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# Infinity Journal



## IN THIS EDITION

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# A Note from the Editor

It seems to be part of the human condition to both want and reject change. There is little insight in saying this except to foreshadow that change *is* coming to Infinity Journal (IJ). When we first came into existence nearly nine years ago there was no similar publication, both in terms of content and method of delivery. Today that statement is less easy to make, as blogs and websites championing the unrestricted or ill-defined subject of strategy has exploded.

Today, being a "strategist" is not the result of having served on campaign planning teams or even to have been a proven student of strategy from whom others have sought advice, but it can literally be anyone, and strategy can be about anything you want it to be.

Where IJ has stood apart is in our insistence on a set standard and definition, which unequivocally links strategy to the consequences of violence as may exist in politics, and that politics is about influence.

Some nearly 250 published articles, sourced from over 1,000 peer-reviewed submissions, have subjected us and our readers to both the very best and, in some cases, the very mediocre insights concerned with our subject. As Editor I make no apology for mediocre articles. I may have written some myself but no one at IJ seeks to stifle debate or impose a subjective and arbitrary style or standard. You are welcome to your opinion. You are not welcome to your own facts or to alter the conversation to your area of comfort.

Whatever changes may come, we will not alter those basic values and ideas, but we *will* have to be open to include the application of violent means as to how that may drive the discussions and understanding of strategy. Strategy can only be done as tactics, and in terms of the state and/or armed group, as they are still the main practitioners in this field. That is why, beginning with volume 7, issue 1, Infinity Journal will be retitled *Military Strategy Magazine*, to be known simply as *Military Strategy*.

Change should also mean more writers with a more diverse background and experience, so hopefully we will get to discuss the relevance of things such as Rules of Engagement as true instruments of policy, without getting sucked into academic arguments, which will mean nothing to the practitioner community. If strategy is really about the consequences of violence then the time, place, nature and expression of violence, as something relevant to policy, should have more time in print than it currently does. How, where, why and whom you kill, matters. "Kind-hearted people might of course think there was some ingenious way to disarm or defeat an enemy without too much bloodshed, and might imagine this is the true goal of the art of war. Pleasant as it sounds, it is a fallacy that must be exposed". If you can help with that exposure, stick around.

**William F. Owen**

Editor, *Infinity Journal*  
January 2019

# Contents

## Why Strategy is Different

4

**Colin S. Gray**

The key difference about strategy is the fact that it cannot be taught and learnt in a classroom. It is not a body of knowledge. Strategic skill is either an inherited characteristic or is learned from experience.

## A Typology of Insurgency and Counterinsurgency

10

**Donald Stoker**

Too often the literature on insurgency and counterinsurgency dwells upon the tactical issues involved while overlooking the core differences in insurgencies as well as the key strategic factors that must be controlled to mount an effective insurrection as well as to defeat one. This article provides a simple typology for understanding and assessing insurgencies, identifies the most important factors combatants should seek to control, and shows why these matter.

## When the Clausewitzian Trinity is Not Paradoxical

19

**Antulio J. Echevarria II**

This article discusses the implications of not viewing the famous Clausewitzian trinity as paradoxical. Most Clausewitz scholars understand the adjective "paradoxical" was never used in the original German text. But they can still find it difficult to avoid thinking about it that way.

## Why Israel and Hamas Fail to Achieve a Strategic Change

23

**Gur Laish**

Why are Israel and Hamas each failing to achieve their goals, vis-à-vis each other, by use of force? Israel has a superior military force, yet Israel fails to stop Hamas's violence. Hamas finds the political and socio-economic situation in Gaza impossible, and yet, with all its rockets and other means of violence it cannot force Israel to end its blockade. This article argues that this failure is not the product of poor leadership but the result of a dynamic, which occurs in many protracted low intensity conflicts. This dynamic seems to "lock" both sides in a deficient equilibrium that can only be changed by large-scale military operations or a diplomatic agreement. All attempts to change the situation by adding some pressure on the other have failed. A better understanding of the dynamic of protracted low intensity conflict can result in a more efficient strategy.

## War, Cognitive Biases and Perception Management: The Time Has Come

28

**Shay Shabtai**

Warfighting is fundamentally a human activity, and therefore it is susceptible to cognitive biases. Western armies should include these biases in their conduct of war, and expand perception manipulation.

## Antecedents to Strategy: The Use of Force

34

**Robert Rubel**

The possession of a particular source of strength could produce a strategic decision-making pathology in which strategists' perception of the situation is distorted. The author leverages his experience in wargaming to illustrate the potential danger and discusses its potential effects in the areas of deterrence and operational planning.





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# Why Strategy is Different

**Colin S. Gray**  
United Kingdom

Professor Colin Gray is a retired independent scholar. He has a D.Phil from Oxford (Lincoln College) and has published many books, including *Modern Strategy* (OUP, 1999) and *The Strategy Bridge: Theory for Practice*, (OUP, 2010). His most recent book is *Theory of Strategy*, (OUP 2018).

## Introduction: The Mystery of Strategy

I will argue in this essay that strategy differs from other components of national and international security in a way that commonly is hardly recognized. Whereas all politics/policy, operations, and tactics can have a contemporary empirical reality that can be verified, strategy alone is an actuality of the future which will be verifiable only through understanding the consequences of thought and behavior. Strategy can be what is intended today, but its reality can exist strictly only in the future. It must always potentially be a guide or warning for tomorrow.

Only a few commentators and historians have come close to recognizing why the concept of strategy has proved so elusive, even almost evasive. This author has been a student of strategy for more than fifty years, but I must confess that in all that time I failed to seek out with sufficient rigor the core of the challenge that, at long last, I accept in this essay. What I find rather puzzling is the nature of this enquiry. I admit that sufficient light appeared and illuminated what previously had eluded me only fully when it was all but thrust in my face by my need to think more deeply than usual about strategy's meaning. I needed to draft my book, *Theory of Strategy*.<sup>[i]</sup>

I have complained, often probably pedantically, about popular, and much supposedly expert, misuse of the 'strategic' adjective. Through frequent abuse the noun, strategy, and inevitably the adjective, strategic, have lost much conceptual integrity. Since *Infinity Journal* is committed uncompromisingly to the better understanding of strategy, it must be assumed to welcome some fundamental reflection on the subject. An unavoidable problem exists in the minds

of those who sincerely do not find the current conceptual vagueness of the subject troubling. Before proceeding further I need to register firmly that in my opinion misunderstanding of strategy, often in the past as also commonly in the present, has been exceedingly painful and expensive. It is improbable that the conceptual habits of generations can or would be turned around, but one can always try.

## Theory

Military students may strive to resist the idea, but the function of military, even strategic, theory simply is to explain the meaning of thoughts and events. Empirical reality can appear a morass of happenings and possibilities that seems designed to promote confusion. Theory, particularly strategic theory, has been conceived, even elaborated, to help enable us to think clearly, which usually means relatively economically and simply. Probably the most valuable contribution that theory can make to understanding lies in its terse identification of conceptual structure. This task may seem too elementary to detain us for long, but in historical practice many a fine army has failed because it could not function as required by a High Command unduly enamored of its own brilliance.

The beginning of wisdom about military affairs needs to be through holistic appreciation of the actuality of defense preparation and warfare itself. All too understandably, a holistic grasp of events is not to be expected, or required, of the performance of the soldier junior in rank. However, war and its warfare as a whole phenomenon, is apt to call for the full commitment of participants of every rank. Reference to 'Strategic Corporals' and the like of recent years has recognized a deep truth about the phenomenon of war. The focus on strategy and strategic in this essay obliges full recognition that should be so obvious almost as seeming too obvious to be worthy of particular notice.

Basic to all contextually specific theories of strategy is the eternal and universal authority recognized as residing in a familiar conceptual mantra. Strategy is expressed with praiseworthy economy to require a careful, if often complex, balance among policy ends, strategic ways, and most probably military means – with the entire exercise seasoned by heavy or light application of pertinent assumptions. When considering the wisdom or otherwise of ventures in statecraft

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of the more exciting character, what should be easily recognizable is the great irony in the conceptual aid that the wondrous trinity of ends, ways, and means, can provide. That mantra should be of the most fundamental help to harassed political leaders in need of timely advice, though one suspects that any leaders really in need of such education ought to be in some profession other than statecraft. Neither politics nor strategy are sciences. Countries around the world deny the merit in what I have just written. Both Russians and Chinese write and talk of strategy as a science. They are seriously mistaken. Needless to say, perhaps, whether or not readers agree with me must depend critically on what one believes to be the requirements of science, not just science-like, with statistics galore.

Confusingly perhaps there can be important science when phenomena are considered at one level of generality, but assuredly not at another. Furthermore, the variability in detail does not necessarily imply any like variants about the activity. For example, the general truth in the truly essential relations in strategy among ends, ways, and means has only a categorical level of validity; always about reciprocal enablement it is subject to the empirical authority of practical experience. Strategy does not differ from the politics that give it birth, or the warfare in which it may find expression, in any movement it makes or entails. Rather, strategy is alone in needing to reach into the future. The key elements in theory all have at least some contemporary reality: Politics and policymaking are permanent activities; ways will be discovered and conducted probably today or in the near future; means actually will be engaged in threatening and using force.

What distinguishes strategy from politics/policy, operations, and tactics is the fact that it focuses most heavily, possibly solely, upon the course of events anticipated for the future. Current arrangements and engagements may well be chosen according to strategic criteria, though what that should mean, simply, is a focus on tomorrow rather than today.

## Time

It is not argued here that considerations of time alone are distinctive about strategy. Naturally the entire phenomenon of conflict has a particular, sometimes variable, temporal dimension. Everything in our universe must occur in time, favourable or otherwise for the enterprise of the day or period. My argument is not that strategy alone has a critically important temporal quality, though that statement is sufficiently true as to warrant respect. The point of importance is not that strategy alone is enabled by the passage of time, that would be incorrect, indeed even ridiculous given what is possible tactically, operationally, and politically, even with temporal assistance of a distinctly explosive order. Think of possible ICBM employment which could be done – I hesitate and decline to say achieved – at intercontinental range. Clear and consistent thinking about strategy tells us that strategic forces, so miscalled, are strategic in their consequences, not in their action. The latter should be understood as tactical, with the possibility of operational art notably problematic in this case. The scope and scale of near certain catastrophe is key to the meaning of strategic nuclear forces. This is what

provides the warrant for the 'strategic' entitlement of the forces themselves and which the superpowers endorse. What it is about forces officially acknowledged as 'strategic', is that one is talking about the passage of time.

It should be needless to say that everything we say and do is to some degree time-bounded. The clock and the calendar are always with us, moreover they always have been regardless of the level of scientific and technological accomplishment of the societies of high contemporary interest. What distinguishes strategy is that it can exist only in, even as, the future.

Strategy is quite alone as a potential contributor of evidence for tomorrow, but not today. The nuclear armed ICBM mentioned above becomes authentically strategic, alas, when we consider the possible, indeed probable, consequences of its use. Popular linguistic use, or misuse, elects to collapse tactics into strategy, when discussion proceeds to consequences of nuclear employment.

What makes strategy different from the other behaviors of particular interest here is a matter of nature rather than of character. All military, political, economic and cultural thought and behaviour eternally and universally, have to occur in the dimension of time. This temporal context is so familiar, even intrusive, that its sheer familiarity can breed what amounts to contempt. Commonly, the high significance of time is not uniformly recognized, or indeed perhaps needed, across the whole board of those who usually contribute to the making of strategy. When writing about strategy it is not unusual for theorists simply to neglect to treat temporal issues. Strategists need always to understand that time 'lost' for whatever clutch of reasons, both good and bad, can never be recovered – it is gone forever. This simple, yet fundamentally important point of geo-physical science continues to have high significance for the makers of strategy.

Strategy is by no means unique in its vulnerability to temporal error – for example mud can impede military performance at all levels, tactical, operational, and even therefore strategic. We should not forget that strategic accomplishment always is, indeed can only be, the deserved product of tactical and operational levels of success. Because strategy is all about consequences, the temporal dimension has to be of extraordinary significance. Tactical and even operational levels of assessment can fail, for a while, to reveal deeply unwelcome military news. For example, by December 1941 it should have been plain to see that Nazi Germany and its allies were approximately two million men short of the total required to succeed in the invasion and attempted conquest of the Soviet Union: one million for casualty replacement, and a further million for the force level needed to complete the task intended. The Nazi excellence at the tactical and even operational levels of conflict was, of course, revealed at the strategic and political levels of war to have been a chimera. What proved most lethal to the German way of war in 1941-5, was the duration of very active fatal combat. Germany's principal error, from which there could be no turning back, let alone recovery, was the assumption that the USSR was akin to a house of cards that would collapse in upon itself when it suffered major military setbacks, let alone disaster. Whether or not this fallacious belief, even if true, would have sufficed to bring down Stalin's Russia can never be known,

because the Wehrmacht failed to inflict irrecoverable damage. What happened, instead, was that the Russians managed to protract the war into a phase where the German enemy lacked the human and mechanical assets to enable the waging of warfare on favourable terms. It was Russian strategy to wage more warfare for longer than the enemy was physically capable of meeting in battle with any prospect of ultimate success.

I do not mean to disparage by implication the growing skill of Russian staffs and generalship. The root of the German problem, however, was quantitative deficiency. Despite commanding an invading army of close to three and a half million men, the attackers fell close to two million short in number.[ii]

Of course it is usually strongly preferable to wage only brief and successful war. Many lands, however, have not been so blessed by circumstance that the wars they are unable to avoid are brief. An important factor in the conduct of lengthy wars should be the opportunity provided by a context of survival to teach how to endure and perhaps gain the time to employ assets productively for ultimate survival. If a polity can survive sundry poor military episodes, as a virtue of necessity it may learn better how to persist and survive. The classic case was the British in 1940. The war was lost in most respects, but crucially not in all. Britain had no realistically credible offensive strategy for victory in the war in Europe. What it did, however, was wage warfare it could hardly lose against the Italians in Libya. It was not much of a contest, but at least the expansive geopolitical successes made for positive news coverage at home in Britain and also in America, where it really mattered. Following the appalling incompetence demonstrated in Flanders (and Norway) in early summer 1940, but then after the truly impressive victory in the Battle of Britain in September.[iii] All that could be done was simply to carry on and hope for notable German errors in politics and strategy: these, of course, duly were done obligingly in abundance, beginning in June 1941 with the Nazi invasion of Russia.

### Flexibility and Adaptability

Strategy is not a search for truth, rather ought it to be the product of a responsible assessment of the consequences of tactical and operational behaviour. There is and can be no strategic behaviour, because, sensibly employed, the idea of strategy must only be the action recorded tactically and operationally. Strictly employed, quite literally the ideas of strategic action or effect reflect confusion on the part of the speaker or writer. Since strategy is about what happens because of tactical and operational action, one is in some peril of saying, or perhaps appearing to say, that tactics and operations cause themselves, given the true meaning of strategy that ought not to be forgotten. Amidst the theoretical contortions into which the unwary theorist might wander dangerously is a truly lethal categorical error. If, in essence, strategy is made of the deeds and misdeeds of both tactics and operations, albeit spiced with a desirably heavily seasoning by political preference, one is compelled to recognize some eternal and universal truth about strategy.

Most especially we need to appreciate that the subject is

inexorably holistic. It can be a challenge to explain to students with sufficient clarity that strategy does not mean what most probably they had believed. Both scholarly academic and popular authors misuse strategy and its adjective with scant conceptual discipline. Strategy simultaneously can be both a grander and a more limited and specific idea than usefully is captured in the ideas herded by tactics and also by operations. This is not to be critical of theory in their respect, of course. Of particular importance for the analysis is the relative clarity of classification. We know and generally agree about what is, or should be meant by tactics and by operations. This theorist is not greatly enamored of the inevitable separations imposed now in the standard triad of key ideas among tactics, operations, and strategy. There is an inflexibility about this triadic categorization which impedes comprehension. Indeed, there is a school-like rigidity about much of the writing on our subject, to the limited extent to which busy professionals are willing to devote scarce time to subjects theoretical!

It is essential never to forget that strategy usually is a contested topic; the enemy also has a vote. Strategy is made for a region of real-world action that may hover between almost free will on a high level of policy shaped and driven by politics, and the serious constraint of enemies determined to resist. Popular reference to the allegedly strategic this or that seems likely to help obscure the meaning of the subject and the implications that can follow. One can almost feel the wave of disappointment when an audience is introduced to the quite novel idea that the somewhat mysterious quality, 'strategic', does not, by certain definition, have a settled material reality. In other words, in the most important of senses strategy cannot be photographed, rather is it a contextual quality of judgement. To risk understatement, this can be an appreciation too far for many soldiers and civilians alike. However, to the gifted political or military leader, the logic of this argument can be liberating.

The difference between policy and strategy on the one hand, and tactics and operations on the other, is truly enormous. In the former categories of thought and behaviour, relatively few choices are prohibited, while in the latter the hindrances and constraints are usually known and may well both be material and human physical, and possibly even visible. Political leaders will tell their strategists, political and military, what they must strive to do, but also possibly how they should go about trying to do what their orders command. Flexibility in policy goals is commonly situationally specific, being at least partially driven by the clamorous demands of notably inexperienced domestic publics, or troublesome foreign allies.

Flexibility commonly is understood not only to be a virtue in statecraft and even in strategy, but also an actual requirement for prudent political and military high command. An obvious problem arises, however, if leaders allow themselves to be tempted fatally by the apparent benefits of adaptation judged domestically to be unduly conciliatory towards a competitor. Strategy differs enormously from the other functions of relevant theory in that it, alone, by definition has yet to occur. Politics and policy, tactics and operations, can all be affected now, which has to mean that empirical knowledge is near instantly available. Tactical mistakes may kill you today, while operational error may prove fatal in days or perhaps weeks. The contrast with strategic error can hardly



be clearer. A strategic error in statecraft or strategy may take years to reveal itself in its full horror. For a very obvious and exceedingly large scale historical example of strategic folly, consider the negative consequences for Native Americans of their failure to keep European intruders offshore. I appreciate why the Native population of the Americas, north and south, could not exclude European colonization. Nonetheless, one does feel that, given their advantages in numbers and, before too long, even in equine mobility, only a poor job was made of effective resistance.

Another glaring example of the grim meaning of strategy is offered in the example of William of Normandy's successful invasion of England in 1066 which, through operational and then tactical error, King Harold of Wessex managed to lose. The ill consequences of the Norman Conquest endured literally for centuries. This was Saxon strategic failure on a truly grand scale. Tactical and even operational mistakes obviously can prove extremely costly, whereas strategic errors in those undertakings have the potential apparently to shift the whole of a society's historical course. A few years ago I wrote for this journal about the Battle of Britain, waged briefly in the sky largely over southern England in August and September 1940. This battle, the first of its kind in history, was tactically and operationally momentous, but its ultimate significance has to be judged strategic. This battle, which of course Germany lost, required Hitler to leave Britain uninvaded in 1940, and, given his race against his own mortality, to make the conquest of the USSR, the next task on Nazi Germany's path of conquest. Failure in a single campaign in 1940 was to have consequences in shaping the entire rest of the war. This fact highlights admirably what is meant by the adjective strategic. The sequence of events from 1941 until 1945, and then the East-West political and military standoff until as late as 1991, was all in traceably logical part a result of German failure over England in Fall 1940.

Probably it would be too much to ask of soldiers that they should lift their gaze somewhat from the death and destruction of contemporary action in order to consider the possible, even probable, meaning of 'action this day' for the course even of unknown, indeed unknowable, events tomorrow. By way of sharp contrast with the understandably limited horizons of most soldiers, the strategist, military or civilian, must peer into the future as best he or she is able. The purpose will be to attempt to comprehend the direction the polity is taking, though possibly, even more probably, not the objectives that may be achievable.

Unlike the professional world for the tactician, the strategist typically has sufficient time allowing for the making of well-considered opinions. In practice, both the military tactician and the political policy maker inhabit a world distinctly vulnerable to the pressures most characteristic of crisis. Quite often and not reliably anticipatable, the politician, as also the tactician, is compelled to make irrevocable choices. Not all words spoken carelessly can be excused or subsequently explained away satisfactorily. It can and probably should be pointed out that not all strategic choices will be beyond revocation. There is an ironic twist to the history of strategy. Whereas, unlike the realms of politics and tactics, the world of the strategist is one that should enable the taking of adequate time prior to the making of decisive commitment. However, once made and executed, strategic decision tends

to be near impossible to correct in a major way. Typically, one can go back on an unwise tactical choice or two. It may even be possible to change one's mind on a political commitment. Strategic choices, however, have inherently more engaging, hence embarrassing at the least, potential to do one harm. A foolish decision to invade, topple, and then replace Stalin's USSR, was found to have placed the German Sixth Army on the Volga in winter 1942 quite beyond rescue. The Nazi disaster at Stalingrad provides textbook illustration of what it is about particular political and military operational choices that renders them extraordinarily strategic when one invades Russia with far too few men, too late in the year: disaster beckons.

It is an important general truth about strategy that whereas the other principal components of relevant theory (politics, military operations, and tactics) usually, though assuredly not invariably, can be, indeed often are, adopted and thereby adjusted so as to fit more closely the live emerging context, strategy can be near impossible to revoke. The concept of strategy pertains to a whole course of events, not just to a particular object or occurrence of special interest. For recent examples, the American-led interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan were both of them plain strategic failures. US political objectives in both countries were not secured and maintained, which, when all else is said and done, is what the most relevant strategy was all about. It is not about trying hard, striving energetically to do good things, even allegedly in the national interest.

Not infrequently polities are able to control the temporal duration of their striving. As Clausewitz noted prominently, however, sometimes the enemy of the day has a vote on the subject of war's duration.[iv] A war may well conclude persuasively when parties to the conflict decide they are unable to wage sufficient further warfare to stand a reasonable prospect of securing politically worthwhile advantage. Alternatively, of course, war can end when there are no longer rivals in a condition fit to sustain or renew active hostilities. In the latter case the political issues at stake may simply be left undecided, possibly to remain for the troubling of succeeding generations in future wars. It is not always essential for world order that great strategic issues should be solved. Some of the most deeply felt issue areas in global politics prudently have long been left politically unresolved. For example, the false religion, socialism for an obvious example, will not have the trans-historical staying power characteristic of the major faiths.

### The Difference

Strategy does not bear a close relationship to politics, tactics, and operations, except crucially and ironically, that it is the product of all of them. I appreciate that this can be a distinctly challenging concept to grasp, because we have (all of us!) grown used to misemploying both the noun and the adjective of strategy/strategic. Moreover, states by the dozen have come to add strategy and strategic to their official vocabularies, apparently with scarcely a second thought. If one challenges some official claim or argument with respect to the meaning of strategic, it has been, and remains today, a field day for invention and rule by expediency.

To be a strategist is to march with history, indeed inevitably in history unavoidably as a participant observer towards unknowable destinations. Happenings possibly of unusual significance may well be believed worthy of a description 'strategic'. From time to time, in retrospect, such understanding

may appear validated empirically by subsequent apparently significantly consequential events. By professional choice the strategist cannot avoid causative separation from the deeds and thoughts he or she has had. The strategist's only realm cannot exist prior to tomorrow.

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[i] Colin S. Gray, *Theory of Strategy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

[ii] The German Army invaded the Soviet Union on 22 June, 1941, deploying 3,050,000 men and 3350 tanks. Department of the Army, Historical Studies, *The German Campaign in Russia: Planning and Operations (1940-1942)*, Pamphlet No. 20-261a (Baltimore, MD: Department of the Army, March 1955), p.41.

[iii] See Colin S. Gray, "Clipping the Eagle's Wings; Explaining Failure and Success in the Battle of Britain, 1940", *Infinity Journal*, Special edn. (October 2012), pp. 5-11.

[iv] Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), p.75.

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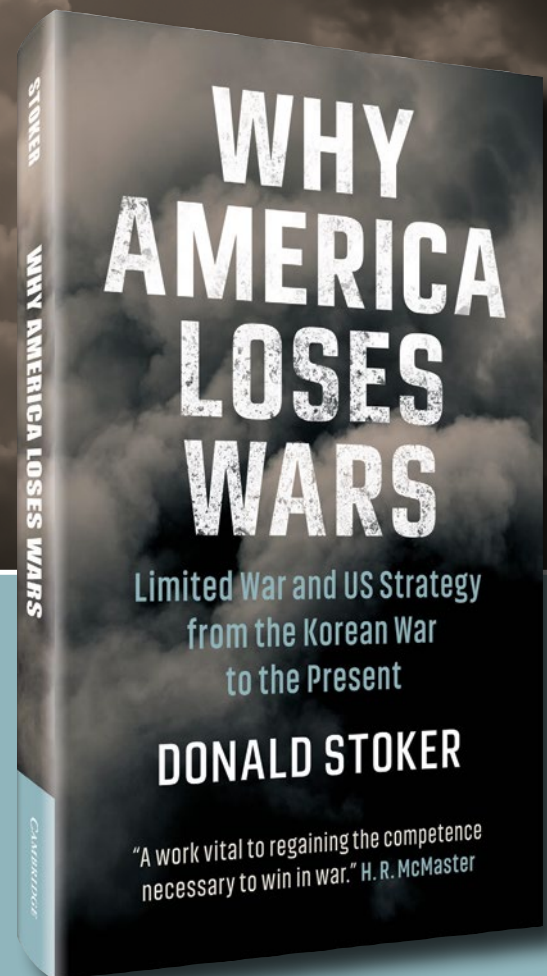
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# A Typology of Insurgency and Counterinsurgency

**Donald Stoker**

Atlas Organization, Washington D.C.

Donald Stoker taught strategy for the U.S. Naval War College's Program in Monterey, California, for 18 years. He is currently a Senior Fellow with Atlas Organization in Washington, DC. His eleventh book, from which this article is drawn, is *Why America Loses Wars: Limited War and U.S. Strategy from the Korean War to the Present* (Cambridge University Press, 2019).

The literature on insurgency and counterinsurgency is voluminous and this is certainly not the place to discuss it, and wars in which insurgency is the dominant factor are invariably described as "limited." What we must point out is that much of the writing on these topics is tactical and thus not directly related to our discussion. The literature suffers from an endemic lack of self-awareness on this point and does not deal with the reality that tactical fixes often cannot address the larger strategic challenges. This failing can lead to simplistic recommendations for addressing one of the most complicated military problems. Unfortunately, space requires us to risk making the same error.

## The Foundation for Analysis: The Political Objective

As with all wars, we must begin the analysis by understanding the political objectives sought. Insurrections are invariably classified as limited wars because the insurgents—tactically—fight using traditional guerrilla warfare methods with forces that are usually (but certainly not always) small, weak, and poorly armed—at least initially. It is the political objective that provides the clearest basis for analysis, not the size of the force or the means and methods of warfare. Insurrections can pursue limited or unlimited political objectives, which will depend upon the situation at hand. Do the insurgents want the overthrow of the regime (an unlimited political objective) or do they want something less, say, for example, 13 colonies in an imperial backwater.[i] Mao Tse-Tung's Communists sought an unlimited political objective—the overthrow of the

Chinese Nationalist regime. The insurgents may also have different objectives against different opponents. The North Vietnamese sought the destruction of the South Vietnamese regime, but also the ousting of the US from South Vietnam. In either case, the primacy of politics reigns supreme. This is also true even if the political objective is clothed in religious rhetoric.

As always, the value of the political objective or aim is key.[ii] If the insurgents want the overthrow of the regime this implies a high value on the object for the insurgents as well as the leaders and supporters of the regime that is now protecting itself. It is the counterinsurgent who is fighting the war for a limited political objective. Indeed, the counterinsurgent—or counter-insurrectionist (a term taken from historian Jeremy Black)—is always seeking a limited political objective because they wish to preserve the regime and its control. Understandably, some will see this as counterintuitive. The political objective of maintaining control should not be confused with the fact that the government might be forced to destroy the enemy to achieve its limited aim. Do not confuse the aim with the means and methods used.

If the objective of the insurgents is not regime change but the redress of some grievances, the regime is wise to try and settle this via negotiations, which is historically one of the ways of ending an insurrection or insurgency and should not be balked at except under very unusual circumstances. Sometimes the counterinsurgent surrenders to impatience here when they should not, denies the legitimacy of any grievances, and fights when talking might be the answer. The counterinsurgent also sometimes wants to fight with the tools and methods they possess without having to incur much in the way of political or social costs while failing to realize when they need to adjust to the situation at hand.[iii] The classic 1940 US Marine Corps *Small Wars Manual* offers excellent advice here: "The application of purely military measures may not, by itself restore peace and orderly government because the fundamental causes of the conditions of unrest may be economic, political, or social." [iv]

Negotiations can be even more useful if this can lead to quick achievement of the political objective desired, though one should be cautious about ceasing to apply military pressure during negotiations as this can be interpreted as weakness.

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## Setting the Stage

Insurgent or insurrectionist groups can be broken into two types: patriotic partisan resistance movements and revolutionary movements. Patriotic partisan resistance groups usually begin spontaneously in the wake of an enemy invasion and then become more organized. The Free French Resistance against the Nazis during the Second World War is a famous example. Resistance doesn't end until the invaders are expelled or the insurgents convinced they can't achieve their goals. Because they are usually directed at an invader, such movements can have larger bases of support than revolutionary movements because their appeal is broader. [v] Carl von Clausewitz studied and planned such efforts and offers what he calls "Conditions Under Which a General Uprising Can Succeed":

1. The war must be fought in the interior of the country.
2. It must not be decided by a single stroke.
3. The theater of operations must be fairly large.
4. The national character must be suited to that type of war.
5. The country must be rough and inaccessible, because of mountains, or forests, marshes, or the local methods of cultivation. [vi]

The second type of insurrectionist group—revolutionary movements—have ideological or religious foundations. In the modern era, they have most often been Marxist in character, though Islamic State and other similar groups represent religiously driven cousins. [vii] Mao Tse-Tung's Communists are the most famous and among the most successful. These movements usually last until the enemy government is toppled or the rebels killed.

What most term "terrorism" and "guerrilla warfare" are the primary tools of violence insurgent groups use to get what they want. Terrorism is considered a tool of the weak, though it is conceptually flawed and limiting to view it this way. The North Vietnamese Communists commonly used terror against South Vietnam, but they were not weak in comparison to their South Vietnamese opponent. Some groups (such as the early Russian anarchists) went so far as to believe that terror alone would be enough to incite the masses and bring down the hated regime, though most realized this very unlikely. [viii]

There are many definitions of terrorism, but one of the best is this: "terrorism is the intentional use of, or threat to use, violence against civilians or against civilian targets, in order to attain political aims." [ix] Terror is used to obtain a political objective, but the point is not the death and destruction it generates, this is the visual result that is part of an effort to attack the target's spirit while simultaneously creating fear, thus driving the target to make political changes. [x]

Terrorism is also often mistakenly called a tactic. One of the reasons for this is a failure to understand the differences between tactics and strategy. For the Algerians who launched the 1954 uprising against France, terrorism was a strategy, not a tactic. Terror against civilians was intended to provoke a heavy French reaction which would drive people into the

rebel camp. [xi] Terrorism was a plank of North Vietnam's strategy against South Vietnam. It helped undermine and destabilize the South Vietnamese government while driving people to support the Communist cause or face the murder of themselves or their families. Terror was a primary element of Islamic State's warfighting strategy. The confusion here is that observers see the tactical application of violence in the form of car bombings or assassinations and then insist that terrorism is a tactic. This overlooks the concepts driving the tactical execution.

Terror also doesn't always work. During the Malayan Emergency (1948-1960) it drove people away from the insurgency. [xii] Islamic State gained much through their use of terror, but this also helped bring the US, France, and other nations into the war. Also, the counterinsurgents must work to ensure that they are not blamed for enemy acts. This can be difficult. The Algerian FLN successfully pinned one of its 1957 massacres on the French, and US forces in Iraq unfairly received the blame for a 2004 Baghdad bombing. [xiii]

Successful insurrectionist movements make great use of distraction and deception. They seek to draw the enemy to one thing while attacking another. Deception, maneuver, flexibility, concealment of their true purpose—these are the attributes of successful guerilla operations. Counterinsurgency theorist John J. McCuen argues that for the revolutionary to win they must take Mao's advice and wage a "strategically protracted war" and 1) wear down the enemy's strength through the cumulative effects of combat; 2) get stronger by gaining the support of the people while establishing base areas and taking needed material from the enemy; and 3) by obtaining outside support, political, and especially military. [xiv]

The counterinsurgent always wants a quick war and is too often surprised by the reality that counterinsurgency takes a long time and is almost always protracted. Scholars differ on how long insurgencies last as there are so many different variables involved in calculating this, most of which are very difficult to control. Six to 11 years is not unusual. [xv] Counterinsurgency expert Robert Thompson wrote: "If one tries to talk about speed in pacification, it must be remembered that it will take as long to get back to the preferred status quo ante as it took the other side to get to the new position." [xvi]

There are many factors that contribute to the length of an insurgency—material and psychological—on both sides. Sometimes the counterinsurgent simply doesn't understand the task facing them. Theorist John McCuen wrote: "Winning a revolutionary war will take massive organisation, dedication, sacrifice and time. The government must decide early if it is willing to pay the price. Half-measures lead only to protracted costly defeats." [xvii] Insurgency theorist David Galula believed that one of France's greatest problems in suppressing the rebellion in Algeria was "The political instability in France and the absence of a firm, continuing, clear cut policy on the part of the various French governments all through the war." The counterinsurgent must have a clear objective that it keeps in sight and a coherent program that impresses upon the opponent that the counterinsurgent is "acting according to a well thought-out plan that leaves them no room for maneuvering." Galula insists that the French, despite the experience of their wars in Indochina and Algeria, never possessed a coherent counterinsurgency doctrine.



[xviii] Historian Jeffrey Record aptly observed that for the counterinsurgent “the combination of a weaker political will and an inferior strategy can be a recipe for defeat.” [xix]

## A Typology of Insurgency and Counterinsurgency

Critically, when there is an insurrection or an insurgency *both sides* must strive to control the following three key factors: 1) the support of the people; 2) the control of internal or external sanctuary by the insurgents; and 3) whether or not the insurgent has outside support. If the insurgent secures all three of these, this will likely mean victory for the rebels. If the counterinsurgent force controls these factors, it will probably win.

### 1. The Support of the People

Winning the support of the people is crucial for the results of the insurrection. They are “the key to the entire struggle,” and their alienation from their rulers can be a source of insurrection. [xx] This is not always the case, though, as groups such as the Chinese and North Vietnamese Communists worked to alienate the people from their regimes, but the people are still the key. Mao Tse-Tung wrote: “Because guerrilla warfare basically derives from the masses and is supported by them, it can neither exist nor flourish if it separates itself from their sympathies and cooperation.” [xxi] The challenge for both sides lies in determining how to win them to your camp while keeping them from the other side, or at least ensuring their neutrality.

The means issue in wars of this type is often a sticking point. One of the great mistakes made by counterinsurgents is to believe that they can win cheaply and use minimal force to do so. One must always use a level of means sufficient to obtain the political objective. Sometimes a small force is the answer. The level and intensity of the insurgency will reveal this. But one of the most common errors of counterinsurgents is to not send sufficient force quickly enough. McCuen writes: “The sooner the governing power reacts, the less will be the resources required and the shorter will be the period in which they have to be applied ... Remember, that the most serious—and the most common—error in counter-insurgency warfare is to do too little too late.” [xxii] The Small Wars Manual advises that “when forced to resort to arms to carry out the object of the intervention, the operation must be pursued energetically and expeditiously in order to overcome the resistance as quickly as possible.” [xxiii]

Unfortunately, this is often easier said than done, and sometimes it’s not the whole answer. In an effort to quell the 1954 Algerian revolt, the French eventually put large numbers of troops on the ground. They mobilized reservists, extended the mandatory service time of conscripts, and committed elite units such as the paratroopers and the Foreign Legion, all to try to ensure they had sufficient forces to provide security as well as hunt down the insurgents. The French eventually destroyed the bulk of the insurgent force in Algeria, but this did not ultimately deliver victory. Numerous other factors, such as the existence of external sanctuary and support, succored the Algerian cause. [xxiv]

When the insurgency began in Iraq in 2003 against the US and allied forces, the US had insufficient troops on the ground to exert control over Iraq and hunt down insurgents. Indeed, the US never got a handle on the situation in Iraq until it increased its own troop numbers, stood up large numbers of Iraqi police and army units, and armed anti-Al Qaeda Sunni tribesmen. Quickly dispatching larger numbers of troops earlier—and better military and civilian planning and leadership—might have prevented some of these problems, or at least made it possible to stabilize Iraq sooner. [xxv] The US should have remembered the advice of its hard-won past experience. The Small Wars Manual advised: “The occupying force must be strong enough to hold all of the strategical points of the country, protect its communications, and at the same time furnish an operating force sufficient to overcome the opposition wherever it appears.” [xxvi]

Gaining an understanding of the depths of the insurgency is also critical. One reason the British initially suffered failure in Malaya was that the Communist insurgency had already metastasized. It had begun during Japanese occupation in the Second World War and had been supported by the British. By the end of the war in 1945, it was well developed and had deep roots in the countryside. By 1951, the insurgency reached its peak strength of 10,000 active members, but also had more than 100,000 supporters. [xxvii] A similar thing occurred in South Vietnam. The famous soldier and writer Bernard Fall determined that in South Vietnam the evidence of Communist penetration could be seen in the assassination of village chieftains, the failure of the South to collect taxes in a district, and the success of the Viet Cong in taxing the area. Six months before the 1963 murder of South Vietnam’s president, Ngo Dinh Diem, between March and May 1963 the Communists were collecting taxes in 42 of 45 South Vietnamese provinces. [xxviii] The insurgency had metastasized before the US escalation. This makes the counterinsurgent’s job much more difficult, though not impossible. More time, effort, and sacrifice will inevitably be required.

Winning back a population under insurgent control can be difficult. In *Small Wars*, C.E. Callwell advises keeping the enemy under constant pressure, but this can only be done by first properly preparing. To do this, he essentially argues for a version of what the French called *quadrillage*. The theater is divided into sections that include outposts for defense; these are supported with fast columns pursuing the insurgents. The size of the sections is based upon the geography and terrain. These zones are further subdivided so as to systematically strip them of the food supplies necessary to the enemy and methodically clear them of guerrillas. Troops should be moved from less troublesome to more difficult zones, a decision made based upon local conditions. The concept dates at least to the French Revolutionaries’ efforts to suppress the 1793 uprising in the Vendée. [xxix]

There are many similar ideas that seek to restore government control and separate the insurgents from the people. One is population resettlement. This famously worked wonders in Malaysia, where the primary source of the insurgency’s manpower—the ethnic Chinese minority—could be resettled in protected villages. The US and South Vietnamese launched a similar plan, known as the strategic hamlet program. The results were mixed, partly because of South

Vietnamese failures in implementation of the program, and partly because the majority Buddhist South Vietnamese had ancestral ties to their land and resented being moved.[xxx]

Totalitarian states also undertake clearing operations and remove populations sympathetic to or susceptible to insurgent influence, but democratic states generally intend to co-opt the people, while the authoritarians usually punish them. Stalin's forced population removal of minorities that might prove disloyal, as well as his wholesale murder of the population in places like the Ukraine, made it exceedingly difficult for an insurgency to emerge. Displacing the population by mass deportations, or mass importation of sympathetic populations, such as the Chinese Communist practice of moving Han Chinese into Tibet, is another way of controlling the situation.[xxxi] This, though, can produce resentments that create problems.

A related point is that one of the factors upon which the guerrillas can sometimes count is the self-restraint of the counterinsurgent when dealing with the civilian population. One cannot make a blanket statement here, but this is generally a rule of behavior among democratic states conducting counterinsurgency.[xxxii] This does not apply to totalitarian states. The Russians used essentially unrestrained conventional military power to prevent the insurgents from establishing themselves among the population in Ukraine in the post-Second World War era and Chechnya in 1999. In Chechnya, the Russian response convinced many Chechen leaders that it was impossible to resist. This allowed the Russians to co-opt them and shift the burden to local security forces. The Syrians acted similarly against the Muslim Brotherhood in the 1980s. Such brutality can have effects that are, to some, counterintuitive: "Paradoxically, collective punishment has at times turned the population against the rebels, who are blamed for the devastation." This has sometimes been the reaction of civilians in the Syrian Civil War who blame the rebels for Assad bombing them.[xxxiii] It is not so easy to predict the reaction of the population to violence in such circumstances. It seems to boil down to the harsh issue of whom the people fear the most.

How counterinsurgents should use force is a critical issue and will directly affect the direction in which the population sways. Killing the leaders of insurgent groups often increases the chances of a government victory and reduces the level of insurgent violence. The government rarely suffers any negative effects as a result of this, and it's "likely to be more effective than capturing them." The more the group is dependent upon the leader, the greater the effect. Killing insurgent leaders, though, does not guarantee success. This is particularly true if the group has a developed bureaucracy and popular support. Some studies have found that killing the leaders of terrorist organizations becomes less effective if the group has existed for more than 25 years.[xxxiv] As is so often the case, the result depends upon the circumstances.

One issue is whether the counterinsurgent should concentrate on killing the insurgents or winning over the population through other means. The answer is usually both. But what is also critical is establishing the rule of law, which is especially important for underpinning the credibility of the counterinsurgent. Insurgents exploit the contradictions in governance, law, land ownership, minority rights, or whatever

else gives them an edge.

Insurgency expert Otto Heilbrunn boils down the counterinsurgent's use of force:

To sum up: security operations will produce dividends only if the police and members of the population co-operate; the terrorists' hold over the population is thus broken, and the security forces have a good chance to win the hearts and minds campaign. If this co-operation cannot be obtained, the security forces are unlikely to win. Military operations can only immobilise the terrorists, and their hold over the population will probably continue; while counter-terror can lead to the terrorists' arrest but strengthens the people's allegiance to the terrorists' cause.[xxxv]

If one is a foreign state conducting counterinsurgency in another land, this adds another layer of difficulty, especially if the uprising is fuelled by nationalism.[xxxvi] During the Algerian War the French viewed themselves as protecting part of France, but the bulk of native Algerians saw them as an alien force.

The quality of governance can sway the people and is critical to consider, especially if one is conducting counterinsurgency in another state. If the host nation suffers from bad government, the counterinsurgency effort is less likely to succeed. This doesn't mean it can't, but one must assume the difficulty increases by an order of magnitude. American diplomat George F. Kennan wrote in February 1948: "You can help any government but one which does not know how to govern." One reason George Marshall refused to allow the post-Second World War US mission to China to expand and assume the same roles as the advisory mission to Greece—meaning allowing US advisors to give tactical and strategic advice—was because Marshall believed US advisors could exert influence over Greek leaders more readily than they could China's head, Chiang Kai-Shek. Rightly or wrongly, many of Truman's advisors believed the Nationalists lost their civil war because of Chiang's "inability to govern." [xxxvii] If the decision is made to provide assistance, it must be appropriate. When advising, it is wise to remember Lawrence of Arabia's Article 15: that it is better they "do it tolerably than that you do it perfectly." [xxxviii]

It is critically important to find the source of the governing problem. Is it internal to the government itself, or external? Internal problems run to the obvious: weak, oppressive, or corrupt leaders are common, as are problems in the system itself. Sometimes the need for reform is obvious, and there is a general failure to address this. Here, it is important to determine whether or not the problems are self-generated, and if the regime has a willingness to tackle them. Unfortunately, it is too often the case that governments simply fail to understand the conditions in their own country. This can make them weak and susceptible to internal attacks.[xxxix] Addressing political, economic, and other grievances can be a useful tool for ending an insurgency as rebel groups often exploit these. Doing so removes points around which insurrectionists can rally support.

What is sometimes forgotten here is that at least some of the governing problem may be external, because the country is suffering from subversion or the effects of the insurgency.

During the Vietnam War there were obvious problems of corruption and incompetence in the South Vietnamese government that dramatically reduced its effectiveness. But the South's governance capability was seriously undermined by the Communist North's constant propaganda and extensive campaign of assassination and kidnapping against Southern officials. This drastically increases the problem of governance while discrediting the regime, which is the point of the activity as the insurgents establish a shadow government to replace the state's rulers. Counterinsurgency theorist Bernard Fall observed in regard to Vietnam: "When a country is being subverted it is not being outfought: it is being out-administered." [xl]

The counterinsurgent should remember to treat prisoners well. If not, this can have negative effects upon their relations with the people. Don't be afraid to treat them under the rules of the Geneva Convention if this is necessary to maintain internal or foreign support. One can certainly add the caveat that this does not mean recognition of the political legitimacy of the opponent, but that this is being done for administrative reasons and to demonstrate integrity to the international community. Exert public pressure upon the insurgents to do the same, though this will undoubtedly fail, because the insurgents, especially smaller groups, usually lack the willingness or ability to act according to any international norms. Mao argued for the good treatment of prisoners as a way to win them to his cause. But the Communists also never shrunk from using any form of violence they believed useful. Another option is to treat counterinsurgents as criminals. One then faces the problems of criminal prosecution and all this entails. Sometimes though, this might be the best solution. This will be determined by the circumstances. Don't be afraid to give amnesty to insurgents if this will end the war on acceptable terms, and if you can bear the domestic and international political costs of doing so.

A harsh truth is that the counterinsurgent cannot fight as the insurgent fights. Their aims are different, which dictates what each side can and must do to achieve its goals. The guerrilla often holds the initiative, and often "has the freedom of his poverty." [xli] Robert Taber writes:

By contrast, the purpose of the counter-revolutionary is negative and defensive. It is to restore order, to protect property, to preserve existing forms and interests by force of arms, where persuasion has already failed. His means may be political in so far as they involve the use of still more persuasion—the promise of social and economic reforms, bribes of a more localized sort, counter-propaganda of various kinds. But primarily the counter-insurgent's task must be to destroy the revolution by destroying its promise—that means by proving, militarily, that it cannot and will not succeed. [xlii]

One problem is that counterinsurgents become so concerned with the tactical issues that they do not see the larger picture. Indeed, some examinations of counterinsurgency argue that counterinsurgency is largely a form of tactics. [xliii]

Critically, both sides will try to win over the people through propaganda or information operations. This is an arena where the counterinsurgent is often weak. Galula criticized the French effort in Algeria by noting: "If there was a field in

which we were definitely and infinitely more stupid than our opponents, it was propaganda." [xliv] This same argument has been made regarding US information operations against Islamic State. [xlv]

## 2. Controlling Sanctuary

For the insurgent, who is usually weaker than the regime he opposes, or, in the case of the North Vietnamese, weaker than the primary ally of its opponent, possession of sanctuary for its government and its military forces is a vital component for building toward success. For the counterinsurgent, removing insurgent sanctuary, both foreign and internal, is critical. One of the primary reasons the Afghan Taliban could continue its war against the US after 2003 was its possession of sanctuary in Pakistan.

The political objectives will, of course, affect sanctuaries, as well as where the war will be fought. [xlvi] This acts as a constraint upon military activity, particularly on the part of the counterinsurgent, who historically restricts where its military forces will fight by placing sanctuary countries off limits, or, such as in the case of the British in the War for American Independence, simply lacks sufficient forces to control enough territory to effectively remove the sanctuary. One observer notes this post-Second World War truth: "The respect for sanctuary has been carried to an extraordinary extent in twentieth-century limited war." [xlvii]

The loss of sanctuary can be fatal to insurgents. The post-Second World War Greek Communist insurgents lost bases and support from Yugoslavia's Tito after his 1948 rift with the Soviet Union. Moreover, the Greeks learned to do counterinsurgency, addressed economic issues, and had much US support. [xlviii] With UN help, South Korea isolated the battlespace and, in the anti-guerrilla Operation Ratkiller, killed 20,000 insurgents and bandits by the end of January 1952. [xlix] Mao's "Long March" allowed him to construct a sanctuary in the Chinese hinterland, and though the Japanese invasion also contributed to the survival of Chinese Communism, the ability to create and preserve a safe base also proved instrumental. Sanctuaries in Tunisia and Morocco did not prevent the French from essentially destroying FLN forces inside Algeria, but it did permit the FLN to build an army as an international symbol of resistance. The Tamil Tiger rebels in Sri Lanka had no sanctuary and no external ally. When the Sri Lankan forces penetrated the Tamil heartland and killed the rebel leader, the movement died.

One of the great benefits enjoyed consistently by the North Vietnamese Communist forces was sanctuary. As rebels against France, they had external sanctuary in China when needed, as well as internal sanctuary in many parts of what is now northern Vietnam. When the US began fighting the North Vietnamese conquest of South Vietnam, the Communist forces benefited from external sanctuary in North Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. This gave the North the ability to dictate the momentum of the war, the timing of their attacks, a relatively secure line of supply via Laos, and safe areas for refit and resupply in Cambodia. [l] The US inability to control the battlespace under such constraints meant that it could not protect pacification efforts from North Vietnamese attacks, which was important for ensuring their success,



especially against a deep-rooted insurgency.[li]

### 3. Controlling Outside Support

Something that most successful insurgencies have in common is external assistance.[lii] Mao agreed.[liii] This can be material and political, with material usually but not always being the more important. The insurgents generally strive to secure external assistance, and with good reason. They are almost always weak in comparison with their enemies, and external assistance can give them arms, money, critical diplomatic recognition, and so many other things they need to succeed. The counterinsurgents must separate the insurgents from outside support. This can be as critical as separating the insurgents from the people, which also must be done.

Insurgent movements can win without outside support, but it's difficult. The Bolsheviks fought their way to success without external help, securing their victory in 1921. In their 1919-1921 war, the Irish Republican insurrectionists succeeded in gaining most of what they wanted from Britain without significant outside support. Mao Tse-Tung's Chinese Communists received outside support from the Soviet Union near the end of their struggle against the Nationalists, but this, arguably, sped up rather than determined their success. Possession of capable, resolute leaders, their ability to successfully appeal ideologically to the Chinese people, and the weaknesses of their opponent contributed greatly to the Communists winning.

Without external support, defeat is the more likely result for the insurgent. The Confederacy failed to achieve its independence partially because Abraham Lincoln helped ensure Great Britain and France didn't join the war on the side of the rebel South. The Malaysian Communist insurgents (1954-1962) had no outside help and did not succeed. The West Papuan Independence movement against Indonesia has not succeeded, despite many years of resistance; it has no outside support. The mid nineteenth-century Taiping rebels had no foreign support, while the Chinese government received Anglo-French aid that helped it achieve victory. The 1967 Biafran revolt in Nigeria was quickly crushed because the Biafran's sea links were cut. This made foreign aid

impossible.[liv] The American colonists triumphed over Great Britain, but the intervention of France and Spain—particularly the former—proved decisive. The Vietnamese Communists won against France in 1954. Chinese aid (and sanctuary) were critical. Soviet and Chinese support also contributed greatly to the North Vietnamese victory over the US and South Vietnam. The Algerian insurgents triumphed even after suffering the near destruction of their forces in Algeria because of international political support.

### Defining Victory in Insurgency and Counterinsurgency

Defining victory here depends upon what one is seeking. The political goals of the insurgents differ from those of the counterinsurgents. Usually, for the rebels, the control of their own state counts as victory. This was certainly the view of the Algerians and Mao's Communists. For the counterinsurgent it's not so simple. Galula points out that "counterinsurgency seldom ends with a ceasefire and a triumphal parade." [lv] In his view, victory had been achieved when the counterinsurgent could remove the bulk of its forces, "leaving the population to take care of itself with the help of a normal contingent of police and Army forces." [lvi]

The bottom line in counterinsurgency: will the people support the government? If not— one should consider quitting.

### Conclusion

The above has touched upon numerous very complex issues and is obviously only an introduction to the topic. A knowledge of history and a creative mind are among the most important things that policymakers and soldiers can bring to the construction of strategy, but the above presents a clear framework for analyzing critically insurgency and counterinsurgency at the strategic level—not the tactical or operational—one that I believe is useful to civilian and military analysts and practitioners. Most importantly, it helps teach us how to *think* about insurgency and counterinsurgency in a clear manner. Finally, none of us should think ourselves beyond repeating the mistakes of our predecessors, especially when confronted with one of war's most frustrating realms.

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# When the Clausewitzian Trinity is Not Paradoxical

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As Clausewitz scholars well know, Prussia's renowned theorist never used the word paradoxical to describe his trinitarian concept of war's nature. The adjective paradoxical was added by Michael Howard and Peter Paret as a translation of the German word "*wunderliche*" (wondrous) in their 1976 English edition of *On War*; they subsequently replaced paradoxical with the more suitable word "remarkable" in the revised edition that appeared in 1989.[i] However, many thousands of copies of the unrevised editions of *On War* remain in circulation. Consequently, the adjective paradoxical stubbornly persists as a descriptor of Clausewitz's trinity. An uncomfortable number of students, for instance, use it in seminar discussions (until corrected). Moreover, even though Clausewitz scholars consciously avoid the word, they routinely describe the trinity in paradoxical terms, as if its elements—reason, passion, and chance—always work at cross purposes to one another.[ii] In effect, the meaning of the word paradoxical often informs how we see the trinity, even if we deliberately avoid using the adjective itself.

An important reason for this confusion is the long Western

philosophical and literary traditions of representing reason and passion as natural opposites. Furthermore, our liberal-democratic assumptions presume balancing power among the government, the populace, and the military—the institutions to which Clausewitz loosely associated the elements of reason, passion, and chance—will always remain a problem. We have no reason to believe Howard and Paret thought differently. Additionally, military strategists have come to see the role of chance and probability as damaging to even the best laid plans. One of the points about *On War* that Howard wished to get across to policymakers, he has openly remarked, was how difficult friction makes everything in war. [iii] In short, regarding the trinity as paradoxical in nature, if not in name, seems eminently justifiable.

Unlike us, however, Clausewitz belonged to a movement within German Romanticism that sought to create a conceptual space in which reason and passion might coexist.[iv] History often portrays the Enlightenment and German Romanticism as fundamentally and irretrievably opposed to one another. But that representation is superficial and misleading. A great deal of Romanticism had to do with reconciling opposites through dialectical interactions. Nor were Clausewitz and the others who sought to reform the Prussian army after its defeat at the hands of Napoleon in 1806/1807 (Heinrich Freiherr vom und zum Stein, Hermann Boyen, Gerhard von Scharnhorst, August von Gneisenau, Carl von Grolman, among others) liberal democrats, despite recent efforts to cast them as such. The society to which they belonged was not a free one in the liberal-democratic sense; nor did they wish to overthrow their king, Frederick William III, to establish such a society as the French had done. What they wanted, instead, was to fuse the monarchy, the army, and the public together into a unified nation state.[v] And they wanted to do so primarily for the sake of achieving greater military efficiency and effectiveness, rather than spreading the revolutionary ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity. Nor did they see chance only as a disruptive force; it was, after all, a realm within which "the creative spirit is free to roam," according to Clausewitz.[vi]

To project our assumptions and values onto the reformers, therefore, though inevitable to some extent, is to distort both their ideas and their aims. More to the point, our projections have restricted our ability to understand Clausewitz's trinity. To remedy that, we must not only shun the adjective

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paradoxical, but also limit its ability to influence our thinking. In this way, we can open the door to several other trinitarian relationships worth exploring. The first of these, in fact, has interesting implications for military strategy.

### From Paradoxical to "Wondrous"

If the trinity is not necessarily paradoxical, then one of its obvious alternatives is the opposite, a trinitarian relationship in which the elements are in accord rather than at odds. Under this alternative, reason, or the government's purpose for the war would align well with the passions of the populace; the military would have enough experience and skill to accommodate the element of chance, and perhaps to exploit it. In Chapter 3, Book VIII, of *On War*, which is essentially a condensed history of war and civil-military relations from antiquity to the Napoleonic era, Clausewitz refers to three examples of such societies: Imperial Rome, the Tartars, and Napoleonic France.[vii] In each of these cases, wars were fought with greater ferocity, and possessed a greater "warlike" character, than in others. He suggests the cause for this difference lay in a certain consistency among the trinity's elements, especially the integration of the populace into the military. The example of Napoleonic France is the most important because he and his colleagues saw France as a unified nation-state in which a single national identity appeared to fuel the fighting spirit of the *Grande Armée*.

Of course, as historians have shown, Napoleonic France and the French army were wracked by internal divisions of their own.[viii] Nonetheless, to Prussia's reformers (not all of whom were Prussians by the way) the French state was far more united than was their monarchy. They looked upon France's citizen army as an exemplary model for mobilizing, and channeling, the patriotic passions of the populace. They also looked favorably upon the French system of promotion based on merit rather than birth, which they felt put a greater number of better talented generals at Napoleon's disposal. To turn Prussia into such an efficient military state would, as a minimum, require abolishing serfdom and establishing the army as a "school of the nation," an institution capable of promoting a national identity and inculcating proper military virtues like patriotism and a willingness to sacrifice for the *Volk*. [ix]

In fact, the Prussia of 1806 was the opposite of France in every element of the trinity. As Clausewitz explained in "Observations on Prussia and Her Great Catastrophe," his country's populace "remained uninvolved" and singularly disinterested throughout the conflict; its military lacked any semblance of the warlike spirit, its generals were living off the laurels of the Frederician era and could neither lead nor plan, and the army's tactics and procedures had "declined into empty formality;" and the government, for its part, could not fathom the type of war that was about to befall it, could not fashion appropriate policies, and could not decide upon a strategy.[x] A modern equivalent of the Prussia of 1806 is the America of the Vietnam era, a society severely divided along racial, ethnic, class, and generational lines. The US military at the time was populated largely by citizen-soldier conscripts, but not all social classes or racial groups were equally represented in its ranks. Many members of the middle and upper-middle classes received exemptions and thus

avoided directly serving in the war. Moreover, the government could not balance the demands of domestic politics with the needs of foreign policy; nor could it develop a military strategy capable of translating its will into a desirable outcome—a negotiated settlement similar to that which it had obtained for Korea—without provoking a general escalation.

Between the two extremes of a unified, coherent trinity, on the one hand, and a paradoxical one, on the other hand, we have three alternatives. In the first of these, *reason-chance*, the government and the military are generally aligned, but less so the citizenry. Clausewitz described this as the situation in Europe for most of the eighteenth century, when "political and military institutions had developed into an effective instrument." Wars became solely the concern of governments which, he went on to say, essentially "parted company with their peoples." [xi] Other examples include America's so-called Banana Wars in which the United States frequently sent its small military to intervene in Latin America. [xii] The US populace was largely unaffected by, and essentially oblivious to, the interventions, but US business interests benefitted. Iconic military leaders like USMC Maj-Gen. Smedley Butler, who participated in all but a few of them, attempted to raise public awareness by arguing "War Is a Racket!" [xiii] Some security experts see the same relationship today, which they describe as a form of militarism. [xiv] The US government has a relatively small, but highly professional all-volunteer military force that conducts interventions worldwide. Indeed, the American public openly praises its citizen-soldiers, but it is ignorant of most aspects of military life and barely understands the US government's foreign policy goals.

In the second case, *reason-passion*, the government and the populace are essentially well integrated, but the military is not. This situation suggests the presence of large and increasingly comfortable, if not affluent, working and middle classes which identify with the government because its policies favor their interests or create new economic opportunities. The America of the 1920s is a classic example; real wages for working and middle classes rose by 33 percent from 1914 to 1929. [xv] Under such conditions, military service became unattractive save for a small number of professional officers and unenterprising enlisted personnel. Another example is the rise of affluent middle classes in early modern Europe which, as Clausewitz noted, avoided military service; hence, commercial cities and small republics outsourced their security requirements to mercenary organizations like the *condottieri*. [xvi] These organizations, however, owed no real allegiance to the government or to the public, except through the purse; the *condottieri*, in particular, became notorious for fighting sham battles designed to line the pockets of both sides. We find a perverse example of that situation today in parts of West Africa. Groups of military personnel act as rebels at night, and soldiers by day; they attack a village at night (disguised as rebels) and liberate it the next day (dressed as soldiers). [xvii] Thus, they extort both the government and the populace.

In the third case, *passion-chance*, the populace and the military are generally aligned, but the government is not. We find this relationship prevalent in rebellions and military coups, especially as one of their primary causes is that the practices of the incumbent regime have alienated the populace. This disaffection makes the public susceptible to

the leadership of the revolutionary movement or the military junta. The situation is often dynamic, however, as both sides must vie for the support of the populace or deny it to the other. In Revolutionary America, for instance, the populace was believed to have been divided roughly into thirds: one loyal to the British crown, one loyal to the patriots, and one—the contested middle third—which remained uncommitted until the outcome became certain.[xviii] Passion is, therefore, contested space in such conflicts. To rephrase the relationship between chance and passion in Maoist terms, the revolutionary “fish” (military) must find enough “water” (people) to sustain itself and then to expand its base of support.[xix] The role of the populace in military coups varies. In some cases, the coups begin by leveraging popular support; in others, they seek public support after the fact as a way to consolidate power and to establish legitimacy.[xx] The citizen-militias of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century America, which frequently challenged the authority of the federal government, offer examples that are less extreme. In the War of 1812, for instance, the government had difficulty controlling the state militias, which frequently pursued their own agendas.[xxi] In fact, the struggle to establish the limits of federal control remained a central feature of American history well into the twentieth century.

The most important strategic implication of these comparisons, as Clausewitz suggests in “Observations on Prussia and Her Great Catastrophe” and in Book VIII of *On War*, is that societies in which all trinitarian elements are aligned, such as Napoleon’s France, enjoy a superior advantage over the others. Aligned societies can take war to a more destructive level, one that approaches the absolute. The elements of the trinity, when aligned, can achieve a collective momentum or force, a synergy of sorts (in today’s terminology) that is greater than the sum of the individual parts. In such cases, political leaders can more easily mobilize their country’s resources; political aims are easier to establish and to communicate; commanders have more scope to use their creativity to destroy their opponents; they can push their troops to extreme efforts and expose them to greater risks because of their higher levels of motivation. None of that was the case, as Clausewitz pointed out, for the Prussian army of 1806, populated as it was with mercenaries or unwilling conscripts, or with narrow-minded officers stuck in a rigid, mechanistic operational system. In short, the synergistic effectiveness of the *Grande Armée* owed itself not just to mobilization, but rather to the presence of a warlike animating spirit that can only come when the individual elements are not just maximized, but unified. Clausewitz’s emphasis on “spirit” as an animating force distinguishes his work, as well as that of some of his colleagues, not only from that of von Bülow, who saw the *Spirit of the Modern System of War* in geometric terms, but also from other Western treatises on armed conflict, such as Henry Lloyd’s theory of the base, that stressed logistics and material factors.[xxii]

Obviously, this advantage of the “warlike spirit” can be taken too far, as the examples of Imperial Japan and Nazi Germany illustrate. The Allies’ response—massive physical force—was appropriate for the Second World War, though counterproductive in other situations. As it turned out, the Axis armies could not overcome the material-technological advantages of the Allied powers, an important modern aspect of war conspicuously absent from Clausewitz’s trinity. [xxiii]

## Conclusion

For obvious reasons, strategists must periodically challenge their assumptions. By regarding Clausewitz’s trinity only through a paradoxical lens, whether explicitly or implicitly, we deny ourselves an opportunity to analyze how this concept applies to other situations, and how military strategy must accommodate, or possibly exploit them. It can help us lift students out of the tactical mindset that is reinforced by regarding the trinity as a paradoxical pendulum that illustrates the immediate swings of war, but never the deeper cultures or the three elements in combination. Sudden flashes of fear and anger are certainly authentic aspects of armed conflict. But they affect battles more than wars. Strategists must, therefore, endeavor to understand the degree to which the societies of their adversaries are structurally integrated and culturally disposed to absorb the psychic as well as the physical demands of war.

The more we learn about North Vietnamese society and its commitment to national reunification, for instance, the more important this lesson appears.[xxiv] This is not to say information about Vietnamese society and culture was not available to US policymakers and strategists. It was. But they failed to understand it and instead underestimated the resilience of their foe, which several times bounced back from losses that would have crippled other societies. If American leadership had truly committed itself to understanding the type of society it was going up against, compared to the one it attempted to support and the limits of its own, perhaps it could have settled on a more rational strategy. As difficult as it might have been to sell at the time, such a strategy would have likely entailed drawing Containment’s “line in the sand” elsewhere, preferably where trinitarian circumstances inclined more in America’s favor. At the very least, such an analysis would have deprived the US Government of one more excuse for failure.

Lifting the paradoxical fog that enshrouds the trinity also enables us to see more clearly what Clausewitz meant by arguing war was “more than a true chameleon.” Not only can war’s character, its external aspects, change—so too can its internal elements. These can change in intensity, to be sure; but also, in certain combinations, they can generate a synergy, and an exceptionally virulent form of warfare, one that differs qualitatively from our modern notion of “total war.” Clausewitz hit upon a fair point, though, that ultimately war conforms to the political conditions of its time. It is not a thing in itself. To attempt to fashion a synergistic form of war for its own sake, in other words, is bound to fail unless the appropriate circumstances are present.

We also would do well to remember states do not go to war; societies do. But societies are made up of any number of institutions, and Clausewitz’s trinity only reflects three general categories. The populace, for instance, can be subdivided into numerous social institutions, such as churches, schools, and labor organizations, all of which will have different but perhaps overlapping cultures. Unity and division are, therefore, relative qualities, and frictions abound in every society. Fundamentally, however, some societies seem to bear the strains of war better than others. As strategists, we need to understand not only the societies of our adversaries, but also the strengths and weaknesses of our own compared to theirs.



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# Why Israel and Hamas Fail to Achieve a Strategic Change

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Why are Israel and Hamas each failing to achieve their goals vis-à-vis each other by use of force? Strategy deals with employing the means available in order to achieve your political goals.

Israel has many means, superior military strength, impressive economic capability and significant international support. So why is it failing to achieve its goals against Hamas in Gaza?

Hamas has invested considerable fortune and time to build a varied terrorist and guerrilla capability, including rockets that can reach Israel's economic centers, offensive tunnels into Israel and defensive tunnels inside Gaza and more. Despite this investment Hamas has failed to achieve its goals against Israel.

Both rivals in this long-duration violent conflict in Gaza have many tools for violence and despite that fail to achieve their goals – does this result from negligent strategic conduct? Or is it the result of a more profound strategic principle that resides in the dynamics of limited protracted conflicts? In this article I will attempt to show that the latter is correct – these failures are due not to bad strategy but to the natural dynamic of such conflicts. Changing the strategic situation will be possible only as the consequence of a significant political-diplomatic move or war.

## Israel's Objectives Against Hamas

Israel's government has no long-term operational goal towards Gaza. Israel has no solution it is attempting to achieve in Gaza. Israel declares that it is interested in a change of regime in Gaza, replacing Hamas, but Israel has no strategy for achieving this long-term goal.

Instead Israel follows only short-term goals – maintaining its security, while attempting to prevent a humanitarian crisis in Gaza by providing it with a measured level of funding and basic supplies.

Also, Israel wants the return of two Israeli civilians who crossed the border into Gaza for unknown reasons and the bodies of two soldiers killed in Operation 'Protective Edge' (2014).

## Israel's Means

Israel has military and political tools it can use to attempt to influence Hamas.

Militarily, Israel has defensive and offensive means, the sophistication of which has no precedent. Israel has the most advanced anti rocket and mortar defensive system in the world. It is completing a defensive system against Hamas' offensive tunnels and it seems that Hamas has accepted the loss of this capability in which it invested tens of millions of dollars and hundreds of tons of scarce concrete.

Offensively Israel has high-quality intelligence and a precise powerful strike capability. In recent years Israel has struck subterranean targets as well as other facilities and posts belonging to Hamas.

Politically in recent years Israel is enjoying a flowering of regional relationships that enables it to employ these relationships against Hamas – especially with Egypt that controls access to Gaza and acts a mediator between the rivals. The Gulf States are willing to donate money to Hamas to buy quiet and the USA provides unlimited backing.

## Hamas Objectives Against Israel

Hamas' current leadership too, focuses on short-term goals. The ultimate declared goal of annihilating Israel remains

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on paper for an unforeseeable future. In fact, after years of resurrecting the military following Operation 'Protective Edge', Hamas, headed by Sinwar, is focusing on stabilizing the civilian situation in Gaza. Gaza's economy is hanging on by a thread after the economic disengagement from the Palestinian Authority, and Hamas is attempting to loosen, if only slightly the Israeli siege while pressuring Israel on the issue of its prisoners.

### Hamas' Means

Despite Israel's defensive capabilities, Hamas can fire rockets all across southern and central Israel to significantly disrupt Israeli civilians' daily lives. The exact status of the offensive tunnels is not known, but even if the entire offensive tunnel system has been severely reduced, the defensive tunnels can cause the IDF much grief inside Gaza. Hamas has also declared it has new and surprising means against the IDF.

Over the past year Hamas has developed two new violent tools. The first – incendiary and explosive-carrying balloons carried by the prevailing wind-regime deep into southern Israel. The second – a form of violent riots along the border fence, trying to penetrate it and injure Israeli soldiers with various explosives, petrol-bombs and sniping.

Politically Hamas is relatively isolated, supported only by Iran, Qatar and Turkey.

### The Current Situation

Since shooting resumed between the rivals, approximately three and a half years after Operation 'Protective Edge', it is clear that both Israel and Hamas are not satisfied with the situation. Hamas has regained some confidence since rebuilding its military capabilities but cannot improve the civilian situation in Gaza. Israel is not satisfied with the resumption of the violence crossing from Gaza and the issue of the civilians and dead soldiers in Hamas hands.

If both sides are not pleased and both sides have capabilities, they are not using why are they not trying to change the situation?

In Israel the IDF is criticized for not reacting more forcefully against the incendiary balloons and border-riots. What is preventing the IDF from employing its superior capability to compel Hamas to cease the violence? Especially given Hamas' extremely difficult situation, possibly the worst in its history, and the plight of the Gazans who desperately need financial aid and an infusion of basic commodities.

The central reason that Israel is not responding forcefully to Hamas' actions is Israel's fear that this would escalate to a large-scale confrontation.

Prime-Minister Netanyahu gave a number of explanations for avoiding a strong response to Hamas' actions:

1. The IDF should hold back and first finish the anti-tunnel obstacle along the border.

2. The need to focus on the Hezbollah tunnel-threat on the Lebanese border.
3. A large-scale operation will not achieve a fundamental change in the situation – it would be followed by a return to the same reality.

The first reason is illogical, because during a large operation there is no operational significance to the obstacle. The major effect of the tunnels is if Israel is surprised by a penetration that attacks an Israeli village. While an operation is in progress the saturation of the border area with soldiers will reduce the threat to the civilians. At the same time, because in any large operation Israeli soldiers will be hurt, the fact that some might be hurt inside Israel is less significant. Therefore, the explanation that Israel is restraining itself till the objective is complete rings hollow.

Given the results of the operation against the Hezbollah tunnels, the explanation that the IDF needs large forces in the north doesn't seem to be supported in fact either. The entire operation was conducted in Israel territory, did not infringe Lebanese sovereignty, received widespread support and legitimacy. Large forces were not needed.

Netanyahu's argument that no large-scale operation can improve the situation is also counterfactual. The three large operations in Gaza – 'Cast Lead' (December 2008), 'Defensive Pillar' (November 2012) and 'Protective Edge' (July 2014) all ended with no long-term solution to the Gaza situation, but the level of violence following them was dramatically reduced relative to the periods before them. Therefore, Netanyahu's argument is mistaken – he does not want a solution to Gaza that includes Hamas, but previous large-scale operations considerably improved the security situation.

Israel has not provided a satisfactory explanation to its mellow policy and strategy against Hamas' violence.

Hamas, on its side, lives in tension between wanting to create an equation of responding to every Israeli strike and its fear of provoking another Operation 'Protective Edge'. Though Hamas claims Israel is not meeting its ceasefire obligations and the civilian situation is deteriorating, Hamas is not escalating its moderate violent pressure against Israel. After a year of incendiary balloons, it seems Hamas has gained nothing.

### The Dynamic of Protracted Conflicts

The dynamic of protracted limited conflicts is created when both rivals prefer to maintain low intensity violence rather escalating to full-out war and, simultaneously, are not willing to reach a political resolution, even if temporary, of their conflict. This situation prevents the militarily superior side from exploiting its superiority thus leaving the weaker side with a sufficient response. In low intensity violence both sides have sufficient capability to escalate their actions, for example by increasing rocket-fire in quantity or areas attacked. The response of the stronger side does not exploit its superiority because it prefers not to escalate too much and does not overwhelm the weaker side. The rivals can 'negotiate by fire' because they each have levels of escalation. The fear of over-

escalation stabilizes the situation. The weaker rival fears all-out war because then the superior rival will escalate beyond its capability to respond. The superior rival fears escalation because it analyzes the cost as outweighing the possible benefits.

Theoretically, the weak rival should have feared escalation whereas the stronger rival should have escalated to exhibit its determination to exploit its superiority. However, reality shows that weak rivals are justifiably willing to take risks based on the unwillingness of the stronger rivals to escalate, even though the stronger rival would enjoy a clear superiority in an all-out war.

The rivals try to improve their relative situations by minor changes in the intensity of the violence or attempt to slightly change the 'rules of the game'. However, these attempts generally fail to make a significant impact. Despite their repeated failures, the rivals are locked in this approach and the situation can remain (and does in fact remain) unchanged for many years.

A dynamic evolves in which the level of violence is 'agreed' – a level which both sides can live with, even though they each prefer something different. Occasionally the actual intensity of violence sways above or below this accepted level – usually because of some operational mistake or accident or due to a hopeless attempt of one of the rivals to slightly improve its situation.

This dynamic can be described by the balance attained when two springs are pulling a weight placed between them. The weight oscillates within the elasticity range around the physical point of equilibrium of the system. If one side tries to move the weight to a new point, the rival increases the force it employs to return the system to its equilibrium. A change of the system will occur only if the force of the movement is strong enough to overpower the elasticity of one of the springs and will then achieve a new point of equilibrium.

In the political conflict, a change of the situation, rather than in the situation, occurs only if the 'rules of the game' are broken. Such a break can be political – a peace treaty or a unilateral withdrawal; or it can be a dramatic escalation in fighting to high-intensity warfare that exploits the clear superiority of the stronger rival. The system will exit its range of elasticity, the strategic equilibrium will change, and a new political equilibrium will be created that will be the basis for the low-intensity conflict that will follow.

The graph below illustrates the intensity of rocket and mortar attacks from Gaza into Israel, from 2005 till the beginning of 2019. It shows that vis-à-vis the intensity of the violence there have been four distinct periods.

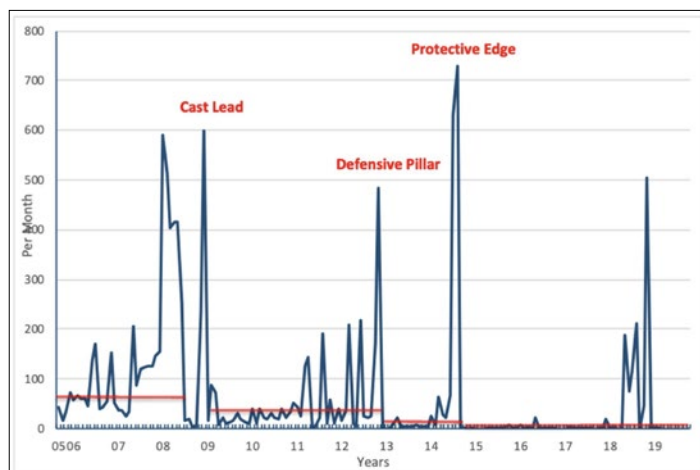


Figure 1: Rocket and Mortar Fire from Gaza

In the first period preceding Operation 'Cast Lead' – dozens of rockets and mortar bombs were fired into Israel every month. The shooting peaked in the summer of 2008 until the rivals achieved a ceasefire agreement – *Tahadiya*.<sup>[i]</sup> In November the shooting from Gaza resumed and in December Israel responded with Operation 'Cast Lead'.

During the second period, following 'Operation Cast Lead' the shooting resumed but averaged less than ten rockets and mortar bombs per month. This period too ended with a Palestinian escalation of fire and Israel responded with Operation 'Defensive Pillar' in November 2012.

The third period – from after Operation 'Defensive Pillar' to Operation 'Protective Edge', there were long periods of quiet interspersed with small bouts of shooting. The escalation of fire in summer 2014, following the abduction and murder of three Israeli teenagers, caused Israel to initiate Operation 'Protective Edge'.

During the first three and a half years after Operation 'Protective Edge', the fourth period, there was virtually no shooting at all.

### The Recent Bouts

Following Operation 'Protective Edge' Hamas underwent a period of rebuilding its forces during which it maintained a very low intensity of violent actions against Israel. However, contrary to common perceptions, it was not completely passive – the first rocket was fired in April 2015, approximately six months after the end of the operation on August 26, 2014.

For the three and a half years following Operation 'Protective Edge' rocket and mortar fire averaged only one or two per month, then in November and again December 2017 the Palestinians fired approximately 20 rockets and mortar bombs each month (in November in one incident and in December scattered over 12 separate incidents).

The introduction of incendiary kites and balloons in 2018 is an especially interesting turn of events, as Hamas tried to add a capability theoretically not included in the 'rules' enforced on it at the end of Operation 'Protective Edge'. At first Israel's



leadership did not know how to respond to this new threat, but after public pressure grew to respond, the government was compelled to act forcefully. The Israeli response triggered a series of bouts of rocket and mortar bomb fire. In one incident in May 2018 the Palestinians fired almost 200 and in November in a two-day exchange they fired approximately 500. Israel's response to these bombardments was severe, but it preferred reaching agreements rather than escalating to a large-scale operation. However, these agreements did not reduce the fighting to 2017 levels. Therefore, in March 2019, less than four months after the previous round, Israel ceased transfer of Qatari funds to Gaza and Hamas responded by renewing its attacks with incendiary balloons and on the ground along the border-fence.

It seems that Hamas is trying to improve its situation by increasing the violence emanating from Gaza. Israel, in turn, intensifies its responses to the point of a large-scale escalation, at which point the rivals compromise on some agreement that does not last and neither side achieves its goals.

### What Can Change the Situation?

The summer 2008 *Tahadiya*, and three large IDF operations, brought about dramatic reductions in the violence that lasted for lengthy periods.

In between the IDF conducted significant operational changes, such as deploying the newly developed anti-rocket defense system (Iron Dome), building improved border obstacles, deploying new intelligence capabilities and new weapons systems. Israel tried different response-strategies, Defense Ministers changed and so did governments.

Hamas also evolved militarily, expanding its artillery arsenal, and spending huge sums of money (in Gazan terms) on building its offensive and defensive tunnel systems, as well as changing its military organization and in its political leadership.

However, only large-scale operations or ceasefire agreements have ever affected the intensity of violence for extended periods of time.

Israel and Hamas are trapped in the dynamic created by a long-term protracted limited conflict. This dynamic stems from the character of limited conflicts, not from the strategies chosen by either side and therefore neither rival has the wherewithal to improve its strategic situation by improving its method of limited action.

Comparing this conflict to other similar ones, such as the conflict in Lebanon, shows the same dynamic working in all of them, including the same limitation on changing the strategic situation without engaging in a full-scale military

operation or a significant political action.

### How Can Israel Change the Strategic Situation Vis-à-Vis Gaza

Israel must decide: at what point is it not willing to tolerate Hamas' level of violence and then initiate a large-scale military operation aimed at changing the security situation? Such an operation, as with the previous ones, will probably not completely transform the strategic situation in Gaza – Hamas will remain in power, given that no viable alternative exists. However, Hamas' internal situation will change and, as with previous cases, it will be possible to compel it to accept a new equilibrium.

Israel's Prime Minister is correct to argue that even after another war with Gaza there will not be a revolutionary change, even if only because he has no long-term goals vis-à-vis Gaza and there is no completely new political and strategic situation he aspires to achieve. However, he is wrong to argue that Israel has nothing to gain from another war and that it is incapable of changing the security situation of the Israeli towns and villages bordering Gaza. Israel has done so in the past (twice while Netanyahu was Prime Minister) and will probably do so again if the Palestinians make the mistake of attempting to unilaterally changing the situation in their favor.

Alternatively, the Israeli government can attempt to achieve a long-term political arrangement with Hamas, but only if it agrees to accede to some of Hamas' demands, at least those that are aimed at improving the lot of civilians in Gaza.

### Summary

Despite their arsenal of military means and political options, it is clear that both sides in the Israel-Gaza conflict have abandoned their long-term goals and are not succeeding in achieving their short-term goals. This is not the result of mistaken strategies of either side but of the natural dynamic of protracted conflicts.

The quantitative data of the intensity of violence emanating from Gaza and analysis of the dynamic of this conflict through 2018 strengthens this understanding of how Israel and Hamas repeatedly failed to achieve their goals through that year.

The conclusion is that a significant change in the intensity of violence is possible only by a significant diplomatic action or, conversely a significant military action. Until then we will continue to see threats not consummated and a reality that continues to confound the leaders who continue to make declarations they cannot realize in fact.

### References

[1] *Tahadiya*: An Arabic term meaning 'calm' or 'quiet'. It is used in context of the different types of ceasefires in Arabic culture – essentially a conditional temporally open-ended unilateral reduction in violence. *Hudna*, on the other hand is a bilateral agreed to ceasefire for a set time. Traditionally, these ceasefire types are intended to provide the Muslim side time to recuperate its strength before renewing a war.



# MARIE VON CLAUSEWITZ

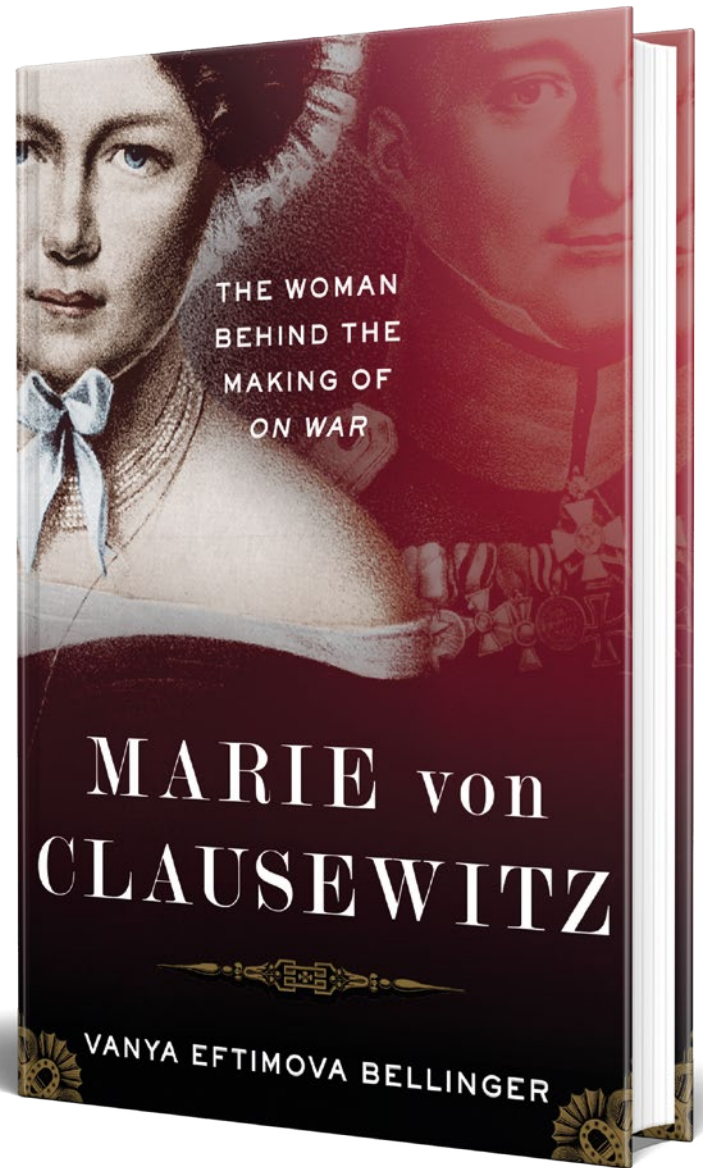
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# War, Cognitive Biases and Perception Management: The Time Has Come

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Shay Shabtai is a retired Israel Defense Force colonel. Shabtai is an expert and practitioner for more than twenty-five years in Middle East issues, Israel's national security, and intelligence and strategic planning. He was the Head of the Long-Term Strategic Planning Department in the IDF. Shabtai is currently a doctoral candidate researching the influence of Israel's intelligence community on its national security strategy, and lectures at Bar Ilan University and the Interdisciplinary Center, Herzliya. He is a strategist at Konfidat, a cybersecurity consulting company, which works with leading Israeli firms.

## Abstract

"Warfighting is fundamentally a human activity, in which humans choose what to do, consciously or subconsciously; rationally, irrationally or non-rationally", states Jim Storr. Therefore, it is susceptible to what behavioural economists call 'cognitive biases' expressed in heuristics, choices based on intuition that affect human judgement and weaken the theory of rational decision making. A realm so sensitive to cognitive biases provides fertile fields for actions designed to influence perceptions and consequently the decisions of the rival in our favour. For reasons elaborated, Western armies find it difficult to meet the challenge of Perception Management. The time has come to connect the cognitive and cultural biases to the conduct of war and to significantly and essentially expand the conduct of perception manipulation.

## Introduction

It is reasonable for strategic and operational planners to envy crime-scene forensic analysts. The latter come to a scene after the event has occurred; if the police did its job properly, the scene will be closed, and the analyst can do his job of collecting evidence in relative quiet and concentration; afterwards he takes the findings to a laboratory and use the tools of science (chemistry, biology, physics...) to arrive at

scientific conclusions. Nothing like the uncertainty, and often chaos, of the strategic environment and even more so of the battlefield.

Researcher Itiel Dror reached a different conclusion. In an article titled *How can Francis Bacon help forensic science? The four idols of human biases*[i] he characterized the difficulties of forensic science in managing the biases of human thinking. He opens the article with a question that strategists and soldiers will empathize with: is forensic science actually a science and can one conduct a critical discussion of its paradigms? After concluding that it is indeed a science, he approaches it via Francis Bacon's four idols that bias human scientific research and uses them to analyze the failures of forensic scientists.

The first, *Idola Tribus*, defines our limitations as members of the human race, and especially our difficulty in looking beyond the confines of our point of view. Thus, Dror notes, the combination of high professionalism and the cumulative discovery of evidence causes forensic scientists to fix on a theory already in the first stages of their work and they find it hard to abandon it for another.

The second, *Idola Specus*, focuses on the personality, education, experience and world-view. Dror determines that forensic scientists see themselves as police detectives, and therefore identify with the need to use the evidence to point to a specific suspect and often one that is already in custody.

The third, *Idola Fori*, describes the effect of our interaction with our surroundings, especially our social and professional contacts. Dror notes that working together with police detectives causes the forensic scientists to adopt practices and terminology that do not necessarily support clear-cut scientific results.

The fourth, *Idola Theatri*, describes the determinations of blind faith based on narrow research and anecdotal observations. Dror argues that critical thinking is difficult when it might reveal human error in assessing the evidence.

Thus, in a relatively closed profession, based on precise scientific tools and affecting the fates of human beings, human biases can cause significant errors. Dror argues that the military profession is less sensitive to these errors, because

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its failures are exposed to all, therefore soldiers cannot not learn from the failures by acting in a closed and defensive manner.

We are sure that strategic and military planners will not agree with him. Our profession is a fertile field for biased judgments and erroneous decisions, that our rivals can exploit to their advantage in the struggle. In this article I will not reveal anything that is not known to the professionals in this field, and I am sure that in every topic I describe there is much more published material that I am not aware of and do not refer to.

My goal is to raise the discussion on the relationship between war, cognitive biases and Perception Management, and to argue that it is time for strategic and military planners to stop regarding it as a side-issue and focus their attention on it as is done in other areas of human activities such as politics and economics.

## War

I have chosen to base my description of the relationship between human behaviour and the characteristics of war on Jim Storr's statement in his book *The Human Face of War*:<sup>[ii]</sup> "Warfighting is fundamentally a human activity, in which humans choose what to do, consciously or subconsciously; rationally, irrationally or non-rationally. Fundamentally, three things occur on the battlefield: men think, move and commit violence. All other activities support these functions"<sup>[iii]</sup>.

He then continues: "The human, as an agent on the battlefield, can make rational choices... Conversely, soldiers may not always act rationally. Surprise, shock and fear all affect their behavior... the human is not just the victim of his emotions. He is an agent on the battlefield and he influences the outcome... His viewpoint or understanding of battle is highly important..."<sup>[iv]</sup>.

Human perception is what leads to the results of a war:"... the normal condition for tactical success or defeat is the collective withdrawal of participation"<sup>[v]</sup>.

Therefore the aim of the physical act in war is to effect human perception: "We seek a concrete mechanism which links manoeuvre and weapons effects to a reduction of individual and collective participation. The mechanism appears to involve shock, surprise and suppression"<sup>[vi]</sup>.

Storr summarizes the characteristics of human battlefield decision-making: "Thus it seems that tactical decision-making should be very quick. It must 'deal with' many interrelated factors. It should aim to inflict damage whilst avoiding damage to one's own forces. It should exploit the strengths and weaknesses of the human beings involved in combat, both friendly and enemy. It is often undertaken in highly stressful circumstances, not least the fear of death or dismemberment. It should initiate and accommodate the outcomes of, strong interactions between forces on the battlefield, be robust against rogue outcomes of those interactions and yet support the clear communication of intent from commanders to subordinates"<sup>[vii]</sup>.

Beyond its physical dimension, war is a human phenomenon. Its results are determined by the understandings of people among themselves and between them and others. In his book Storr focuses on the tactical level. On the strategic level, which will not be analyzed here, some of these characteristics are strengthened because the activity is more on the cognitive level rather than in action; others are weakened because the personal survival of those involved is not immediately threatened. Therefore, war is profoundly affected by the biases of human thinking.

## Cognitive Biases

Till the beginning of the 1970s economic science based itself on the concept of the *homo economicus*, claiming that people make rational economic decisions designed solely to maximize profit. Over time a new research concept grew, behavioural economics, developing the analysis of cognitive biases, expressed in heuristics – choices based on intuition that affect human judgement and weaken the theory of rational economic decision making. This direction of research has broadened beyond economics and is now a central view of human behaviour.

Despite war being a human activity, the penetration of the cognitive bias concept into military theory has been slow and partial. One of the pioneers is Richard Heuer, a researcher of the Intelligence profession, who already in 1981 identified the effect of cognitive bias on intelligence estimates and the decisions based on them<sup>[viii]</sup>. He analyzed the effect of biases on intelligence work, pointed to the ability of deception operations to influence the intelligence picture and the decisions made by a rival, and offered solutions to the problem. His theory was based on the determination that "Circumstances under which human perceptions are most commonly distorted have significant implications for understanding the nature and limitations of intelligence analysis"<sup>[ix]</sup>.

However, a search by the current author based on an admittedly not methodical or comprehensive, found that research and discussion on the relationship between war and cognitive biases has increased only in the last decade and even that not in the core of military doctrinal debates<sup>[x]</sup>.

Among other issues, the writers point out the following biases:

**Availability Bias:** the human tendency to estimate the probability of a current event based on examples available in their memory, usually those that have occurred repeatedly. An example is the tendency of people to avoid flying after the September 11 attack because of a fear of repetition, resulting in heavier road traffic, more car accidents and deaths, even though, statistically flying is much safer. A military example would be assuming deterrence of a rival from certain actions because in the past he suffered heavily when acting in that manner.

**Anchoring Bias:** Initial perceptions of an issue solidify and it is very difficult to change them even when presented with conflicting facts. An example would be the British success in planting in the Germans the false impression that Cyprus was held by 20,000 soldiers, and causing the Germans to



not choose to conquer the island. Thus, creating in the rival's thinking reasons to rule out certain possible courses of action *a priori*.

*Confirmation and Disconfirmation Bias*: emphasizing data that strengthen our concepts or weaken rival theories. Thus the surprises at Pearl Harbour and the Yom Kippur War as examples of channeling the rivals decisions to suit our needs by supplying him false information.

*Sunk Cost Fallacy*: continued adherence to a course of action causing considerable losses only because we have already invested considerably in it. Thus, causing the rival to adhere to a course of action that has already caused him considerable damage.

The various writers suggest possible solutions to manage these biases. One of the main problems is the method of military situational assessment and decision making, the OODA Loop, of collecting information, analyzing it, making decisions based on it and implement them that are extremely sensitive to biases in the process. Among the suggestions are:

- a. Methods to enable the decision makers to identify problems in their process: check lists and adding a process of analyzing competitive hypotheses.
- b. Red Teams, serving as Devil's Advocates and inserting external considerations to monitor the analysis and decisions.
- c. Techniques for identifying rival deception efforts on our decision-making process.
- d. Conducting deception operations to create biases within the enemy's way of thinking.

However, it is doubtful if these methods will defeat the challenge. Williams summarizes: "The volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity of our operating environment demand the military professionals make rapid decisions in situations where established military decision making process are either too narrow or ineffective... As a result, commanders find themselves engaged in more intuitive decision making... When subjective assessments, ego, and emotion are intertwined with cognitive processes, we realize that intuitive decision making is fraught with potential traps"[xi].

## Perception Management

A realm so sensitive to cognitive biases provides fertile fields for actions designed to influence perceptions and consequently the decisions of the rival in our favour. I call this 'Consciousness Manipulation' or 'Perception Management'.

In recent years the world around the military profession, especially economic-marketing and politics, is boiling with manipulation of information – 'Fake News' – and emotions aimed at those the manipulators wish to channel to making certain decisions. Research and writing in this field is at a high and some is not yet ripe and full of contradictions – see for example the contradictory studies of the effects of the Russian campaign to influence the 2016 U.S. elections.

Perception Management is the core of political campaigning. The following quotations are from a book by three leading Israeli strategy consultants[xii], but similar statements can be found in the writings of many others in the field: "Often it seems that campaigns' staffs want to encourage 'strategic voting' – to create a Bandwagon Effect[xiii], and will manipulate polls or pseudo-polls to cause swing voters to vote for them only because of the urge to join a winning team. The candidate must provide them a picture that shows him on the way to victory. There are many ways of achieving such data, mostly by the manner questions are presented and formulated"[xiv].

"Manipulations would not succeed if it was not for the media. During campaigns the media needs an infinite amount of materials, it will adopt and publish any piece of information found rolling around. Polls are an excellent way of pushing useless or fake information into the media"[xv].

"Politicians use 'spins' to divert public debate to topics comfortable to them. A 'spin' can repair the results of events that have already occurred or pre-empt a future event. 'Spins' are conducted by creating a story suitable to the teller; releasing facts and data useful for him..."[xvi].

"Donald Trump conducted 2.0 generation social media campaign. He replaced Obama's infographics, structured video-clips and thought-out posts with personal tweets 'pulled from the cuff'. Most politicians work to have themselves referred to positively. Trump threw that rule out. Positively or negatively, all that mattered was to be talked about..."[xvii].

As Spiro Agnew's famous complaint: "The bastards changed the rules and didn't tell me".

The change in the military's attitude to Perception Management has already begun in Russia (and I am not referring to Western interpretation of what is mistakenly called the 'Gerasimov Doctrine'). In July 2018 a federal indictment was filed in the USA against 12 men accused of operating the Internet Research Agency LLC in St. Petersburg – the organization that conducted the interference operation in the American elections[xviii]. Though this is not written explicitly in the indictment, they are alleged to be agents of the Russian military intelligence (GRU).

The Chinese too have developed a Perception Management concept based on their military's official *Three Wars* doctrine: Public Opinion Warfare, Psychological Warfare and Lawfare.

Public Opinion Warfare precepts are: "'demoralize one's opponent by a show of strength', 'create momentum to control the situation', 'assail strategic points', and 'seek the avoidance of injury'. In particular, it is critical to be the first to release information in a contingency and actively guide public opinion in order to achieve and preserve the initiative on the 'public opinion battlefield'. Beyond efforts to exploit an adversary's shortcomings, the opponent's attempts to engage in public opinion warfare must also be countered. For example, this approach is reflected in Beijing's attempts to influence domestic and international public opinion with regard to the U.S. role in Asia..."[xix].

However, in the West official doctrines avoid explicitly delving into Perception Management. Thus, the definition of



Information Operations in American doctrine:

*"Information operations is the integrated employment, during military operations, of information-related capabilities in concert with other lines of operation to influence, disrupt, corrupt, or usurp the decision making of adversaries and potential adversaries while protecting our own (JP 3-13). An information-related capability is a tool, technique, or activity employed within a dimension of the information environment that can be used to create effects and operationally desirable conditions (JP 3-13). Examples of information related capabilities (IRCs) include military information support operations (MISO), military deception, operations security, public affairs, electronic warfare (EW), civil affairs operations (CAO), and cyberspace operations"[xx].*

In the confined framework of this article there is no room to elaborate the failings of the American Information Operations doctrine elucidated above, but from the first paragraph it is clear that information is regarded, first and foremost, as a functional medium, whereas the aspect of perceptions is secondary; that the basis for Information Operations is procedural and organizational rather than qualitative; that it is a very complicated integration of dozens of secondary efforts (some 30 different bodies are elaborated as involved in the Information Operations situational assessment); and that the concept is focused on integration with military operations and has no element of an independent effort.

The British discussion of Strategic Communications reveals a deeper understanding of the change:

*"Information can no longer be routinely subordinated to the more familiar and comfortable concepts of manoeuvre and force. Too often in the past we have placed information on the periphery of our operations, failing to understand the reinforcing, or changing, the attitude and behavior of selected audiences can have equal, if not greater, utility than force in securing operational objective"[xxi].*

The British manual continues with a description of the effect of perceptions on achieving strategic goals. However, when it discusses application it states: "Strategic communication requires the co-ordinated use of different information capabilities of Defence such as information operations including psychological operations and presence, posture, profile alongside defence diplomacy and in conjunction with other levers such as manoeuvre and fires. Co-ordination of these information capabilities with Media Operations or Public Affairs is also required and oversight by a unifying information or communication authority is helpful. However, while all communication should be coherent, a firewall must exist between the routine conduct of Media Operations and other influence activities in the operational space, which could include operational and tactical deception. This firewall helps meet Defence's obligation to inform truthfully"[xxii].

This example shows the difficulty of the military establishment in adjusting to the transformation of the realm of perceptions: it focuses on the coordination of complex efforts at the expense of stratagems that will enable creating and imbuing an effective and winning narrative, and it restricts its capabilities by requiring an "obligation to inform

truthfully". The result: a not enough sufficiently professional, hesitant, insufficiently resourced handling that does not strive to achieve a favourable decision in the struggle over perceptions.

Why do Western armies find it difficult to meet the challenge of Perception Management? We can assume a number of possible reasons - Perception Management is considered:

- a. An un-military profession and therefore not the domain of military personnel.
- b. Diverting attention and resources from the 'true story', that is the use of weapons to direct focused violence against the rival.
- c. Immoral and unfair in that it requires military personnel to lie, cheat and deceive. This in contradiction to the Russian perception that believes "this is an effective tool for strategic subversion, by which one can decide wars and cause a regime-change even without employing regular forces on the kinetic battlefield"[xxiii].
- d. Having the army - a state institution - possibly manipulating the principles of democracy, especially the rights to express an opinion and vote freely.
- e. As too far from the anti-intellectual and mechanistic norms of behaviour that dominate the army in peacetime; as Storr writes: "... a depressing picture of armies forgetting old lessons and of authoritarian senior commander. To that should be added a tendency not to improve in peacetime..."[xxiv].
- f. As a continuation of the trauma caused by the immature and wrong concept of Effect Based Operations, that Colin Grey described (as quoted by Storr) as: "...both unmistakably banal and dangerously illosury"[xxv]; and General James Mattis noted that "It is my view that EBO has been misapplied and overextended to the point that it actually hinders rather than helps joint operations"[xxvi].

## The Time Has Come

The time has come for a significant change in the way the Perceptions Domain is viewed in the military profession. Clausewitz identified the importance of the perception aspect when he wrote: "One must say that the physical seem little more than wooden hilt, while the moral factors are the precious metal, the real weapon, the finally-honed blade... History provides the strongest proof of the importance of moral factors and their often incredible effect..."[xxvii].

Luttwak identified the complexity of the perception aspect of war when he defined two phenomena: the paradoxality of war - *"the entire realm of strategy is pervaded by a paradoxical logic* very different from the ordinary 'linear' logic by which we live in all other spheres of life. When conflict is absent... whenever, that is, strife and competition are more or less bound by law and custom, a noncontradictory linear logic rules, whose essence is mere common sense. Within the sphere of strategy... another and quite different

logic is at work and routinely violates ordinary linear logic by *inducing the coming together and reversal of opposites*. Therefore it tends to reward paradoxical conduct while defeating straightforwardly logical action, yielding results that are ironical or even lethally damaging";[xxviii] and the 'post-heroic era' – "none of the advanced low-birth-rate countries of the world can play the role of a classic Great Power anymore... their societies are so allergic to casualties that they are effectively 'de-bellcized' or nearly so."[xxix]

Developments in information technologies and changes in human culture that stem from them only amplify these two phenomena and the connection between them. The claim, that must be examined in depth, is that today the paradoxality is penetrating into realms that were considered to be linear, such as politics and business; the post-heroic attitude strengthens the exploitation of the perception aspects over actual combat; and the connection between them creates a situation which increases greatly the centrality of perception manipulation as an effective tool.

One can today claim that the perception aspect is central to the conduct of conflicts. Consciousness has become a much more powerful middleman between the physical military action and its effects on the conduct of the rivals involved in it. The understanding that translating tactical events into strategic understanding is done in the perception medium is very old; but the changes in technology and human culture have enhanced the potential influence of this activity to unprecedented levels of significance to the conduct of war.

If we accept this conclusion, and as part of the efforts I will describe below, and the importance of continued study and analysis of this activity, then the following is required:

- a. Changing the cultural perceptions of the military to honour the arts of lying, manipulating, faking and deceiving, in achieving strategic goals with out recourse to violence. What is more moral and correct than to prevent the slaughter of people by lying to them? Western military personnel struggle with digesting this idea, but the general public is more familiar with manipulations and find it more acceptable than killing people.
- b. Within this framework we must adopt practices characterizing political election campaigns. Wars are similar to election campaigns, because they have clear goals; more or less clear time frames; they are a 'one shot' attempt to influence the situation; and require rapid decision making to paralyze opposing perception manipulations and achieve domination of our own narrative. To for nothing is much use made in political campaigns of terms and practices of military campaigns. The relevant cognitive and cultural biases must be identified to exploit all of Francis Bacon's four idols and to charge with them without shame or apology.
- c. Perceptual manipulation requires considerable

investment of resources: collecting and analyzing the relevant data requires diversion of intelligence assets from divining the exact location of the enemy to enable targeting to understanding the enemy's perceptions and the relevant enemy target-audiences for our messages; it requires to include the perception issue as a central element in the planning process, understanding that perceptions are the only bridge between the tactical actions and the strategic goals, therefore the actions have to be aimed and designed to impact them; and that, therefore, investing forces and efforts in operations focused at the manipulation and influence of perceptions is a central element of the tactical action.

- d. It is important to exploit Western almost total domination of information technologies. The ability of resource-poor ISIS over many months to use Western information technologies in order to manipulate perceptions is a badge of shame to the failure of Western defence and military organizations to adapt to reality. The West, should it decide to do so, can eliminate its rivals from the perception domain with defensive and offensive methods.
- e. It is important to understand that efforts can fail: there is enormous room here for trial and error to develop a concept of operations. Thus, in order to create an effective *Anchorage Bias* in the rival's perceptions, it is necessary to be the first to raise the issue in question so as to dominate the 'discussion'. Identifying the issues, planning and implementing the manipulation constitute a complex challenge. Another challenge is that in a political campaign it is enough to achieve 50% plus one votes, sometimes even less, to win, whereas in war the result must be much more lopsided. There are many dilemmas: for example, the rapid almost absolute connectivity in today's information domain, creates a situation in which the manipulation conducted on the rival is also completely exposed to the international audience, and worse, to one's own home-audience. How can we overcome this? In the First Gulf War General Norman Schwarzkopf chose to lie to the audience of a press-conference in order to strengthen his deception of the Iraqi enemy and justified this in retrospect by the need for democracy to defend itself and reduce human casualties on both sides.

## Conclusion

The time has come to connect the cognitive and cultural biases to the conduct of war and to significantly and essentially expand the conduct of perception manipulation. This is the present and even more so – the future. Enroute, we shall be required, as Itiel Dror tries to show in the profession of forensic science, to conduct a deep analysis of the military profession by debating the difficult questions of the artistic and scientific elements required in it and its ability to adapt to the changing perceptual environment surrounding it.

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# Antecedents to Strategy: The Use of Force

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The title of this article might seem, to those conversant in the subject at hand, to be inverted. That is, strategies make use of force and so their conception and formation must occur before it is decided how force is to be used to accomplish them. This view fits nicely into the traditional ends/ways/means syllogism that has been the foundation of strategy courses for generations; the possibility of a chicken-or-egg problem being potentially disruptive in any number of ways. However, the author, having had to formulate war plans (if only notional and local) meant to produce political effects, has found that in practice there is a rather chaotic search process that occurs at the outset of strategy generation, one that can, and frequently has, over the course of history, produced counterproductive strategies when effective ones were possible, judging by the ends desired and means at hand. How to reduce the chaos? On the one hand, Clausewitz asserts that it is the innate aptitude (genius) of the decision maker that sees the glimmerings of the inner light which leads to truth; and...the courage to follow this faint light wherever it may lead.[i] This view is generally supported by Colin Gray, who concludes that the complexity of the environment in which strategy is made makes any attempt to teach it futile.[ii] With due respect to both writers, it is only responsible to try and find some way to assist those who must produce strategic plans. If we grant that yes, strategy is beset by "intellectual complications and extreme diversity of factors and relationships" [iii], we still must try and find a way to increase the odds that someone will detect the glimmerings and be able to follow them.

In an epistemological sense, one way to get a grip on some

complex problem is to find its practical boundaries, and within those boundaries define the range of alternative ways of dealing with it. In military planning terms the ideal, when doing a commander's estimate of the situation, is to develop mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive lists of both enemy and friendly options. What this means is that each and every possible course of action has been identified. As a practical matter this is of course virtually impossible, but the closer one can come to the ideal, within the constraints of available time and effort, the more confidence one can have in the decision emanating from the estimate. Of course, the military estimate process is normally employed by commanders at the tactical and operational levels, the complications at the strategic level obviating its routine use there. That being said, it appears to this author that the basic logic of the estimate can be used to ease the intellectual complexity and disorder encountered when making strategy.

Let's start with Infinity Journal's own definition of strategy: "Military strategy is the direction and use made of force and the threat of force for the purposes of policy as decided by politics." [iv] The key words are "the use of force and the threat of force." Can one delimit the number of ways force can be used? If so, there would at least be some kind of menu a strategist could employ to organize his or her thinking. In the view of this author there is such a delimitation possible. The possible ways force can be used devolves into four categories: definitive, coercive, catalytic and expressive. This taxonomy is a modification of that coined by James Cable in his book *Gunboat Diplomacy*. [v] Cable is focused on the limited use of naval force short of war, but the author found that Cable's logic could be extended throughout the spectrum of conflict, and was of direct utility in being able to see the forest for the trees in a war planning problem with which he was confronted. Let's first establish the taxonomy and then see where it led the author.

## Definitive Force

A tactical commander who is ordered to take a hill occupied by enemy forces, and does so by assault, is using force in a definitive manner. It would be nice if, after the preparatory artillery bombardment, white flags appeared, but the orders contemplated the need for a ground assault that either drove the enemy out or killed and captured the defenders. The end

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result is that the attacking forces wind up in possession of the hill, with no cooperation from enemy forces needed. Definitive use of force is that application of force that directly solves the dispute, without requiring cooperation from the enemy. The nice thing about the definitive use of force is that its effects are predictable, and if the plan succeeds, are highly reliable. Of all the possible ways force can be used, this way provides the best opportunity for creating a straight line between cause and effect.

At the tactical level the opportunities for the definitive use of force are common. In fact, tactics are largely designed to destroy forces in order to physically remove or prevent resistance to whatever goal is assigned. However, in the higher strata of war, opportunities for the definitive use of force are less available. At the operational level, the goal may be the occupation or defense of certain territorial positions. This was Saddam's intent when he seized Kuwait; clearly a definitive goal.

Strategic calculations involved with the definitive use of force tend to be straightforward, and military officers tend to be most comfortable with them. The basic question is feasibility; can the strategy be carried out in the face of enemy opposition? If the Attacker can overcome enemy resistance, the desired effects are sure to follow. Thus, it was that when Allied forces rolled into Berlin in 1945, the war in Europe was truly over, and there was no need for a complex and tortured bargaining process like there was at Versailles twenty seven years prior. The Third Reich's expansionist policies, which were the original source of the dispute, ceased to be an issue because the Third Reich had been eradicated. Similarly, when British forces entered Stanley in the Falklands, the issue was settled because Argentina had no further capacity to contest the situation.

Strategic calculations that involve definitive use of force can go wrong if the enemy's ability to resist is underestimated or if the existence of a potential rescuer nation is not recognized. This is the error Hitler made when he invaded Poland. There was little question of the Wehrmacht's ability to subdue that country, but the international reaction it provoked was ultimately fatal to the Third Reich. Although German strategic thinking associated with the invasion of the Soviet Union was fuzzy, Wehrmacht planners seemed to have definitive force in mind as they contemplated the destruction of the Red Army and the occupation of most of European Russia. In their peculiar strategy development process, the Germans failed to discern the massive and resilient reconstitution capability of the Soviet Union and were physically prevented from achieving their strategic goals.

A danger exists that military planners will attempt to define military problems in definitive terms when it is not appropriate. Conducting war is a stressful process, full of uncertainty and pressure. High level commanders and their staffs will naturally seek a comfort zone in their approach to strategy and planning. Most of these officers' outlooks were formed in a tactical environment where there existed a firm connection between military action and the anticipated results. They will look for ways to find such a connection at the higher levels and ascribe definitive qualities to projected operations even though other mechanisms are at work.

The inaccurate attribution of definitive quality to a proposed use of force leads to a disconnect between military action and the strategic goals it is supposed to achieve. Admiral Doenitz' and his staff advertised that their submarine operations would "bring England to its knees". Presumably this meant that unrestricted submarine warfare would take away Great Britain's ability to continue in the war. It was probably more realistic to think of the operation in terms of coercing the British into a negotiated peace, because in lieu of an invasion to achieve overrun, the British government would be capable of continuing the war so long as it had its fleet. The relevant (and painful) question for German planners was how susceptible to coercion the British (more specifically, Churchill) in fact were.

### Coercive Force

The North Koreans were brought to the bargaining table in Panmunjom by the threat of nuclear weapons. Despite several years of unsuccessful offensives that chewed up their manpower and drained resources, North Korea stubbornly continued to fight. From the United States' perspective, definitive force had not worked; China, North Korea's rescuer, had closed off the opportunity for the forced reunification of the Peninsula and the extinguishing of the communist regime. President Eisenhower was therefore forced to consider other avenues for obtaining an acceptable peace. In lieu of any other suitable alternatives, he turned to the threat of nuclear bombardment. This prospect was apparently of sufficient threat to the North Koreans that they decided to accept the status quo at the 38th parallel. They were, in other words, coerced into ending hostilities on what, to them, were relatively unfavorable terms.

The coercive use of force is a common feature of strategic military plans and doctrine because it presents the possibility of victory short of a total effort to overrun the enemy. Moreover, an enemy decision to acquiesce in the strategic situation tends to legitimize the gains. The aggressive rhetoric of offensive military doctrine has repeatedly extolled the virtue and necessity of making the enemy see the error of their ways, and extracting acknowledgement of one's own position of unchallengeable strategic superiority. Indeed, one of the basic tenets of strategic bombing theory is that bombardment from the air can take away the enemy's will to continue the war.<sup>[vi]</sup> In other words, the progressive destruction of his forces and economy will coerce the enemy leadership to sue for peace.

If a strategy of this kind is pursued, some important questions emerge. The foremost is the degree to which the enemy government is susceptible to coercion. This can be a difficult question to answer objectively in an environment of strong animosity, where planners may attribute various racial or character weaknesses to the enemy. A desire to find a solution to a complex and pressing problem can also color planners' perceptions. They may attribute far more coercive value to various kinds of military actions than these actions actually possess in the eyes of the enemy. Hitler's "terror bombing" of London, for instance, had the opposite effect he intended. What's more, this attempt at coercion drained resources away from his definitive effort, to neutralize the RAF, which was on the road to success.

Strategists who contemplate coercive use of force must consider the position of the enemy decision-makers. It is quite possible that the enemy leadership will regard a negotiated settlement on unfavorable terms as political and even physical suicide. This will be a function of how secure the enemy government's hold on power is, and nature of its relationship to the war. A relatively weak leader who has identified his legitimacy with success in the war is likely to be virtually immune to coercion. The particular personality of the leader or the dynamics of a corporate leadership will also have a significant effect. Apart from any other circumstances, Winston Churchill was not someone who could be easily coerced, as Hitler found to his deep frustration.

It is possible that some methods of applying military force will have greater coercive power than others in a particular situation. The threat of massive invasion did not bring the Japanese to the peace table, nor did a seaborne economic blockade or ruthless strategic bombing. Only the threat of continued nuclear bombardment provided the impetus to surrender on Allied terms. Attempts at coercion can backfire dramatically if military methods are not chosen with care. Being the victim of strategic air attack, seaborne blockade or other assault may actually strengthen the enemy leadership's political hand domestically and internationally. To an extent, Saddam's defiance of the U.S. economic blockade enhanced his image among certain elements of the Islamic world.

The uncertainties surrounding the use of coercion being what they are, strategists who contemplate using force in this way should make a special effort to look beyond anticipated operations to envision what may happen if their strategy doesn't work. Coercion is usually associated with an attempt to checkmate the enemy. What is required is that the enemy is made to feel pain and to perceive that more and greater pain will inevitably follow if he does not accede to our demands. If plan execution arrives at the point where the enemy was expected to yield, and the fight still rages, more pain than expected or a different kind of pain must be applied, or a different kind of defeat mechanism sought. The coercer is now forced to consider whether he has the political leeway to impose more pain and whether the object of the war is worth the increased effort and risk.

### Catalytic Force

During the First Gulf War President Bush made several public statements that indicated he would be pleased if elements of the regular Iraqi Army overthrew Saddam Hussein. If one could have been a fly on the wall of U.S. targeting headquarters just before and during the war, it is possible that the conversations overheard could have included the discussion of what amount of damage to the Iraqi Republican Guard would be required to embolden regular officers to attempt a coup. Or perhaps a broader pattern of target selection had an auxiliary motive of causing popular unrest against a regime that had brought this kind of destruction to their homeland. Planners who contemplate using force in this way are hoping for specific second order effects to arise from the military actions they envision. They are planning for the catalytic use of force.

The catalytic use of force can be a dazzling opportunity to reap huge military or political effects from a relatively limited amount of force. The current buzzword "leverage" is often associated with obtaining catalytic effects, ranging from tactical advantage to strategic superiority. A famous example of catalytic effects at the operational level is MacArthur's landing at Inchon during the Korean War. By establishing a beachhead on the West Coast of Korea with a relatively small force he stimulated the wholesale retreat of the North Korean Army because he threatened its main supply route. Catalytic use of force could be classified in this case, as maneuver warfare, or as the indirect approach espoused by Sun Tzu, B. H. Liddell-Hart, et al.

At the lower levels of war catalytic effects may be relatively easy to calculate. At the upper operational level and the strategic level, however, issues can be so complex that it may be difficult or impossible to calculate the linkages between a military cause and a hoped-for second order effect. Saddam tried his hand at this by launching SCUDs at Israel during Desert Storm, hoping to precipitate an Israeli entry into the war. This, he calculated would force the Arab countries arrayed against him to drop out of the U.S. led alliance, thereby causing it to come unraveled. In the event, Israel refrained from responding and his stratagem failed.

The moral is that dazzling visions of achieving strategic leverage through the catalytic use of force is a dangerous undertaking unless the potential cause-effect linkages are known and understood. If a strategy is based on catalytic effects, the nation may quickly find itself with a bankrupt strategy, and facing a drawn out war of attrition. Catalytic strategies can backfire and have virtually the opposite effect than was originally envisioned. Schemes for applying precision munitions to achieve strategic aims quickly and cheaply often depend on catalytic effects, whether they clearly state this or not. There is no evident and necessary linkage between destruction and political control, and a failed catalytic scheme may end up causing substantial political damage to its perpetrator.

### Expressive Force

In the aftermath of the failed 1983 air strike on the Shiite artillery positions outside of Beirut, Lebanon, there was considerable controversy and finger pointing concerning the raid's timing and execution. Somewhat lost in the discussion was any meaningful questioning of the raid's objectives. If the strike had been executed with precision and without losses, what were the intended effects? President Reagan's policy was a "prompt and vigorous response" to further ground fire directed at American reconnaissance aircraft. Perhaps the thought was that bombing of Shiite artillery positions would deter future incidents. If so, this could have been classified as a coercive use of force. The fallacy of this theory is that the ground fire could have emanated from a number of different factions, and it is highly unlikely that taking out a couple of emplacements would have induced a cessation of such activity. It is doubtful that the strike planners or strategists thought of this as a realistic outcome. Definitive force can be ruled out because there was no way to actually destroy a significant portion of the guns with any realistic level of effort.

This strike was meant to send a message. The message was that the United States would not countenance continued aggression against its forces. The strike was a signal that the United States was no longer willing to absorb blows and was not afraid to use force. The exact decisions we desired of potential adversaries were not spelled out; the threat was supposed to be the more ominous by its vagueness. The exact recipient of the message was not explicit either. There were many players in the messy game of Lebanon, most of whom were hostile to U.S. interests. So this particular strike does not fit cleanly into any of the categories discussed so far. It was, in fact, an expression of outrage and frustration by the United States, an expression that had no specific, immediate military or political goal. As such it will be considered an expressive use of force.

The defining characteristic of the expressive use of force is the lack of a clear military objective. Even some terrorist acts have specific political or military goals, and can be otherwise categorized. Expressive force is used to vent anger, present a non-specific threat or to merely harm the enemy. Reprisals fit into this category many times, if their use is reflexive and not clearly directed. Often, war crimes may be forms of the expressive use of force - the manifestation of pure hatred. This is not to say that the expressive use of force is always wrong; it may end up having salutary effects. It is, however, frequently the refuge of those who have no other means or ideas, and are hoping for the best. The danger in this is that the expressive use of force can generate reactions all out of proportion to its original strength and intent. Those who advocate "sending messages" lack of true understanding of the use of force. The simple old axiom used by many gun owners seems appropriate here: don't point your gun at someone unless you intend to use it. "Using it" in the strategic sense means having a plan and capability to use force in a definitive, coercive, deterrent or catalytic manner.

### Using the Categories as Antecedents

The author's carrier battle group was tasked, as an exercise, to plan a bombing campaign to convince a certain dictator to cease and desist from sponsoring terrorism. In one sense, the task defined the overall strategy in the sense that the means and ends were pre-selected. Political leadership were assumed to have determined the end, and delimited the options by prescribing the general means: bombing, as opposed to invasion and occupation. On the other hand, the ways were left to the imagination of the battle group planners. At this point, strategy could have been devolved into pure targetteering, and that was what initially happened in the staff spaces of the aircraft carrier where the author was serving. Determinations of what could be bombed were accompanied by seat-of-the-pants extrapolation of their effects (being reduced upon clinical examination to some form of "this will fix 'em"). The author, having been put in charge of the planning, and by default the strategizing process, and having already been educated by reading James Cable (and actually thinking through what he said), thrashed about for some more definite link between cause - bombing - and effect; the cessation of terrorism sponsorship.

The initial skull sessions after receipt of the tasking message were indeed chaotic, with a dozen senior officers each

floating an immediate solution of the "this will fix 'em" variety. The discussion revolved around the feasibility of means; what targets could be bombed with the aircraft and ordnance at hand. Desired effects were assumed to flow from what we knew how to do. *A priori* assumptions were made about time available based on the recent history of such operations as Eldorado Canyon. Jockeying for influence became a subtheme as differences of opinion based on aircraft community became evident. Hours of arguing ensued, with agendas hidden and overt coloring the proposals and counterproposals. This occurred among what, to an outsider, would seem a highly homogenous group that ought to have a common set of values and background. One can easily see how the intellectual churn would be magnified among groups such as the U.S. National Security Council. Having been put in charge of producing a campaign plan for the tasking authority to review and judge, the author retreated to his stateroom and tried to think the problem through using the uses of force taxonomy as a life preserver.

A definitive solution would involve killing the head of state who was the source of the nation's policy on sponsoring terrorism. The problems with that involved defying US policy that proscribed assassination, the difficulty in targeting an individual and the political blowback likely to occur if the strategy was successful. Still, if it could be done, the desired end would be, by definition, achieved.

The coercive solution presented many imponderables. What pattern and degree of destruction would prove coercive to this particular individual? The available intelligence provided no help; the leader's legitimacy was heavily connected to jihad and support of pan-Arab causes, so any appearance of caving to American military coercion could amount to political or even physical suicide. Thus, it was possible to envision that the necessary degree of destruction of military and economic targets might exceed what was politically and even militarily feasible given the anticipated resources, especially in terms of time. An extended bombing campaign would likely create political difficulties for U.S. leadership. Moreover, an open-ended campaign would increase the potential for unanticipated factors to undermine and deflect U.S. policy.

Sending a message - the expressive use of force - seemed at best a long shot. In lieu of an overtly coercive effort, the scattering around of a few tons of bombs to demonstrate displeasure did not seem to have anything to recommend it other than its ease of implementation. Given the analysis of the target leader's political position, a simple message was unlikely to move him. And here, the old saying that hope is not a strategy applied.

A catalytic solution appeared to be possible. Intelligence indicated that there were elements in the country's air force that were potentially hostile to the leader. What if they could be stimulated to conduct a coup? One way to do that would be to suppress surface-to-air defenses, fly fighters over the country, basically daring the air force to come up and fight while bombing the army guard units that formed the leader's personal protection. This would be accompanied by political pronouncements from the US that operations would cease and assistance deals struck if the leader were deposed. The air force officers, understanding that taking off would amount



to suicide, and perhaps ordered to do so by their political leader, might then revolt. This, of course, was a thin cause-and-effect reed to cling to, but it involved less destruction and less political risk than either the definitive and coercive solutions and a better, if only marginally so, prospect of working than the expressive option. It at least imposed some rationality on the problem.

Over the objections of some officers who were uncomfortable with a clinical analysis of the problem, we adopted the catalytic solution and proceeded to devise a campaign plan that incorporated the necessary logistic and communications elements and sent it up the line where it was received with surprised approval. Apparently previous groups had submitted rather confused essays on strategy instead of a definite plan. We were subsequently ordered to video tape a briefing on the plan and how we arrived at it, presumably to educate future deploying staffs.

### Observations

This discussion is, of course, a gross simplification of a massively complex subject, but the central idea could not be simpler and more straightforward; strategy must be done, and one has to find a constructive way for approaching it. The use of strategic doctrine or principles as a substitute for thinking creatively about the problem at hand represents a surrender to chaos. Having a framework to organize thinking without prejudging a solution is a survival skill. It is instructive to note that the U.S. Army found it necessary to assist unit commanders operating independently in Iraq and routinely encountering situations not foreseen by either

orders or doctrine by issuing a pamphlet that described how to define the problem.[vii] They were essentially faced with devising strategy in the sense of the *IJ* definition and simple application of the commander's estimate process was insufficient; there had to be antecedent reasoning to sort out the problem before strategy could be concocted.

The author's experience was only a drill and very narrow, but it conformed to the *IJ* definition of strategy and at least as a microcosm seems to have illustrative value. Strategy making is a group activity and as such is subject to the "forming, norming, storming and performing" dynamic so many have described in the sociology literature. That process can easily be distorted by agendas extraneous to the problem at hand; one can only imagine what went on within the White House and Pentagon as the decision to invade Iraq was made. At some point, someone must see the glimmer and be persuasive enough to get the group to follow. Almost by definition a strategy problem is complex to the point of being indecipherable, but people nonetheless must sort it out and act. The school of hard knocks is one way for strategists to gain competency in their craft, but that is an expensive and uncertain means of getting the right people into position to make strategy. As Colin Gray points out, probably correctly, sending people to school to learn strategy may be a fool's errand, the complexity, specificity and uniqueness of each successive strategic problem obviating any doctrine or principles that necessarily form the basis for teaching. However, a set of antecedent heuristics – a comprehensively exhaustive, mutually exclusive and simple set of categories that describe how force can be used to get one's way in the face of opposition – can at least be a way to get purchase on one's own inner genius.

### References

- [i] Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, edited and translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), p.102
- [ii] Colin Gray, "Can Strategy be Taught?," *Infinity Journal*, Article 1, Vol 6, Issue 3, [https://www.infinityjournal.com/article/210/Can\\_Strategy\\_be-Taught/](https://www.infinityjournal.com/article/210/Can_Strategy_be-Taught/)
- [iii] Clausewitz, p. 178.
- [iv] *Infinity Journal*, "What is Strategy," *Infinity Journal*, 04/03/2013. [https://www.infinityjournal.com/article/91/What\\_is\\_Strategy/](https://www.infinityjournal.com/article/91/What_is_Strategy/)
- [v] James Cable, *Gunboat Diplomacy 1919-1979*, Second Edition, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981), Chapter 2, pp. 41-86.
- [vi] Although not as strident as in previous generations, current Air Force doctrine still maintains echoes of the idea that it can independently affect the will of an enemy to fight. U.S. Air Force, *Basic Doctrine*, Volume 1, pp. 29.
- [vii] U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, *Commander's Appreciation and Campaign Design*, TRADOC Pamphlet 525-5-500, Version 1.0, 28 January 2008.





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