of motives rather than treating terrorism as an 'evil' beyond the realms of rational comprehension. Strategic thought eschews a moral stance in order to analyse objectively the means political actors utilise, including violence, to achieve their ends.[xliv] It disinterestedly investigates situations 'within a framework that places the conscious choices of actors above any singular focus on the morality or causality of violence itself'.

Conclusion

Clausewitz, we might surmise, would have very little time for the distortions and occlusions that occur in the contemporary use of language about terrorism. Terrorism has become a contested concept through misleading assumptions that have allowed the description to become stretched and infused with normative connotations. This results in the political language of terror becoming ambiguous and distorted.

Applying the principles of accuracy and parsimony that he pioneered in the study of war enables us to chart a different and more meaningful path that facilitates insight and clarity, rather than add to the confusion and contestation that surrounds much contemporary debate. Strategic theory reveals that terrorism is a tactic that has at its core the explicit intention to create fear for a purpose. It can be studied as a rational and instrumental phenomenon, thus freeing terrorism from the 'semantic bog' in which it has been mired.[xlvi]

Strategic theory also reveals the limitations of the current discourse about terrorism, which gives rise to incoherent speech acts. It can also remind us that a logic of social science inquiry requires parsimony and falsifiability. Unfortunately, much contemporary debate about terrorism has abandoned these principles. It is possible, however, to reveal a better way by replacing talking in tongues with clear speech acts.

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