
MILITARY STRATEGY MAGAZINE

Linking Ends and Means



Antulio J. Echevarria II

**The New Unequal Dialogue:
Professional Military Advice in the
Age of AI-Analytics**

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A Note From The Editor

I believe the edition you are about to read is particularly strong in terms of the content we seek to progress for *Military Strategy Magazine*. That said, we are not a publication for beginners, but we should avoid becoming an elitist academic journal with little relevance to all, bar academia. Beginners do not really need content adjusted for their level of knowledge. Strategy is not chemical engineering. As a social science, simple familiarity with language should be enough to get most through the door. The only limiting factor in being conversant with Strategic Theory (thus "Strategy") is the amount you have read combined with the quality you understand. There is no quantity versus quality debate. Both are required. The real problem is that Strategic Theory will only take you so far. To really see the theory work you need Strategic History, which is really nothing more than history understood with the lens of Strategic Theory. There is no magic here. It is all brutally simple stuff, albeit simple stuff that can be hard to understand.

Simple stuff that is hard to understand? Yes. The greatest insights and most useful understanding come from deep knowledge. Deep knowledge is what creates the levels of understanding that enable application in the real world. To this end, I would ask our readership to point out sophistry, pseudo-intellectualism and faux complexity should they see it in our publication, or anywhere else. If nothing else this is a useful antidote for those of us who are standing too close to the elephant to see the elephant. If anyone supposes I am offering this challenge because I see such digressions commonly occurring in the field of Strategic Theory, then you may be right. Was *Infinity Journal* ever guilty of such issues? I hope not, but it never hurts to look in the mirror. To those readers who are wondering what I am wittering on about, I would simply say that, for example, Clausewitz is not inherently complicated or complex. The ideas are pretty simple. Did Carl explain his ideas clearly and simply? Not always, but this is not about debating Clausewitz. It is about clarity, so if you want to write about Clausewitz, write to make his ideas clearer, and not debate him using the lens of some abstract French or German philosopher people only pretend to have read.

Strategy needs simple and clear writing where an extensive vocabulary is only employed to create greater and more useful precision of expression. Likewise, ideas and concepts that are not easy to explain and demonstrate need to be held to rigour and assayed in the fire of common sense. Also, call out pompous editors who stretch analogies too far! To paraphrase the much-maligned but skilled Tactician and Strategist, Bernard Montgomery, "if the thinking is clear, the doing is clear."

William F. Owen
 Editor, *Military Strategy Magazine*
 September 2020

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Eado Hecht

Though the Syrian Civil War smolders on, to date the last major campaign in that war was the Syrian Regime's offensive in the Idlib province from early 2019 until March 2020. In this offensive, Regime forces captured more than 40 percent of the last major territorial holding of Rebel forces. Only Turkish intervention prevented the Regime from taking more. The article compares the rival strategies, operations, and tactics in that campaign.

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Although not always recognized by the vast majority of a nation's population, there is a direct link between the National Security Strategy and the required military capabilities. A strategy itself never explains a requirement in detail. It defines an end state, outlines objectives, describes ways, and sometimes even means. It sets the frame for further planning of the nation's instruments of power.

The New Unequal Dialogue: Professional Military Advice in the Age of AI-Analytics

Antulio J. Echevarria II - U.S. Army War College, Carlisle, PA.



Illustration Eugen Dobric | Dreamstime.com

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Much has been written on artificial intelligence (AI) to date, especially in recent months. In fact, the volume of AI-related

literature is increasing almost as fast as AI computational power, which is reportedly doubling every 3.4 months.[i] That literature now includes such disparate topics as the uses of “big data” and the problematics of autonomous weapons systems.[ii] Fortunately, most experts now say the “singularity” moment, when artificial intelligence will surpass that of humans, is still in the distant future. [iii] Nevertheless, “weak” or “narrow” forms of artificial intelligence, such as AI-

enhanced analytics, are causing subtle yet critical changes in our daily activities from marketing analysis to competitive

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sports. One strategy-related activity that may be altered is what American political scientist Eliot Cohen once referred to as the “unequal dialogue” between civilian policymakers and military professionals.[iv] If strategy is the “bridge” between political objectives and military resources, as the late Colin Gray once stated, then the unequal dialogue is the two-way traffic that traverses the bridge.[v] It should be self-evident that a sound strategy requires a good dialogue. But we have not duly considered how weak or narrow forms of AI might affect that exchange; indeed, the potential exists for AI-analytics to make the unequal dialogue more equal, which would in turn have important consequences for a democracy.

This article is necessarily speculative in nature. As one late-nineteenth century American sociologist admitted, science “could not get on without speculation.”[vi] Speculation allows us to get ahead of the change curve, to anticipate future dilemmas, and to begin thinking about what it would take to avoid or resolve them. As noted above, the pace of change with regard to AI computational power is increasing swiftly. For that reason, the time we have available to resolve some of the complex dilemmas that may be created by AI is decreasing rapidly.

I

The unequal dialogue is integral to the use of military force, the crafting of military strategy, and the development of defense policy. Its purpose is to improve the probability of policy success. Accordingly, it involves open and candid discussions in which political and military leaders express their views regarding the advantages or disadvantages of various courses of action. It is unequal (or has been to this point) because the military remains the subordinate player in the dialogue and policymakers have the final say.[vii] Moreover, the inequality of the dialogue supports Cohen’s model of “active control,” whereby policy has the right, if not the duty, to override military commanders and to redirect their efforts at any time. After all, if war’s nature is predominantly (but not exclusively) political, then policy should have the last word when choosing strategic courses of action and overseeing their execution. Additionally, history offers an abundance of examples of how wrong military commanders can be about war and strategy, despite, or perhaps because of, their training and experience. Military advice is, therefore, essentially a matter of opinion, albeit a seasoned opinion in many cases. Indeed, the intense disputes between enemy-centric and population-centric approaches to counterinsurgency doctrine provide but one instance of how contradictory that advice can be.

For purposes of this article, AI simply means any automated process driven by algorithms, or sets of instructions, that improve the system’s performance of an activity, whether it be playing chess or Go, driving cars, or using drones to conduct reconnaissance and surveillance missions.[viii]

Improvements occur whenever systems perform these activities because some algorithms are designed to draw data from each event (such as a chess move) and to use those data to rewrite other algorithms. The performance of the system improves, or should, with each iteration of a task. In short, the system appears to be learning from its own experiences.

When linked to analytics, or the computational analysis of data, AI can accelerate the process of extracting meaningful patterns from vast seas of information.[ix] It can explore branches and sequels, accommodate variations in terrain, climate, weather, force structures, and it can assess data from war games, simulations, and historical case studies. Analytics are, of course, as old as arithmetic. But the ability to navigate oceans of data with an artificially intelligent analyst at the helm is new and is turning AI-enhanced analytics into what some pundits have called “prediction machines.”[x] A good prediction is nothing more than an answer that has a higher probability of being correct than other available answers for a given set of circumstances. The more good data we can feed into this process, the greater its probability of generating good predictions. One analysis of economic crises, for instance, predicted internal factors (such as shareholder uneasiness) were more important in triggering downturns than external events.[xi] Similarly, other research has predicted that persuading the population to share critical information about insurgent activities is more important in counterinsurgency campaigns than merely protecting noncombatants from combatants.[xii] Hence, the ongoing debate between enemy-centric and population-centric theories of counterinsurgency can now take a new turn. To be sure, AI-driven analytics cannot predict or guarantee victory. But they can reveal essential causal relationships among data in such a way as to move military opinion closer to verifiable fact.

Utilizing AI-enhanced analytics in this way has significant drawbacks that must be acknowledged. First, it requires accepting the proposition that historical data should guide future decisions. That proposition is a risky one because the circumstances of the past and the present are never the same, except in a controlled environment. Nonetheless, sometimes the proposition is born out. West Point’s football team follows its analytics when deciding whether to “go for it” on fourth down and short yardage situations. Variables such as time left in the game and field position are never quite the same when the decision has to be made; yet the analytics provide a reasonably reliable guideline for “predicting” which decision—going for it, punting, or attempting a field goal—would be most beneficial.[xiii] While the analytics are reliable, they are not always correct; moreover, it is easy to become over-reliant on them. Over-reliance is particularly problematic since incomplete, “bad,” or “poisoned” data and faulty or biased algorithms can undermine any AI system. Gathering good data and protecting them will be critical, as will filtering biases from our algorithms. These drawbacks notwithstanding,

we would do well to remember AI-driven analytics need not be flawless; they simply need to outperform human judgment on a consistent basis which, in turn, will give them credibility in the public's eye.

II

Just as AI-analytics can help improve a team's performance in competitive sports, so too it can enhance military advice by aiding in the cultivation of the military's corpus of professional knowledge. Over time, the rapid and iterative analysis of historical and other data made possible through AI-analytics will strengthen professional military advice by eliminating some of the faulty assumptions, or myths, that underpin it. Professional military advice will never be infallible, but it will become more credible and, therefore, more difficult for civilian policymakers to question or to overrule. Recall the 2003 testimony of US Army Chief of Staff, General Eric Shinseki. When questioned by the US Senate Armed Services Committee about the number of troops it would take to stabilize Iraq, Shinseki said he believed "several hundred thousand soldiers" would be needed.[xiv] His advice was the product of his considerable experience and training. But it was also subjective and, for that reason, imminently contestable. In fact, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz dismissed it as "wildly off the mark." [xv] With AI-enhanced analytics added to the debate, however, tomorrow's professional military advice may be slightly—but seldom wildly—off the mark. Again, it is less a question of whether Shinseki was right (some research claims he was not) than the fact that Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz were wrong, egregiously wrong.[xvi]

Accordingly, military advice will likely have to be taken more seriously in the future and it may well shape policy more than policy shapes it. Consider the additional persuasive power General Stanley McChrystal's 2009 strategic assessment of Afghanistan would have had with the benefit of AI-enhanced analytics.[xvii] At a minimum, it put enormous pressure on the Obama administration to commit more troops to Afghanistan; it also fueled (or refueled) the strategic debate along partisan lines.[xviii] If the predictive accuracy of such strategic assessments should increase, the military is likely to become more influential in shaping US defense and foreign policies. This concern is an especially important one given the high esteem in which the American public tends to hold its military professionals, compared to the generally low regard it has for its politicians.[xix] Most military professionals do not have to fight an uphill battle for credibility on defense matters; however, most policymakers do. Taken collectively, these factors suggest we may see the weight of the unequal dialogue either become more balanced—or shift in favor of the military.

To be sure, political leaders will retain the final word, legally and constitutionally. But in practice they may find

themselves tacitly deferring to military advice; for they will have little to gain by contradicting it. The situation will thus be one of de facto military, rather than civilian, supremacy in matters of defense policy and military strategy. If so, war's grammar (its guiding principles) may increasingly direct policy's logic. The examples of Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz, though more than a decade old, still serve as warnings to policymakers—the penalty for being wrong in wartime is high, as well it should be. Rumsfeld, Wolfowitz, and others ultimately lost their positions within the US government. If the unequal dialogue becomes more equal, or favors military professionals, it is also likely to undermine Cohen's model of active control, whereby political leaders insert themselves vigorously and repeatedly in the process of strategy formulation. Instead, we may see the emergence of what Cohen called "normal control," an ideal rather than a real model, in which political leaders allow the military to conduct operations largely unmolested.[xx]

Furthermore, we cannot rely on the military's professional code to prevent it from asserting itself in strategy debates, particularly if it believes its perspective is buoyed by a body of knowledge that has been scientifically validated. Over the course of US history, American political and military leaders have occasionally wrestled for control over the country's defense policies, and they will continue to do so. Some US political leaders have had to take extraordinary measures to counter stubborn or outspoken military experts. President Theodore Roosevelt orchestrated a debate over "all big-gun" battleships in 1907 that led to the "dethroning" of Alfred Thayer Mahan, America's foremost naval expert at the time. [xxi] President Calvin Coolidge instigated the court-martial of William "Billy" Mitchell, who had repeatedly criticized the US government for not establishing an independent air service.[xxii] America's "Revolt of the Admirals" in 1949 and its "Revolt of the Generals" in 2006 are examples of similar problems, wherein military professionals sought to coerce the government into pursuing a particular defense policy. [xxiii] As American social scientist Samuel Huntington once warned, democracies may well have more to fear from the military expert armed with superior technical knowledge than they might from the overt threat of a coup.[xxiv] In the age of AI-analytics, the importance of military experts will almost certainly increase.

At the same time, there is nothing to preclude policymakers from procuring their own sources of AI-analytics to counter those of military experts. The result will be an analytics arms race of sorts with each side attempting to outdo the other. In a word, analytics will become weaponized. But that will only make them more important, not less, in any strategic debate. Like footnotes in a scholarly book or article, analytics will be required sources for any serious strategic publication. The question will not be whether analytics are trustworthy, but rather whose or which analytics are most trustworthy. Eventually, the company with the better track record for reliable predictions will become the "Harvard of strategic analytics." Its voice will

count more than the others and buying that voice will not be cheap. But the larger issue is that outsourcing of strategic analyses in this way introduces a third interlocutor into the unequal dialogue. The role of that third interlocutor, moreover, will not necessarily strengthen the political side of the dialogue and may routinely weaken it depending on whether the military's professional knowledge rests on firm foundations or intuition.

All this is not to say the military would not experience considerable internal friction in the years ahead. The US military hardly speaks with one voice, despite the passing of the Goldwater-Nichols Act (1986) decades ago, and the services' subsequent movement toward jointness. Extant divisions and rivalries among and within the services would persist for a time, and may worsen considerably, as debates arise over how best (or whether) to incorporate the findings made possible by the new data sciences into a collective body of professional knowledge. Military experts, too, would become dependent on AI-driven analytics and would feel pressure to keep pace with a growing body of knowledge, or risk becoming irrelevant. Expertise, after all, can have a relatively brief shelf life. Analytics would also become integral to the congressional hearings and court-martials that follow any failed military action. We can easily imagine the military establishment censuring some of its commanders for not following those courses of action the official analytics of the day had recommended. Conversely, we can easily imagine military leaders being relieved for not knowing whether or when to override or discount the official analytics. We can only guess what analytics might have predicted about the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, the debacle of the Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961, or the failure of Desert One in 1980. As always, scapegoats will remain essential in politics and in war, and AI-analytics will cut both ways.

Conclusion

AI's famed singularity moment, which is still in the distant future, has drawn a disproportionate amount of our attention. While some experts claim the way ahead is for humans "to trust that AI knows better than them," this essay has put forth the counterclaim that placing our trust AI-analytics is the equivalent of a pseudo-singularity moment. [xxv] Such a moment may be neither harmful nor avoidable; however, we should approach it with an informed sense of its potential effects. Unfortunately, since AI computational power is doubling rapidly, the time we have available to discuss, debate, and perhaps prevent some of its effects is diminishing just as rapidly. Moreover, preliminary evidence suggests Generation Alpha (the "screenagers" born between 2010 and 2024) is more willing to trust AI and the data sciences than its predecessors have.[xxvi] As Generation Alpha matures, many of the speculations entertained in this essay stand to become less theoretical and more real.

Chief among these is the possibility that AI-analytics may render the future unequal dialogue more equal, or even unequal in the direction of the military. If so, then it will also challenge the fundamental proposition that policy's logic is entitled to override military grammar, even at the cost of the occasional failed operation. In the past, policy's primacy helped preserve civilian supremacy over the military, a vital principle for a democracy. However, the reality may turn out to be that, while policy remains entitled to override military grammar, it is unwilling to risk doing so. Hence, we will need to find ways to offset this *de facto* military supremacy. Yet it may also be time to discuss whether military grammar should, in fact, have some veto power over policy's logic, that is, whether a more equal dialogue might benefit the republic. Either way, we also need to realize the trust we place in any AI system is not fully ours to control.

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The Idlib Campaign 2019 – 2020

Eado Hecht – Israel



Fighters in the Free Syrian Army, Photo 34475926 Richard Harvey | Dreamstime.com

About the author

Dr Eado Hecht is an independent defense analyst specializing in military doctrine and its implementation. He teaches at Bar-Ilan University, Haifa University and the Israel Defense Forces Command and General Staff Colleges.

The aim of this article is to assess the military strategy, operations and tactics employed against each other by the Syrian Assad Regime on one side and the assortment of Rebel forces (often hostile to each other – sometimes actually fighting each other) on the other side during the year-long Idlib campaign. Each side was supported by outside forces who provide them political backing, money,

equipment, training and some combat units, but most of the actual fighting was done by the Regime and Rebel forces themselves and the focus will be on them.

The sources of the information on which this assessment is based are problematic. Information provided by the rivals is limited and replete with propaganda. Supposedly independent foreign journalists are few, often have agendas of their own, and are dependent on local informants, Rebels or Regime supporters, who are well aware of the narrative they are required to 'sell' by their respective superiors. Furthermore, the professional military understanding of many of these journalists is highly suspect. After trying to read between

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the lines of the news reports and viewing many video clips filmed by journalists and participants of the actions, and taking into account the limitations of these sources, the following is my understanding of the strategies, operations and tactics employed by the rivals. It must be considered a work in progress.

For the sake of brevity I will regard each of the rival sides as virtually homogenous politically and organizationally, though in reality they are not. Where the internal fractures affect the analysis I will mention them.

The Rival Political Goals

The rebellion began in 2011 as a series of protests on the economic situation in Syria, escalated to a demand for Regime-change which became a multi-sided civil war and partially converted to a religious war that drew into the conflict external-forces ideologically allied to the various factions. As the fighting escalated and evolved, new foreign forces intervened to serve interests that were neither internal-Syrian politics nor religion. There is no room here to catalogue all the various goals and variants that have been involved in the fighting. Furthermore, current allies fighting together for converging short-term goals might differ completely on their medium-term and long-term goals. So I will focus only on the immediate goals of the rivals and mention only divergences that are relevant for this specific campaign.



Location of Idlib in Syria

For the Assad Regime the goal is fairly simple – reestablish full control over all of the territory of Syria and any population as are willing to live under its domination. Anyone not willing to live under the Regime can leave. As with the other areas of Syria Assad's forces re-conquered, the Regime prefers possibly disloyal civilians to leave Syrian

territory for good and is willing to encourage that with fire.

The Russian goal in Syria is a fairly stable Assad Regime beholden to them, so they can maintain military bases in Syria, needed by them for political and strategic goals unrelated to the Syrian conflict and more important to them. Ostensibly Russia fully backs the Assad Regime and therefore provides it political and military support. However, there are limits to the extent Russia is willing to physically support Assad with direct involvement. Therefore, they do not want Assad doing something that could escalate the conflict – such as drawing Israel or Turkey into a head-on full-strength confrontation. For that reason, though they understand the need for Iranian involvement in Syria (manpower and money for the Regime) they are not enamoured with it – especially those actions that provoke Israel. They also understand Turkey's military advantage over Syria and do not want to have to put their own troops on the ground to save Assad from the Turks. Furthermore, the Russians seem to have a more sophisticated understanding than the Assad Regime and its supporters of the combination of non-military with military actions to further the achievement of the political ends (see below).

Iran wants the Assad Regime to survive and retake control of Syria's territory as part of its Shiite Crescent initiative – to create a contiguous land corridor from Iran to the Mediterranean Sea dominated by Shiites. However, Iran's other political goals are less relevant to the Idlib campaign so, I will stop there.

The Rebels' short-term goal is survival – maintain some embers of the rebellion burning. In the longer term, if they survive, what to do with those embers is an issue of dispute between the Global Jihad oriented Rebels and those who are focused only on the internal political future of Syria, and among the latter – between more religious groups and more secular ones.

It should be noted that though from late 2018 mid-March 2020 the fighting in Idlib was the most intense – various Rebel factions and remnants of ISIS are still waging low intensity guerrilla warfare in many of other, ostensibly pacified, areas. The casualties they claim to be causing the Regime are probably exaggerated but are a constant thorn in the Regime's side. Furthermore, there is still 'powder in the pan' of many of the ostensibly pacified groups across Syria and so the Regime must tread lightly in order to not to reignite the fires. A Regime defeat in Idlib could throw a match into one or more of those 'pans'.

The Turks are also treading carefully. They have various goals in Syria, but as far as the campaign in Idlib is concerned, they are apparently driven by three – two driving to increase involvement and one inhibiting it:

- a. They fully support the Rebel's ultimate political goal

of overthrowing the Assad Regime and therefore their short-term goal of maintaining the rebellion.

- b. They fear a Regime victory will drive a couple of million more Syrian refugees into Turkey.
- c. Conversely, they are willing to be militarily involved in the campaign only to a limit that does not risk full-scale involvement in the war – especially if that risks a collision with Russia or risks a military humiliation that might provide a morale boost to the Kurdish rebellion inside Turkey...[i] They prefer to have surrogates do their fighting for them, but have tried to mark red-lines on the ground with their own troops (from autumn 2018 Turkish troops manned a series of platoon to company sized observation posts marking the perimeter of the Rebel enclave of Idlib as a ceasefire line), only to have those red-lines crossed by the Assad Regime and being forced to accept this. The risks to Turkey are not just military – in the past Russia retaliated with painful economic sanctions when Turkey angered it.

The Rival Strategies

Rebel Strategy

The Rebel strategy is defensive. They are not trying to conduct irregular (guerrilla) warfare – i.e., absorb Regime attacks with pinprick ambushes and then compel them to withdraw by small raids. To the contrary, **they are fighting to hold ground**. When they lose ground, they attempt to concentrate forces to counterattack to retake it. That does not preclude guerrilla-style raids and ambushes in Idlib itself and into the surrounding areas dominated by the Regime forces, but these are secondary – just as in the First World War the nightly raids by the rival armies on each others' trenches were secondary to the major offensive and defensive battles.

Regime Strategy

Regime strategy, no doubt authored and mentored by Russian advisers, is to reduce Idlib piece by piece, not to risk a major defeat or even large numbers of casualties in a single large offensive. The strategic goal seems to be two-fold: capture the territory and kill, wound or capture as many enemy fighters as possible. This strategy differs from what we have seen in the past. In the first few years of the rebellion Assad tried to hold everything and counter-attacked to regain anything lost all at once. This did not work. The Syrian army, about 600,000 strong (including Reserves) when the rebellion began, lost roughly half its personnel to desertions (the exact number of defectors are moot – up

to a hundred thousand or more in either direction) and conscription was limited to loyal population groups who were a minority of the entire population. Dispersed all over Syria to hold everything at once and retake anything lost at once, his remaining forces were gradually worn-down and lost territory.

Shortly after the Russian intervention a new strategy was employed:

- First, retake province by province, instead of trying to retake all territory simultaneously – thus allowing a superior concentration of forces in each separate offensive.
- Second, in each province not only attack, also offer the Rebels a way out: surrender and choose between giving-up your weapons and swearing fealty to the Regime, or **surrender and be provided a bus to carry you and your personal weapon to Idlib province**.
- Third, don't hurry. Minimize Regime casualties by maximum use of firepower over a long time with a minimum of ground maneuvers to follow-up the successes of the bombardments by capturing only important locations that strengthen the pressure on the Rebels and enable applying firepower more effectively on the next objectives.

As can be seen from the second point – each province pacified actually strengthened the Rebel forces around Idlib. The idea, apparently, was that one big battle for Idlib after a few dozen small ones for the other provinces was better than a series of medium battles in each province with the casualties they would entail.

As can be seen since the beginning of the offensive on Idlib from early 2019, there are still some concepts of this strategy that are being applied – take your time, win bit by bit, but at least for now there is no capitulation offer on the table – except perhaps for a total unconditional surrender which the Rebels are not likely to accept.

Rival Operations

The plans have not been published so they can only be surmised from the conduct of operations over the past year.

To understand the rival operations, one must first understand the geographical and geopolitical layout of the province and then the general size and tactical composition of the rival forces.

Terrain



Topography and Frontline January 2019

Schematically one can describe the topography as divided into strips of flat to undulating low-ground separated by strips of more undulating to hilly high-ground. The general 'flow' of each strip is north to south. The westernmost high-ground strip is along the Turkish border and fairly steep and rough. The next strip is the fairly low and flat Orontes river valley, followed by a narrow strip of slightly hilly high-ground, another flat valley which then climbs moderately to the high and gently hilly Jebel al-Zawiya. Finally, the widest strip is east of Jebel al-Zawiya, low and flat to undulating. The city of Idlib, which the province is named after, is north of Jebel al-Zawiya in a lower-ground corridor connecting the easternmost strip of low-ground to the central strip of low-ground. Of course, there are no sharp boundaries between the strips – transformation from one to the other is gradual.

Along the fuzzy natural boundary between the Jebel al-Zawiya and the low-ground to its east, passes the M5 highway that connects the important city of Aleppo in the north to Hama, then Homs and finally Damascus in the south – the four demographic, commercial, industrial and political centers of Syria. There are bypass roads connecting these cities, but this is the only highway and therefore, beyond its technical and economic importance as a wide (four lanes) paved road, that enables heavy two-way traffic, it is also important politically. Control by the Rebels symbolizes the separation between the Syrian political heartland in the south and Aleppo in the north. Control by the Regime symbolizes the gradual return to pre-rebellion normalcy.

The second important route is the east-west M4, connecting the major Mediterranean port of Latakia to the M5 and via the M5 to Aleppo. Again, there are minor routes that enable bypassing the M4, but its width (mostly only a two-lane major route plus a short section of four lanes) and directness confer it economic and political importance beyond its mere technical specifics.

The junction of the two routes occurs at the town of Saraqib, conferring importance to control of that town above others.

The original 1.5 million inhabitants of the province were scattered mostly in agricultural villages, interspersed with small towns and a few bigger ones. Another 1.5 to perhaps 2.5 million refugees from other parts of Syria inhabit tent-towns mostly close to the Turkish border in the north-west of the province.

The villages are scattered at distances of 2.5 to 5 kilometers apart. Most of the villages are built on small rises in the ground and are surrounded by open agricultural fields. The fields are currently completely barren and therefore do not impede the view all the way to the next village. Towns are sparser, but most are merely villages that have grown as commercial centers for the surrounding villages. The villages and towns are therefore the tactical positions and progress is reported by both sides specifically in the number of villages and towns successfully defended or captured on a particular day. Towns are generally more important because they reside on route-hubs, but since cross-country travel in the dry season (most of the year) is fairly easy, unless they happen to reside on the M5 or M4, they are not much more important than the villages.

The villages are composed mostly of one or two storey individual family houses. Density of the houses varies: in some villages or parts of villages the proximity of houses is fairly close, in others there are wider spaces with gardens or natural vegetation between them. Town centers are generally denser and, in some areas, also have taller buildings, though not high-rise towers. Also, around the towns there are small industrial areas characterized by large hangar-type buildings and office buildings of various sizes and densities.

Rebel Operations

The size and unit organization of the Rebel forces are not clear – quoted personnel numbers vary from 50,000 to 100,000; but how many of them are actually fighters? They are divided among a number of separate allied groups (though sometimes they fight each other – so the term 'allies' should be regarded loosely) – the strongest being the local Al-Qaeda affiliates who have imposed (occasionally by violence) a certain level of coordination and cooperation between them all. They use organizational terms such as companies, battalions and brigades – but these seem mere hyperbole. They have heavy and medium weapons – tanks, artillery (guns, rocket-launchers, mortars), IFVs (infantry fighting vehicles), APCs (armoured personnel carriers), automatic anti-aircraft cannon and guided anti-tank missiles – most captured from the Syrian army, some supplied by foreign supporters. Since many served in that army before defecting to the rebellion, they know how to employ them, both on the mechanical level and the tactical level. And yet they seem to be employing them in very small

groups only, as fire bases. So perhaps the total available number is too small for mechanized unit actions. Another weapon in their arsenal is a plethora of small drones. These are mostly for surveillance, but dozens have been employed to drop small bombs (factory produced or improvised and varying in size from hand-grenades to RPG rocket warheads to small-calibre mortar bombs). Also, they have conducted small-swarm attacks with suicide-drones carrying explosives. However, the Rebels' main combat weapon is the infantryman armed with a rifle, a light machine-gun or an RPG launcher.

Commensurate with their mission to hold their ground, their inferior firepower and Regime air-superiority, overall Rebel defensive operations are:

- Rigid: Not surrendering ground willingly.
- Mostly static: Holding specific villages, towns and hill-tops rather than maneuvering between them.
- Mostly passive: Mostly fending off attacks on their combat positions, with occasional counterattacks to regain lost ground (3 big counterattacks and approximately 25 small ones in a year of fighting) and very rarely, if at all, attempting spoiling-attacks to disrupt Regime attacks before or while they occur. This relative passivity is when facing Regime offensives – during the long periods of static warfare, the Rebels are very active in conducting small raids, long-range direct-fire fire (from rifles and machine-guns to mortars and guided anti-tank missiles) and artillery fire to harass the front-line Regime forces.

The Rebel forces are mostly scattered in a loose necklace of positions (each one a fortified village/town or dug-in on empty hill-tops) around the outer edges of the province in an attempt to create a defensive crust that will deflect Regime offensives wherever they come. How thick that 'crust' is at any one place (how many villages in depth are being held simultaneously in any particular sector) I have not been able to determine.

There are some mobile forces (riding armoured vehicles, small and medium trucks and pick-up trucks) held in reserve and occasionally these are sent forward to reinforce areas under attack or to counter-attack to regain lost ground, but I have not been able to determine the exact proportion of these forces relative to those holding ground up-front – other than that they are fairly minor.

Regime Operations

The size and composition of the Regime forces is almost as nebulous as that of the Rebels. Unit organizations declared in the media have no bearing on the actual organizations in action – thus, a 'division' might be an actual, albeit somewhat reduced, division, or it might be an honorific

denoting a couple of thousand pro-Regime militia men. As a rough guesstimate Regime and allied forces in the region number perhaps 30,000 or so actual fighters (i.e., not including administrative and technical troops). The Syrian army has more tanks, infantry fighting vehicles, APCs, and artillery pieces of all types and sizes than the Rebels, but, if the numbers are correct, fewer infantry.

Tasked with taking the province and destroying the Rebels at the least cost in casualties, while reducing the probability of massed Turkish military intervention, the Regime forces' operational concept has been a very gradual step-by-step offensive. Each step aimed at taking a relatively small 'bite' of the ground held by the Rebels, each unit taking a village or two per assault, and then halting for hours to days before the next step – advancing from village to village, hill-top to hill-top, more often than not in pincers a few kilometers apart, to surround selected areas before assaulting to clear them. With a few units attacking simultaneously, on most successful days the Regime claimed to have captured a dozen to two dozen villages and towns. But not all days were successful... It is not completely clear what drives the selection between areas assaulted directly vice areas surrounded first – it seems to be a preference to capture smaller villages first in order to surround bigger villages and towns before attempting to capture them. That may be an indication to the deployment of Rebel troops – weaker in the smaller villages, stronger in the larger villages and towns.

I haven't seen an attempt to very quickly close the pincers so as to prevent the defenders from retreating – hence I deduce that they seem more focused on taking ground than on killing the enemy. Perhaps it also has to do with a reluctance to pay the casualties necessary to physically annihilate a desperate and fanatically determined foe. Though western media has focused on the casualties inflicted by Regime troops on the Rebels and on their civilian supporters, the reality is that throughout the war Regime troops and civilian supporters have suffered almost as many casualties, the supply of new troops is not limitless and their morale is brittle, as evidenced from their behaviour during reverses.

After only sporadic bombardments from September 2018 to February 2019, the Regime's offensive campaign began unofficially in February 2019 with a gradual escalation in the intensity of air strikes and artillery bombardments, followed, from 6 May 2019, by a series of limited offensive manoeuvres interspersed with days or weeks of bombardments sans manoeuvres: from 6 May to 5 June 2019, the Regime focus was on conquering the southern sector of Jebel al-Zawiya; then, from 28 July 2019 till 18 February 2020, on capturing the entire length of the M5 highway and the territory to its east. In late February 2020 they again focused temporarily on the southern Jebel al-Zawiya, and then, following Rebel counter-attacks that retook a portion of the M5, they refocused along that highway, retook the lost ground, reopened the road to Aleppo, and by 7 March had

taken all of the ground also west and north-west of Aleppo, creating a defensive zone between the M5 and Aleppo and the as yet Rebel-held territory.[ii]



Change in Frontline from January 2019 to March 2020

As they advanced, Regime forces bypassed a dozen Turkish strongpoints set up just behind the pre-campaign Rebel front line to delineate and monitor the Turkish-Russian de-escalation agreement of 2018. These strongpoints are now surrounded deep in Regime territory. The Regime forces ignored them (though in some cases they claim the Turks fired on Regime forces bypassing them) and allow Turkish supply convoys to travel to them. Turkish troops have been killed or wounded, but it seems that virtually all such incidents were due to local identification errors (most were hit in air strikes or artillery fire) and perhaps occasionally when Regime units returned fire at Turkish units who initiated engagements.

Turkish operations

From January 2020 Turkey attempted to intercede on behalf of the Rebels without getting embroiled in a full-scale war. It inserted increasing numbers of troops, armour and artillery into the Rebel enclave, provided artillery support for the Rebels and increased supplies of weapons and ammunition. Turkish reinforcements were deployed defensively behind the Rebel front line, staying out of direct fire range and out of sight of Regime ground troops, mostly along the M4 to create a barrier against further Regime advance along this route and some in northern Idlib. Turkey repeatedly issued ultimatums that the Regime forces must withdraw, or it would attack them. These were ignored by the Assad Regime, more than likely with Russian backing.

After suffering sporadic casualties from Regime and Russian air strikes and artillery bombardments (accruing 15 to 20 fatalities and a few dozen wounded over a month of fighting), on 27 February 2020 a single air strike killed 34

Turkish soldiers and wounded a few dozen more. Over the coming days Turkey retaliated with a few hundred drone strikes, most independent of and some coordinated with Rebel counterattacks, and rushed thousands of troops and many tanks, APCs and self-propelled guns into Idlib, to create a Turkish defence-line behind the Rebel front-line.

Negotiations between Turkey and Russia ended in a ceasefire gradually implemented from 5 March. Again, Turkey's demand that the Regime forces retreat to the status quo ante was ignored. Unwilling to escalate its military engagement, Turkey acquiesced to the Regime's gains and has been denounced by the Rebels and local civilian population as traitors for doing so. The M4 was designated a 'security corridor' to be patrolled jointly by Turkish and Russian troops.

Summary of Operations

To sum up: in a year-long campaign the Regime gradually captured approximately 2,700 square kilometers of approximately 6,200 square kilometers of Rebel territory, opened the main highway connecting Aleppo, the demographic, economic and political hub of north-western Syria, to the Syrian demographic, economic and political heartland in the cities of the south-west – Hama, Homs and Damascus, at a reasonable price for the Regime. However, Turkey is now militarily invested in the area still in Rebel hands – for how long and whether this will put more than a temporary stop on the Regime offensive waits to be seen.

Rival Tactics

Rebel Tactics

I have found no explicit details of the Rebels' defensive tactics, but, given that many, perhaps most, of the Rebel commanders were trained in the Syrian army before defecting or in foreign armies before volunteering to the Rebel cause, reading between the lines of the published battle reports and viewing hours of video footage of the battles, I assess the following principles were and are guiding Rebel defensive tactics:

- The main combat positions were the dozens of villages and towns scattered all over the region.
- In some locations the Rebels built 360-degree fortified combat-positions composed of trenches and earth-berms on small rises in the open ground between villages. No explanation has been published by the Rebels for this divergence from their more common practice of defending inside the villages. From looking at a couple of these locations, I surmise that the reasons are that the line of sight between adjacent villages was blocked by higher ground or the distance between adjacent villages was too great to control by fire from

the villages themselves. The rebels, therefore, built these positions to compensate for those deficiencies.

- It is likely that some combat positions were deemed to be 'security' positions – manned to provide early-warning and delay the Syrian army, while the main defence forces prepare to fight in the line of positions deemed 'holding' positions. This point is one of the more difficult to establish, but some villages seem to be held more fervently while in others the defenders are less obstinate. This could also be because of differences between the people holding each position – so it is still moot.
- Defensive combat generally began with fire from the combat positions over the open fields they dominate which were regarded as kill-zones – creating interlocking fire between adjacent villages. The one qualification here is that the distances between positions were such that small arms fire was irrelevant except to defend each position itself. So only heavier weapons were effective in providing the overlap of fire between adjacent positions – medium to long range guided anti-tank missiles, mortars and heavy machine-guns or light automatic cannon and of course armed-drones. The Rebels possess artillery, rocket launchers and field guns, but I do not know the number and I have never seen a photograph or video in which more than a couple are shown together, so they were probably not able to create artillery fire-concentrations. No doubt ammunition stores also were not enough for concentrating fire massive enough to block a determined assault – therefore the essence of the defence was the fighting inside the villages. In at least some actions they have reportedly received support from Turkish artillery.
- The tactical defence of each village in itself was flexible: i.e., rather than rigidly defending the outskirts, exposed to the longer-ranged fire-power of Regime forces, they preferred allowing Regime forces into the village, where the firepower advantage of the Regime forces was mitigated by the short inter-visibility ranges. The defenders combined static and mobile actions: choosing specific buildings to fight from and fighting from them, come what may, while others seem to be held only temporarily – the defenders moving between them. They also combined both passive and aggressive actions: mixing purely defensive holding of buildings with many small counterattacks to retake buildings captured by the Regime forces or counterattacks to harass but not retake. Among the aggressive actions was the use of vehicles loaded with explosives driven into attacking Regime forces by suicide drivers, though this seems to have been less common than in past years of the Civil War.

The Rebels mounted a number of counterattacks aimed at

retaking lost towns and villages. The forces were brought forward on pick-ups, vans and light trucks to assembly areas in villages facing the chosen objectives and from there they usually attacked on foot. I have, however, seen footage of mounted assaults of infantry in armoured vehicles (some actual APCs captured from the Regime, some improvised from trucks with armour welded on and, in one case, T55 tanks converted to APCs by having their turrets removed and a low armoured box welded in its place and a not insignificant number of Turkish-supplied ACV-15s and M113s) crossing open ground, while firing top-mounted machine-guns and dismounting 'in the objective'. Most photographs or footage show, at most, half-a-dozen tanks and armoured vehicles in a single attack (usually less), with most of the force fighting on foot. However, at least one fully armoured attack, a counterattack to retake the village of Miznaz, included a few tanks and 15 to 20 APCs. The attacking force was annihilated in the open, a few dozen to a few hundred meters before reaching the village by the defending Regime forces. Very few rebels survived, if any.

Attacking infantry attempted to use ground for cover, moving in dispersed single file to exploit the cover. Exposed ground was crossed in rushes in widely dispersed formations.

In the past the Jihadi groups often used suicide-bomb vehicles to lead their attacks,[iii] but during the Idlib campaign these have rarely been mentioned in offensive contexts, though, as mentioned above, they have been used in defensive actions. That does not mean there have not been any, but it does suggest a reduction in using them.

The attacking force was generally provided supporting and covering fire by a small number of artillery and tanks and a plethora of medium weapons, usually emplaced beyond the flanks of the attacking infantry to prevent masking. Given the limited number of artillery weapons and ammunition and lack of target acquisition and fire control equipment, these bombardments were generally small and not very accurate. However, from December 2019 to March 2020 the Rebels received support also from Turkish artillery which, given its more advanced technology, was probably more effective.

Regime Tactics

Regime tactics are just as hard to deduce. Offensive tactics were easier to see, but they too must often be pieced together from bits of information, textual, verbal and video. Defensive tactics were virtually invisible except for the general layout of the occasional strongpoint. Regime tactics were certainly focused more on mixed tank and mechanized infantry actions, heavily supported by artillery and air-strikes, conducting dismounted infantry actions inside the villages or to capture fortified objectives.

The typical attack was as follows:

- A heavy long-duration (a few days to a few weeks) bombardment of the area to be captured. After watching quite a few videos showing these bombardments from both viewpoints, it seems they used various types of drones to search for the Rebel positions over a long period of time, before, during and after air strikes and artillery bombardments. Often the bombs and artillery shells were landing in the middle of villages or towns. These were often described by western media reporters as indiscriminate attacks on civilians, and no doubt there were those too, but since most, if not all, of the front-line villages were abandoned by the civilian population shortly after the first bombs and shells fell, it is more likely they were striking targets that had been identified by the drone-operators as Rebel positions – unless of course they just enjoyed wasting bombs and shells on empty targets for fun... This also fits my assessment that to reduce exposure to direct fire most of the Rebel positions were inside the villages rather than on their outskirts.
- When ready, the Regime concentrated tanks, armoured vehicle mounted infantry and walking infantry in villages adjacent to the area to be attacked. Some of the tanks conducted direct fire on chosen targets, identified or suspected Rebel positions, to destroy or at least suppress them; the other tanks lead the attack over the open ground followed by the mounted infantry. Walking infantry usually attacked through small woods and orchards in a manner fairly similar to the Rebels, as described above. I haven't seen large formations – the biggest force I saw was, perhaps, a battalion combat team – that doesn't mean they don't employ bigger forces, but these don't fit in the average cameraman's field of view. I also only rarely saw anything bigger than a platoon in line formation. Most footage shows small columns driving as fast as they can from the assembly-area village to the objective village and then spreading out a bit to fight along the village streets and from house to house.
- Inside the villages and towns, they seemed to prefer converging attacks from a number of directions. When the tanks lead, they advanced slowly in the streets, shooting into houses, the infantry following dismounted from house to house. Most of the infantry movement seemed to be in the streets, only entering houses that have to be cleared. When the infantry lead, they brought up a tank every time they 'bumped into' serious resistance.
- Virtually all Regime attacks are conducted during daylight to fully exploit their fire power advantage.

An interesting variance occurred during the Turkish aerial counterattack, numbering hundreds of drone strikes, in late February. The Turks claimed to have 'neutralized' **thousands** of Regime soldiers and destroyed a great deal of equipment.

I highly doubt the veracity of this claim – the Regime forces recovered their balance too quickly for that.^[iv] After the initial shock wore off the Regime forces continued to attack but changed tactics. Instead of tank and armour-mounted-infantry based assaults during the day, the 25th division, for example, conducted a number of walking infantry-based assaults during the night. Theoretically that should not have reduced the ability of the night-vision equipped Turkish drones, but the assaults succeeded and took more ground from the Rebels before Russia and Turkey agreed to a ceasefire on 5 March and Assad concurred. How many other units did the same is not clear.

Regime defensive tactics seemed focused on fire power no less than their offensive tactics. In 2017 I personally observed a defensive battle near the border with Israel. The Rebels were trying to capture a Regime-held town with an infantry assault supported by some artillery fire. As they advanced in open formation across the open ground from the town they were based in to the town they wished to capture, the Regime forces smothered them for a few hours with a heavy artillery bombardment – during those hours hundreds upon hundreds of shells fell in varying frequencies on the intervening ground (sometimes sounding like a continuous drum-roll, sometimes more isolated 'bangs'). Eventually the Rebels retreated. Footage of Rebel counterattacks in Idlib is usually only available from their side and usually shows only snippets of small forces attacking, while claiming the capture of up to a dozen villages in a day of fighting. The background sounds of artillery are not very intense, nor does one see the concentrated dust-clouds of a defensive bombardment such as the one I saw in 2017. There is no reason to suppose the Regime forces have lost the ability to conduct heavy defensive barrages. So, perhaps they are simply not deploying to actually hold the ground they took in a continuous line and most of the villages the Rebels recapture are either empty or merely security positions – the majority of the Regime force pulled-back to prepare for the next attack rather than consolidating their gains? Actual defence of conquered ground seems to have occurred only where Regime commanders deemed specific ground vital or important – villages or towns located on or very near main movement arteries and on especially dominating ground. Be that as it may, each successful Rebel counterattack is countered by a day or two of artillery and aerial bombardment, and then counter-attacked to reconquer the ground retaken by the Rebels.

Summary

Looking forward, the future of the remnant Rebel enclave of Idlib will be decided by the determination of Turkey to fight for it, or at least to convince the Russians and Assad that they are willing to fight for it.

If the Turks significantly reduce their current military presence Assad will very likely resume the offensive –

though circumspectly so as not to trigger a Turkish return. The Regime operational concepts and tactics have worked, so we can expect them to continue to employ them also in the future. Some media reports describe the Russians and the Regime working hard to rebuild the army – filling up vacant posts with new conscripts, reorganizing and rearming the forces to gradually build true divisions (especially mechanized divisions) and brigades.

However, if the Turks remain adamant and invested, Assad and the Russians will probably reorient their military focus to the pacified but not yet quiet areas to the south and south-east. From April 2020 fighting in southern Syria escalated slightly and the Regime transferred some troops from Idlib to that area. In the foreseeable future the Kurdish area (north-eastern Syria) is unlikely to be a target for Regime military operations because of the American presence and the fairly good, if mostly covert, relations between the Regime and the Kurds. The Kurdish areas include oil-fields and persistent reports claim they have been and are selling the oil to Assad. In October 2019, when President Trump declared the American withdrawal and the Turks attacked the Kurdish region, the Kurds requested Assad's assistance and agreed for Syrian units to enter their territory to block the Turkish advance.

If the Turks withdraw their troops from Idlib, the Rebels will need much improved operational and tactical capabilities to maintain their enclave. Achieving this depends very

much on Turkish assistance. As noted above, many Rebel commanders have the schooling to achieve more – what they lack are the means and a unified organization. Rebel unit training probably exists (I have seen video footage of what seems to be a company exercise), but to what level is impossible to work out from available information. The Turks already train a specific Syrian Rebel militia they have employed as proxies against the Kurds, but to provide advanced military training and heavy weapons to forces dominated by an al-Qaeda affiliate requires a willingness to risk not only Russian disapproval, but American and European as well. Will the Turks provide them with much needed heavy weapons and ammunition and advanced unit-training? To date they have been careful not to – they have supplied much light weapons and other needed supplies, but the heaviest weapons have been a number of anti-tank missiles and mortars and armoured-personnel carriers. The repeated political humiliations by the Russians and Assad (Erdogan's propaganda organs aside, many in Turkey and Syria criticized his dismal achievements in the March 2020 negotiations – to the point of calling him a traitor to the cause) may push them to risk doing so. If they do, we may expect a future Regime offensive to collide with a much more robust defence. To avoid another political defeat by allowing the Rebels to be crushed on the one hand and not anger the Russians, Americans and Europeans on the other, it seems the Turks will have to maintain their presence in Idlib for a while yet.

References

[i] Unlike north-eastern Syria, where Turkey has also intervened militarily in the fighting, the Idlib area has no Kurds in it, but a military humiliation could give heart to the Kurds in north-eastern Syria and in Turkey itself to escalate their military operations against Turkey.

[ii] To be precise, some of this ground is outside the Idlib provincial boundaries but it was part of the Rebels' territory contiguous with the Idlib province.

[iii] Often assaults began with a series of trucks each carrying several tons of explosives: the first would explode on the obstacle protecting the Regime position, clearing a route for the second to explode at the entrance to the position, and finally a third exploding in the heart of the position. I have not seen this tactic, or any other multiple vehicle attack, used in the Idlib campaign.

[iv] Also, some of the footage displayed by the Turks to prove their claims seems 'fishy' (for example, in one piece some of the background of the target seems to have changed between pre-hit and post-hit frames) – but I am not an imagery expert. Also, some of the footage from the Regime side during strikes shows Syrian Regime troops weathering the strikes – though that too, in this propaganda intensive war, should be regarded suspiciously.

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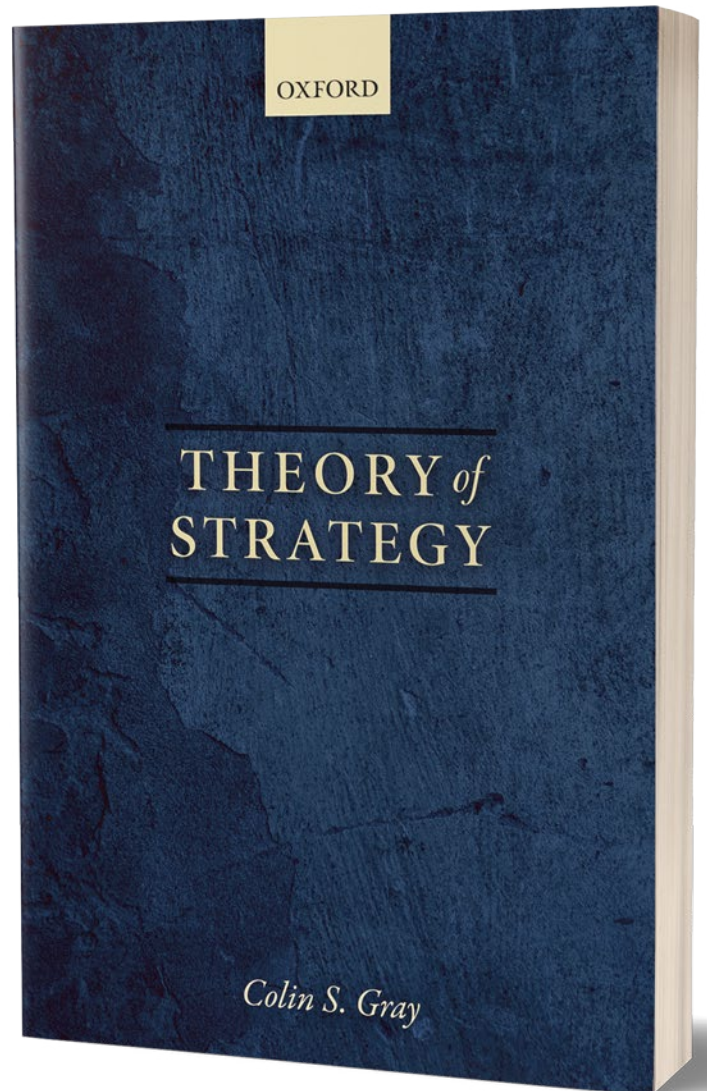
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Strategic Decision Making – A Case Study

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Throughout history, professional military officers have studied the past to learn strategic planning and decision making. While history remains the best means to study strategy, it is problematic due to imperfect knowledge of actual events and personal biases infecting hindsight. If

these are some of the problems, what are solutions to using history in a more effective manner as a tool to sharpen strategic thinking? This paper examines how practitioners can develop strategy by demonstrating a methodology for constructing alternate courses of action in a historical case study. Studying options, using information known at the time and that could have been gleaned with a greater investment in intelligence, is one of the building blocks to developing a strategically analytical mind. Gaming-out options starts with identifying the enemy's most likely and most dangerous strategic course of action. From this point one can develop a theory of victory (TOV), meaning a concept

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of what conditions are necessary to defeat the enemy's strategy, such as gaining command of the sea or winning a decisive land battle. With a theory of victory, one can then develop an overall strategy, effectively a blueprint, to accomplish it. The strategy is then honed by comparison to the enemy's most likely response. This analysis results in alternate courses of action that are in turn honed until the most efficient and effective strategy to achieve the policy objective has been determined. The goal is to implement a history-driven process that can be carried forward to developing future strategic contingencies.

The 1904-05 Russo-Japanese War serves as our model because its historical record provides clear data of the belligerents' policy objectives, orders of battle, their internal political structure, the geostrategic landscape, the theater's infrastructure, and clear geographical features that dictated Japan's lines of attack. Simplifying the exercise is that this war was a limited conventional struggle between two great powers with little to no interference by allied or third-party nations. Furthermore, the belligerents foresaw a military confrontation well before the first shots and had time to develop and resource a chosen strategy. Due to limitations of space this paper will be confined to an overview of five Russian strategic options.

Nine months prior to the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War, General Alexiev Kuropatkin, Russia's Minister of War, toured the Far East and predicted a Japanese attack. The Russian Imperial Navy had also anticipated war with Japan and gone so far as conducting war games to assess the likelihood of victory.[i] Their foresight provides the temporal starting point to examining Russian strategic options to counter a possible Japanese offensive.

The question is: how does one build strategic options? Following Sun Tzu's prescription to "know thyself and thy enemy" and Carl von Clausewitz's admonition that policy is the primary determinate of the nature of war, the Russians first needed to discern Japan's policy objective. By knowing what they sought to gain from the war, Russian leaders could then determine Japan's optimal TOV and thereafter their strategy. Russian planners could have further dissected this strategy's operational components, discerning Japan's course of action by determining the strategic end state and logically discerning how the Japanese military would arrive at it. From this point, Kuropatkin could then develop Russia's optimal strategic counter. The methodology worked in the following manner. Prior to Japan's surprise attack on the Russian fleet based at Port Arthur (now Lushan, China), the Japanese government had publicly opposed Russian encroachment into the Korean peninsula and Manchuria. In the case of war the obvious Japanese policy would be to drive the Russian government and military permanently out of these regions and supplant their authority. Defeating Russian forces in Manchuria was their only means to accomplish the policy. This strategic end state required control of the sea to project the army

ashore and then secure a land victory to break Russia's will. Owing to Russia's drastically larger manpower and financial resources, the Japanese recognized the need for a relatively short war that only decisive battles could deliver. Japan's most likely strategic course of action informs analysis of Russia's options to counter it and achieve its policy objective of retaining control of Manchuria and increasing influence in the Far East.

Strategic Naval Option 1: Decisive Naval Battle

The United States' legendary naval theorist, Alfred Thayer Mahan, argued that Russia's best option was to prepare for and execute a decisive naval battle using the seven battleships of its Pacific Squadron. Arguably the Russians had critical advantages over the Japanese at sea. Overall, Russia possessed a much larger fleet and if properly concentrated, as Mahan advocated, it could have traded ships with Japan and still won the war. If Russia was victorious at sea, Japan could not have landed on the Asian mainland, hence Russia would have retained Manchuria and achieved a quick, decisive victory! Because Japan could only win the war on land, Russia had the advantage of being able to risk its fleet and if defeated, fall back on the army to deny the Japanese their objective.

The key to adopting Mahan's strategy was immediate action the moment Kuropatkin realized war was to occur in the near future. First, the Russians should have appointed their best admiral, the dynamic, charismatic and already internationally renowned Vice-Admiral Ossipovitch Makarov, to command the Russian Pacific Squadron at Port Arthur. The history of the war revealed what Russian leaders already knew of Makarov's capabilities. In one month of command, before his ship, the *Petropavlosk*, struck a mine and carried him down with it, he drastically improved the sailors' seamanship, gunnery, and morale to an extent that the Russian Pacific Squadron could challenge the Japanese navy on an equal footing. Second, Kuropatkin should have ordered and resourced a naval "intelligence preparation of the battlefield" (IPB) of the Japanese navy's order of battle and capabilities to identify his own navy's requirements. To win control of the sea, Russia needed overwhelming superiority of battleships, a problem Russia could have been rectified with ships idling in European waters. A reinforced fleet, with Makarov at the helm, would have been fully capable of winning decisively at sea. Seeking out the Japanese fleet for a decisive battle would have been relatively easy, because it was bound to protecting the army coming ashore. Makarov could have struck immediately after Japan fired the first shots or waited until a substantial force had come ashore and then destroyed the Japanese warships, leaving a significant portion of the army stranded in Korea. Kuropatkin's strategic, operational, and tactical naval options would have abounded with proper preparation, which Russia was wholly capable of doing because they foresaw the coming war, possessed the world's third largest

navy, and were blessed with an excellent fighting admiral.

Strategic Naval Option 2: Commerce Raiding

If the Russians had deemed decisive naval battle too risky, a secondary naval option would have been a commerce war. Japan was particularly vulnerable to this strategic option due to its relatively small merchant marine, the refusal of neutral vessels to carry Japanese war materials, and the reality of its navy having to guard against the possibility of a Russian fleet sortie from Port Arthur. Mahan rightly assessed that Russia's flawed disposition of its commerce raiding cruisers, deployed alongside the battleships based at Port Arthur, rather than dispersed to unguarded Vladivostok, meant it was unprepared to seize opportunity after Japan attacked. Implementing this strategy, though, would have required forethought beyond what Mahan discusses. As with the prior strategy, European based cruisers should have been shifted to Vladivostok in the ten months prior to war to have made this a viable option. Makarov could have conducted exercises, identified his ablest commanders, and used the naval IPB to discern the best operational approaches to this strategic option. Russia did none of these preparations and found itself with ad hoc commerce raiding operations which proved a dedicated strategy of this nature had much potential to change the course of the war, if it had been properly planned for and resourced. For example, three Russian cruisers sank Japanese transports carrying critical war materials such as siege guns for Port Arthur and American made locomotives Japan needed to project its army into Manchuria. Some analysts concluded that loss of the siege guns alone delayed Port Arthur's fall by months and drastically increased casualties. With proper coordination, the Russian battleships of the Russian Pacific Squadron could have threatened the Japanese army's sea lines of communication on the western flank of the Korean peninsula to pin Japan's limited naval forces. If the Japanese navy hunted the commerce raiders they would have exposed the army to a sortie from the main Russian fleet. To leave the raiders unmolested could have crippled the lifeline to Japan, rendering the Japanese forces already ashore vulnerable to a Russian army riposte. Once again, Russia's failure to explore strategic options before the war left it unprepared in another strategic dimension. Japan was able overcome Russia's deadly commerce raiders because they were so few and the lethargy of the Russian Pacific Squadron after Makarov's death allowed them to eventually dispatch naval forces to find and sink the Russian cruisers.

Strategic Land Option 1: Trade Space for Time + Eventual Decisive Battle

Irrespective of the naval options, Russia could have analyzed three land strategies. Kuropatkin's chosen strategy was a limited withdrawal along the Russian line of communication – the South Manchurian Railway – to await

reinforcements before shifting to the strategic offensive. Kuropatkin assessed that in the initial months of the war, Japanese forces outnumbered his men in theater; therefore, he would gain time and preserve his army's strength by the classic method of trading space. Time would allow Russian engineers and laborers to improve the Trans-Siberian railway, Asiatic Russia's lifeline to its European counterpart. This strategy necessitated withdrawal of all Russian forces in southern Manchuria to the city of Liaoyang, roughly 120 miles from the Yalu River. The merit of Kuropatkin's strategy was that it accomplished his goal of buying time to increase Russian numbers over the Japanese. At the Battle of Liaoyang, the Russians possessed 158,000 soldiers and 609 guns against 125,000 Japanese and 170 guns.[ii] Yet the Russian army was defeated at this potentially decisive battle and the subsequent larger engagement at Mukden because it was an untested and poorly trained force, led by a commander who conceded every strategic, operational, and tactical initiative to his opponent!

What Kuropatkin had gained in time and men in his wholesale retreat, he lost in infrastructure (ports and railroads), key terrain (landing sites, mountain passes, and choke points), and opportunities to hone the army's operational and tactical skill. Retreating into southern Manchuria left all amphibious landing zones throughout Korea and the Liaotung Peninsula undefended. After the Japanese came ashore they found almost every avenue of approach to Dalny, a commercial port and the most significant logistical hub of the entire war, open, with the limited exception of one regiment at Nanshan, where the Liaotung Peninsula narrows to its most defensible point. While the small Russian force fought a heroic defense, it was outnumbered 10:1. Kuropatkin had left Port Arthur's garrison to defend itself and simply abandoned Dalny, potentially dooming the Russian Pacific Squadron. Perhaps the worst effect of Kuropatkin's strategy was that the token resistance he did offer was fodder for Japanese victories. Russian battlefield defeats boosted Japan's international standing, allowing it to float critical loans, unify its people, and devastate Russian morale on the home front, eventually culminating in revolution.

Strategic Land Option 2: Scorched Earth + Trade Space for Time + Eventual Decisive Battle

Assessing his army as initially too weak to fight a decisive battle, Kuropatkin could have moved his forces deeper into Manchuria, beyond Japan's logistical reach, while destroying all infrastructure in southern Manchuria. Planning for this strategic option would have included sending the Pacific Squadron back to Europe to preserve this valuable asset and avoiding the disastrous effects on Russian morale stemming from its loss. With no fear of abandoning the fleet, Kuropatkin would have possessed a free hand to withdraw the army and destroy war resources without immense political pressure to hold ground. A scorched

earth methodology would have destroyed infrastructure Japan required to project its army into southern Manchuria. For example, after capturing Dalny, Japanese General Yasukata Oku reported, “Over 100 warehouses, barracks... were found uninjured. Over 290 railway cars still usable.... Docks and piers uninjured.”[iii] Ashmead-Bartlett Ellis, a British reporter, confirmed Dalny’s value to the Japanese war effort, reporting “Every day numerous trains steam out of the station laden with troops and stores for Oyama (Field-Marshal Iwao Oyama) and his half-a-million of men.” Ellis went on to describe the docks, harbor, and breakwaters as “splendid.”[iv] Furthermore, Dalny’s rail line connected it to Port Arthur and to the South Manchurian Railroad which ran through the towns of Liaoyang and Mukden, sites of the war’s two largest battles. In his memoirs, Kuropatkin would inadvertently incriminate himself regarding leaving the infrastructure intact referencing, “the delivery of heavy howitzers [that destroyed Russian defenses] and the landing of other siege material was greatly facilitated by the existence of Dalny.”[v] Japan’s use of Dalny as a logistical hub illustrates that a scorched-earth methodology would have increased Japan’s war costs and drawn-out the war in Russia’s favor.

If the Russian army had been safely beyond Japan’s reach, Kuropatkin could have improved the Trans-Siberian Railroad while training and equipping his force for a counteroffensive. A primary factor in Japan’s preemptive strike was the recognition that steady improvements in the Trans-Siberian railroad would eventually permit Russia to deploy a force that could overwhelm their manpower and resources. At the outset of the war, the Trans-Siberian Railroad lacked 600 of the necessary 900 locomotives deemed sufficient to sustain a massive force. It had a large gap at Lake Baikal and was single tracked. Through prodigious effort, the Russian supply situation had drastically improved by March of 1905; however, by this stage Kuropatkin’s many defeats had helped spark revolt in European Russia and the army was a demoralized force.[vi] Avoiding costly human losses and husbanding material and manpower until the railroad was prepared to sustain a large army, would have allowed the Russians a transition to the offensive with overwhelming force against a foe attempting to sustain hundreds of thousands of men across too much desolated space, with its manpower and finances exhausted by a long war.

Strategic Land Option 3: Active Forward Defense + Eventual Decisive Battle

Perhaps the most daring, yet rewarding, land option would have been for Russia to conduct an active defense based on defending against Japanese amphibious landings, and waging a fighting withdrawal until reinforcements arrived from Europe to tip the military balance toward a strategic offensive. Preventing the Japanese from coming ashore

in sizeable numbers would have preserved Manchuria’s infrastructure, saved the battleship fleet at Port Arthur, and provided Kuropatkin’s forces with all the advantages of the central position. Denying the Japanese easy and early victories would have bolstered the army’s morale and skill, dried up Japanese war loans, and perhaps forestalled the Russian Revolution of 1905, which denied it the option of extending the war.

In the first two months of the war, the Japanese offensive was most vulnerable because it had to conduct a risky series of complimentary amphibious operations. The Japanese First Army initially landed in central Korea, distant from Russian counterattacks, then marched north along dirt tracks, with only Korean coolies providing logistical support. These initial troops seized inlets that allowed the navy to keep advancing the army’s logistical base closer to the Yalu River, at the base of the Liaotung Peninsula. Victory at the Yalu would protect the eastern flank of the Second and Fourth Armies as they came ashore at beaches near Dalny and Port Arthur. If the Russians had contested northern Korea and defended the Yalu River, rather than Kuropatkin’s pitting of a mere 19,000 men against 42,000 Japanese, the Russians could have stalled the entire Japanese offensive, making time a weapon in their favor.

This Russian strategic option would have rested on a combination of prepared forward defenses supported by quick reaction forces (QRF). First, Russian intelligence needed to conduct an IPB of the Korean and Liaotung Peninsula’s topography to determine landing sites, lines of communications, and advantageous defensive terrain. Defending the beaches with a combination of garrison forces and QRFs would have drastically increased Japanese casualties and potentially slowed their advance along the Korean Peninsula to a crawl. On almost every beach the Japanese army was exposed coming ashore. For example, the Japanese Second Army landed in chest high water and had to wade ashore, across a long and vulnerable stretch. Their equipment continued to be offloaded on sandy beaches until the Japanese captured Dalny. If the Russians had opted to defend against amphibious landings, they may have been able to inflict a disaster similar to the British army’s debacle in World War I at Gallipoli. If driven back, the Russians could have fought from a belt of defensive positions to bleed the Japanese army and extend the war, thereby draining Japanese financial resources and exhausting their nation. The Russian army was fully capable of such a defense as it proved at the Battle of Nanshan and the siege of Port Arthur. Drastically outnumbered in both operations, the Russian defenders inflicted massive casualties on the Japanese. What would have been the strategic ramifications of such battles being fought before the Japanese had time to offload their entire army onto the continent and were bottled up on beachheads and narrow lines of communication, all the while Russian reinforcements poured in from Europe to seek the final decisive blow?

Conclusion

For military leaders, prognosticating a future war and predetermining strategy is extremely difficult, but if correctly anticipated, such insights provide opportunity to analyze, plan, resource, and even war game scenarios. In the 1930s, the United States Navy anticipated a naval battle similar to Midway, allowing its students, in particular Chester Nimitz, to study options to defeat the Japanese. This exercise bore fruit in perhaps America's greatest naval victory. The Navy could not be certain of the future, but the evidence they observed allowed them to visualize realistic scenarios which were the basis of planning. Similar to Nimitz, Kuropatkin also foresaw war but unlike America's great admiral he failed to subject his strategy to productive counter-thesis. While some may decry analyzing alternative historical strategies as smoke and mirrors,

mentally exercising options not taken in the past helps develop critical skills applicable to future wars. A great challenge in the historical method is that historians tend to write on the paths taken, not hypothetical alternatives. And since historical information is the intellectual fuel for analyzing war, one must cobble together evidence and use logic to develop plausible alternatives. This methodology is hard for many analysts to internalize. How can one use strategies that did not take place? Fortunately, the Russo-Japanese War provides ample information to study a range of strategic options. Starting with the belligerents' policy objectives and working through net assessments, strategic options begin to coalesce. In the Russo-Japanese War Kuropatkin possessed the resources to defeat Japan's military, but he lacked a means to analyze the best strategic course of action.

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MARIE VON CLAUSEWITZ

THE WOMAN BEHIND THE MAKING OF ON WAR

Vanya Eftimova Bellinger

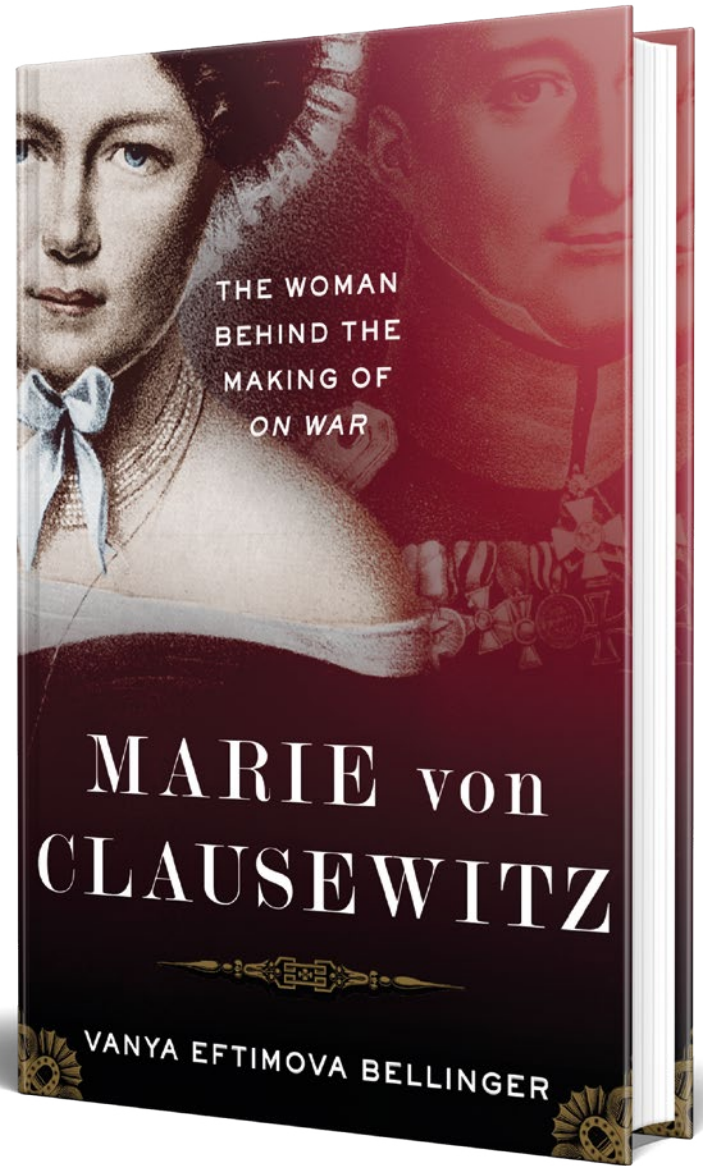
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Improvident Strategy: When Process Supplants Policy in Targeted Killing

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U.S. Air Force photo/Lt Col Leslie Pratt / Public domain

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import for the US in September 2001 when al-Qaeda attacked sites in New York and Washington, D.C. The Bush Administration's response to the 9/11 attacks included a campaign of airstrikes and commando raids that sought to prevent future attacks by denying terrorist organizations the benefit of sanctuaries through the use of relatively precise, sudden violence. Anxious to end the entangling conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Obama Administration

Terrorist attacks are an old problem that took on added

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eschewed preventative wars as a tool of policy, but it accelerated the use of targeted killing to disrupt and deter non-state threats.[i]

Targeted killing is the use of lethal force to degrade the capacity of weak actors to harm one's interests or to deter those hostile actors by imposing the threat of future retaliation. Following the 9/11 attacks, the perceived immediacy of the terrorism menace demanded a swift and rhetorically decisive response from US political leaders. The available technology for guided weapons and remote platforms made targeted killing appealing as the signature means of the US strategy because non-state threats like al-Qaeda lacked the means to respond against US vital interests as a powerful state adversary could. Yet, risks remain.[ii]

In justifying the strategy, policymakers and strategists have implicitly rendered the death of an individual as a quantum of US political purpose by characterizing attrition as strategic progress. The absence of an explicit strategic formula leaves only this logic as a moral and legal rationale. In making human targets a unit of measure, targeted killing presumes that the sum of attrition shall eventually produce the desired strategic effect. However, this presumption contradicts both theory and empirical evidence. No outcome can be presumed wherever the will of the adversary still controls, and no strategy can retain its coherence if it does not sufficiently represent the legitimate will of the state.[iii]

Targeted killing can be a suitable strategy, but it is always a bad strategy. It might feasibly meet the specifications of a given policy, but it also relies upon a rubric that incentivizes bad choices by all parties in the kill chain. Routinizing the nomination of persons as targets, over time, erodes the supremacy of policy relative to mere technocratic or tactical imperatives. The routine intrinsically presumes, independent of actual policy interests, that it is both rational and relevant. This presumption toward policy is how targeted killing as a process subverts the proper unity between policy and strategy.[iv]

An Illusory Solution

Targeted killing subverts the bridge between policy and strategy by allowing technocratic process to displace the scrutiny of policy discourse. Entrusting strategy to the rationality of the process would work if its rubric is reliably attuned and reconciled to actual policy interests and to the mind of policymakers. However, targeted killing has empowered policymakers to act without needing to forge a consensus among partisan and bureaucratic stakeholders. The strategy has operated under the vague purpose of defeating forces associated with 9/11 and the general right of national self-defense. Targeted killing serves a purpose that is so loosely defined that it precludes any conclusive assessment as to its consequence or effectiveness beyond achieving mere tactical outcomes.

A more costly strategy could not survive long without a more substantive logic. Targeted killing has retained the imprimatur of successive US presidential administrations despite its uncertain benefit because its results have come at a nominal cost. It rescues national security leaders from the taint of intractability by quantifying progress through the names and faces of eliminated enemy leaders. Whether by airstrikes alone or by some combination of drones and elite infantry, targeted killing simplifies the cost-benefit calculus of policy and strategy to the benefit of action. After 9/11, it provided US leaders with an unambiguous riposte to the menace of foreign extremists which has seemed neither disproportionate nor unduly provocative to American policymakers.[v]

Its proponents could have it both ways, warning the public that achieving US security aims against al-Qaeda and its ilk would be a long time in coming and, at the same time, reassuring the public that victories would assuredly come and at an acceptable cost.[vi] However, two decades after 9/11, targeted killing remains far more problematic as an open-ended approach than its more ardent advocates had suggested because it masks the complexity of the problem presented by non-state threats behind a veil of bureaucratic protocol and procedure, giving the appearance of inexorable progress albeit incremental. Thus, narrowing the issues of war to a narrow subset of domestic, institutional interests invites policymakers and military professionals to insulate decision-making in the kill chain within a formalized process. However, the feasibility of targeted killing as a tactic belies its limited utility as a strategy by suggesting that it can escape the liabilities of war's irrational forces and the influence of the adversary's will.[vii]

Inherent Consequences of Violence

Entrusting targeted killing to a process is dangerous because it tempts policymakers and strategists to believe that it is less about violence than any other military strategy. The great pain that the US has imposed on its enemies by precision strikes is not discretely removed from the complex wages of lethal force. Successful strikes have raised concerns that are common to all modes of violence, such as aggravating extant sources of instability, cultivating threats by provoking the passions of the people, and other unpredictable influences. The dynamic interaction between the Clausewitzian rational and irrational elements of war apply as much to remote drone strikes as they do to pitched battles, and they should not be overlooked in assessing the consequences of violence despite the relative precision of targeted killing.[viii]

Strategies must account for the aims and perceptions of those affected by the violence. In a war between state adversaries, one reasonably expects that the interplay between the political and moral impetus of adversaries will be captured in the work of policymaking bodies and

military headquarters. Well-established institutions in the bureaucracy exist for ensuring that policy and tactics are reconciled and act as a coherent whole.

A liability of targeted killings is that their small-scale violence can aggregate into a virtually invisible war that is removed from substantive political oversight and public scrutiny. The discrete nature of violence in targeted killing allows the unwary strategist to lose sight of how political consciousness can link individual deaths into a narrative web that shapes and magnifies the meaning of those deaths to a global audience through online media. Proponents of the strategy could argue that the message of violent disruption is a constructive one, deterring future plots by demonstrating the futility of hiding. However, such a defense is a willful aspiration and not a strategy. It ignores the ultimate consequence of severing a strategy from its dependency on political assent to the cost and obligations of using military force.[ix]

Trusting in the absence of attacks as proof of progress is more than logically fallacious. It contradicts what we know about how societies respond to violence and how political consciousness determines that response. Strategies of coercion rely upon having a nuanced understanding of communities connected to the targeted individuals in order to achieve their ends. Targeted killing necessarily approaches the task of assessing communal context in a fundamentally episodic and tactical manner because each strike occurs within the inchoate problem frame of violent extremism rather than the clearer framing of a state adversary.[x]

Such tactical frames are wholly unsuited to accounting for the phenomena that have imbued individual identity with a political potential unknown to policymaking less than a century ago. This awakened social context has made a profound understanding of received narratives in affected communities all the more essential as a consideration in determining the success of coercive strategies. Yet, targeted killing incentivizes flippancy because the strategy presumes those narratives to be ephemeral rather than material to its outcome.[xi]

Narratives at the local level are not ephemeral, however. The political and social consciousness of societies determine the relative utility of force, imposing thresholds of feasibility on what military force can achieve for the purpose of policy. Communal consciousness changes how violence actuates the “blind natural force” of emotion described by Carl von Clausewitz in his trinitarian depiction of war.[xii] The imposition of mortal harm and danger on a self-identified community awakens shared feelings of hatred and enmity that are not strictly subject to the dictates of rational purpose. These irrational echoes of targeted killings matter in ways that are difficult to quantify but discernable nonetheless.[xiii]

Some realists have characterized norms of armed conflict as a mere privilege of the powerful—a tool of self-interest and nothing more. Yet, even in the breach, norms are consequential because the violation of moral standards translates into political and moral effects that determine the physics of war as a phenomenon. War obtains a portion of its potential from the political and social narratives that frame what is at stake, and standing norms are intrinsic elements of those narratives. Thus, the choice of violating such norms can have real consequence in determining whether a society receives any given targeted killing as a reciprocal act of policy, affecting cost-benefit, or as an irrational act, demanding vengeance.

Abrogating Strategy to the Technocrats

When tactics are extended to define a given strategy, leaders are particularly prone to overlook the complex and irrational consequences of violence, relying on theoretical constructs or ideology to determine the strategic effect of a tactic rather than using empirical evidence to test the strategy’s underlying theory. The irrational byproducts of violence are difficult to discern in the moment because the socio-political phenomena that killing propagate are by their nature diffuse and long developing. To the commanders in the field, they can be indistinguishable from the turbulence and dysfunctions regularly afflicting weakly governed spaces.

In contrast, the tally of targeted killing is far more immediate and conclusive. A successfully targeted enemy is either dead or incapacitated. Effectiveness is already assumed in the rationale for the strike authorization. The presumptive nature of the process disincentivizes policymakers and their institutional interlocutors from pausing to consider the actual impact of each strike and to question assumptions. The absence of attacks against the US homeland and the observable disruption of hostile organizations has a greater natural hold on the military’s institutional psyche than the percolations of enmity in an affected community. The latter are almost entirely abstract if not invisible as a matter of concern in national policy.

Targeted killing can routinize the punishment and deterrence of enemies so that it functions outside the vision of a state’s reason and emotion. Targets are nominated and vetted according to criteria drafted and adjudicated according to standardized processes and perhaps even by arbitrary whim. Orders are then approved and executed. Veiled by their categorization as legitimate targets, individual missions need not suffer a deliberate calculation of consequences beyond plausibly projecting a desirable tactical effect on a hostile organization.[xiv]

The political and social affirmation that follows each successful kill undermines the mooring of the military’s institutional and strategic vision, prejudicing operations

against their own campaign objectives and rendering the military a slave to the process—as merely an instrument of the kill list. The strategy itself can only be appropriate if it is employed with the greatest possible discipline and integrity of purpose. However, it is neither as free of consequence as some of its advocates have suggested nor as necessary, and the strategy is particularly fraught for the military as an institution if the political leadership is ever less than fully invested in its oversight role.[xv]

Conclusion

Therefore, the problematic quality of targeted killings is not in the proximate effectiveness of the strategy. Rather, it is in the wisdom of a process that itself begets norms and propagates societal consequences hidden from the vantage point of policymakers and strategists. The rationale of the present necessarily misestimates the complexities of

future concerns, and it is the voice of present interests that provides the language for defending US targeted killing.[xvi]

When hastily enacted strategies are institutionalized, they are too easily abrogated by policymakers to the discretion of technocrats and the whim of parochial thinking. The ceding of violence to technocratic supervision is antithetical to authentic strategy because it precludes both policymakers and strategists from being able to see themselves or their adversaries. The ease with which states can employ remote strike technologies without risk of public opprobrium or revolt among their political elite tempts political leaders to outsource the policy of violence against non-state threats to their military institutions, raising attendant risks of strategic drift between a state's actual policy interests and its conduct. Thus, an open-ended strategy of coercion by remote killing presents a persistent and distinct hazard not only to a state's moral legitimacy but to its strategic coherence as well.[xvii]

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Antifragile Adversaries: How to Defeat Them?

Samuel Zilincik – University of Defence, The Czech Republic



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Samuel Zilincik is currently pursuing a doctorate in Security and Strategic Studies at Masaryk University and teaches at the University of Defence in the Czech Republic. He is interested in strategic theory, history and practice. His published works include the article “Setting the Categorical Hydra Ablaze: Applying Clausewitz to the Fallacies of War Categorisation” and the essay “Strategy and the Instrumental Role of Emotions”.

Most categorizations of adversaries are of little relevance to our understanding of strategy. The popular distinction between state and non-state actors has no bearing on the capacity of the respective actors to behave strategically.

The labels of asymmetric or symmetric adversaries only convey that the two sides are somehow different from each other. Dividing adversaries into insurgents and counterinsurgents only reveals that the former fight to change governmental policies while the latter fight against the former. Similarly, the category of hybrid adversaries is hardly enlightening because every adversary can combine military and non-military instruments of power or regular and irregular troops on the battlefield. While the category of terrorists conveys the use of terrorism as a strategy, the label is inaccurate and misleading. Afterall, actors can use several strategies simultaneously or sequentially.

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Accordingly, those who use the terrorist label run the risk of confusing themselves about the actual capacity and effort of the adversary. Not all of these distinctions are useless. Nonetheless, they either do not reveal anything substantial about the particulars of strategy in practice or they confuse rather than clarify.

Any useful categorization of adversaries cuts to the essence of strategy, to the utility of violent interaction. Strategy is about the purposeful use made of violent engagements with the adversary. The purpose of strategy is to decrease the adversary's military capabilities or his will to fight.[i] Strategic performance, in its consequences, determines whether the purpose is achieved. Therefore, the effects produced by strategic performance are what matters the most in strategy.[ii] These effects may vary in three directions. They can decrease the adversary's capability/will to fight, leave these variables unchanged or increase them. A proper categorization of adversaries helps the strategist orient himself in the logic of these three scenarios.

The main goal here is to develop a new typology of adversaries and to zoom in on those who get stronger when engaged in strategic performance. The paper draws upon the concept of antifragility, popularized by Nassim Nicholas Taleb in his book *Anti-fragile: The Things That Gain from Disorder*. I argue that depending on their reaction to strategic performance, adversaries can be put on a spectrum from fragile to resilient, to antifragile ones. To keep the scope of the investigation reasonably limited, the paper focuses on the effects of strategic performance on the adversary's military capabilities rather on his will to fight. The first category describes the adversaries whose military capabilities shrink as a consequence of engaging in strategic performance. The second category is reserved for those adversaries who are able to replenish their military capabilities to the original position after engaging in strategic performance. The last category describes those adversaries whose military capabilities increase as a consequence of taking part in strategic performance. These are, of course, ideal types and their manifestations in strategic practice are less clear-cut.

Antifragile adversaries pose a particular, but not unsolvable, challenge. The challenge resides in the fact that attrition, the most common effect in strategic practice, strengthens these adversaries instead of weakening them. Nonetheless, there are four distinct ways to defeat antifragile adversaries. These include rapid sequential strategies, strategies of decisive battle, cumulative strategies of underwhelming attacks, and the deliberate uses of peace. The secondary argument of this paper is that antifragility in the context of strategy is as much a function of the adversary's capacity to adapt as of strategist's own conduct of strategy. Strategist is responsible for the character of the adversary, he shapes it by his own choices and performance. Antifragility is therefore not an inherent nor a stable characteristic but rather a quality which the adversary acquires temporarily

and in an interactive relationship.

In the next section, I briefly discuss the concept of antifragility to distinguish it from fragility and resilience. The subsequent section develops a typology of adversaries, dividing them into the respective categories. Consequently, I move on to examine the options of defeating antifragile adversaries by drawing upon the inherent characteristics of antifragile objects. The conclusion summarizes the findings and discusses their implications for strategy-makers and scholarship.

"The Things That Gain From Disorder"

Taleb coined the term antifragile in order to describe phenomena that are at the opposite spectrum of the fragile ones.[iii] When facing challenges, fragile objects get damaged or collapse completely. A typical example is anything made of regular glass. When thrown against the wall it breaks and is of no use for anyone. Then there are resilient objects, which can sustain challenges with no permanent damage taken. An inflatable ball thrown against the wall may slightly change its shape for a second only to return to the original form in the next moment, with no impact on its utility for the future.

Antifragile objects benefit from facing challenges. Bones have to be challenged regularly in order to get stronger and muscles only grow when repeatedly damaged. In fact, both bones and muscles get weak if unchallenged for longer periods of time.[iv] Two key requirements need to be present for the manifestation of the anti-fragile potential. First, the challenges have to be proportionate to the capacities of the object. Jumping from places that are too high may be an overwhelming challenge for bones and lifting stuff that is too heavy may irreversibly damage muscles. At the same time, challenges far below the capacity of the object may result in having no effect at all. A professional bodybuilder lifting weights of one kilogram every-day does not benefit from this exercise. Second, enough time has to pass between individual challenges to grant the object the space for improvement.[v] With no time to grow stronger, both bones and muscles deteriorate under constant pressure. Antifragility is therefore as much a function of the inherent predispositions of the object as it is of the character of the challenges the object faces.

Adversaries and the effects of strategic performance

The spectrum from fragility, to resilience to antifragility captures how strategic performance affects the three basic types of adversaries. The first ideal type is the fragile adversary. In this case, the strategist's performance degrades the adversary's military capabilities. Fragile adversaries are arguably the most common types across strategic history.

The Greek king Pyrrhus and the Carthaginian general Hannibal in their respective wars against Rome come close to the ideal type of fragile adversaries. Roman strategic performance, though often flawed or even disastrous, gradually degraded military capabilities of both adversaries. More modern examples include the Swedish king Charles XII during his war against Russians and the Confederacy during the American Civil War. Both the Russian and the Union's strategic performance destroyed their adversaries' military capabilities despite suffering initial setbacks. The logic of defeating fragile adversaries is straightforward. If the strategist is less fragile than the adversary, he has a high chance to succeed with any strategy. Indeed, as the examples above illustrate, the strategist can even suffer a string of defeats and still be successful in the long term. Fragile adversaries do not pose any unique challenge for strategists.

The second ideal type is the resilient adversary. Strategic performance does not affect the capabilities of this adversary in either way. Actors who have access to large pools of military resources and adequate mobilization procedures fall into this category. Typical examples include the Roman republic or the Russians (Soviets), especially in the 20th century. The Romans suffered many defeats in their countless wars but they were always able to recover and deploy fresh troops to replace their losses. The Russians were able to recover from the initial shocks of the German impetus and to field overwhelming numbers of forces throughout the Second World War, first stopping and then reversing the German advance into their territory. Nonetheless, the logic of defeating the resilient adversary does not differ significantly from the previous case. Ultimately, military means are always a finite resource. Therefore, the strategist can defeat resilient adversaries by becoming more resilient himself. If he possesses more resources than the adversary, then in the end he will prevail through the simple process of attrition. Of course, not every strategist has easy access to additional military resources. For this reason, resilient adversaries may pose a considerable challenge for most strategists.

The third ideal type is the antifragile adversary. For this one, strategic performance serves as a stimulus for the growth in his military capabilities. This happens when the adversary with antifragile predispositions faces regular challenges appropriate to his current capabilities. Of course, what is "regular" and "appropriate" is context dependent. Antifragile adversaries are less common in strategic history. This is so because they manifest themselves only in instances when their predispositions match with the favourable character of the strategist's attacks. One historical example that comes close to the ideal type were the Thebans in their wars against the Spartans (395-362 B.C.). The two polities fought each other regularly during the first half of the fourth century. The continual engagement in strategic performance made Theban forces stronger from one major battle to another. Though first suffering a defeat at Nemea (394 B.C.), Thebans

fought Spartans to a standstill at Coronea (394 B.C.), routed them at Tegyra (375 B.C.), and slaughtered them at Leuctra (371 B.C.) and Mantinea (362 B.C.).[vi] Over the course of the wars, Thebans enjoyed gradually increasing morale, explored innovative echelon tactics and developed new kinds of military units. Therefore, by their own efforts as well by the repeated violent interaction with the Spartans, the Thebans fulfilled their anti-fragile potential. Seeing this development in practice, one Spartan sarcastically congratulated his own king that by the repeated attacks against Thebes, he had taught his adversary how to fight. [vii] Antifragile adversaries are not an artefact of a distant past. In fact, as David Betz and Hugo Stanford-Tuck argue in their recent piece, even the contemporary West has often pursued a way of war "which through one's own efforts leaves the enemy stronger at the end than at the beginning. [viii]" Antifragile adversaries are universal and so is the unique challenge they pose.

The main challenge in facing antifragile adversaries is that what does not kill them makes them stronger. This is a bit of exaggeration, but in general it does apply. To start with, most strategies seeking to attrite that adversary do not work. Worse, these strategies work for the antifragile adversaries. Actively seeking out the antifragile adversary and trying to attrite his military capabilities by frequent engagements is a reliable receipt for making him stronger. This may not seem like a big deal when the other strategies are available. The problem is, most of the other strategies eventually turn into some sort of attrition contest as well. Strategists too often envision quick and decisive wars of annihilation and get prolonged wars of attrition instead. Others, who start out with terrorist attacks and guerrilla raids, turn to attrition once they develop sufficient military capabilities to have a reasonable chance of success. Not all the strategic options lead to attrition but too many of them do. It follows that most options for dealing with the antifragile adversaries convey high risks of failure. Still, strategists can defeat antifragile adversaries and the next section theorizes some ways in which this can be done.

How to defeat antifragile adversaries

The first step is to understand the kind of adversary at hand. As Carl von Clausewitz wrote, "The first, the supreme, the most far-reaching act of judgment that the statesman and commander have to make is to establish by that test the kind of war on which they are embarking; neither mistaking it for, nor trying to turn it into, something that is alien to its nature." [ix] This is difficult as one can only achieve this understanding reliably after strategic performance takes place. However, there are some variables which might provide a basis for educated guesses beforehand. One can start by conducting a net assessment of the relative distribution of military means at each other's disposal. The more the distribution of means favours the adversary, the more likely the strategic performance turns them less

fragile and more resilient. At the same time, the numbers are not paramount to antifragility. After all, the Spartans outnumbered the Thebans in most of the battles and the former were exceptionally fragile while the latter came as close to antifragility as anyone. The numbers matter only so far as the adversaries are able to make effective use of them.

A glance at the history of the adversary's conduct and adaptation in the past wars may provide some clues. For example, the Spartans could hardly ever be turned into resilient or antifragile adversaries. Everything in their society, including their traditions, their social norms and their military policies, contributed to their fragility. It would take a revolution to change the nature of that polity. Consequently, any strategist could safely bet on the Spartans remaining fragile in the wars to come. At the same time, not all adversaries are as conservative as the Spartans were. Many of them may evolve from one war to another. Some adversaries are able to learn from the past mistakes and change their military practice so as to become resilient or antifragile instead of fragile ones. Besides, one can be resilient against one kind of the adversary only to find himself fragile when facing a different one. After all, the Thebans of the Peloponnesian war were more resilient than antifragile. History, while useful, is therefore a slippery ground to base important judgements on.

Once the strategist correctly identifies the character of the adversary, he can change and defeat the latter. Antifragile adversaries may lose their potential if the strategic performance they face is inappropriate to their capabilities or if they lack the time to adapt. This does not just turn the antifragile adversaries into the resilient ones. The relationships between the specific characters of the adversary forms a triangle rather than a linear hierarchy. Therefore, one-time antifragility does not guarantee a safe landing in the resilient zone. Antifragile adversaries can be rendered fragile without becoming resilient ones. Strategists have several options to make this happen. These include sequential and cumulative strategies, as well as the strategy of annihilation, and the deliberate use of peace.

The first option includes rapidly executed sequential strategies to deny to the adversary the time to get stronger. [x] The theory of victory here relies on a quick sequential campaign, by which the strategist robs the adversary of the time to improve the latter's military capability. The adversary can counter this by refusing to engage at all, but then he deliberately robs himself of the opportunity to improve his military capabilities through strategic performance. Sequential strategy can, therefore, force the adversary out of his antifragile mode by either denying him the time to adapt or by rendering him unable to engage in the kind of strategic performance that would increase his military capability. The critical requirement for this approach is to have logistics effective enough to support the continual and relentless push into the adversary's territory. However, this strategy contains a high risk of morphing into

attrition. The sequential strategy can be interrupted in any moment by the adversary as well as by friction and chance inherent to strategic practice. Any serious interruption gives the adversary the time to grow stronger and increase the probabilities of turning the strategy into attrition. Still, the rapid sequential strategy may be useful when trying to achieve limited territorial objectives rather than a regime change. This is so because the pursuit of limited objectives contains fewer opportunities for interruption. The suitability of the strategy therefore varies widely with the political objectives of the strategist.

The second option is the strategy of decisive battle which seeks to annihilate the adversary's force in one engagement. [xi] The theory of victory behind this approach resides in the delivery of the overwhelming challenge to the adversary. Such strategic performance destroys the adversary's military capability and the associated chance to grow stronger. To pull this off, the strategist needs the cooperation of the adversary and sufficient military capabilities of his own. The adversary must accept the time and the place of the decisive battle. The strategist then needs to be able to defeat him. The adversary may decline the battle but by this he again robs himself of the opportunity to become stronger through strategic performance. On the other hand, the failure to annihilate substantial forces of the adversary during the battle may result in the struggle of attrition. The Spartans were often able to force Thebans to accept battle but they failed to annihilate the latter. Consequently, their hopes of annihilation turned into the practice of attrition which benefited the Thebans. Another problem is that contemporary strategic practice seldom allows strategists to annihilate large portion of the adversary's military capabilities in one engagement. This has to do as much with the size of the armies as with the ways in which these are deployed. Strategists may be able to pull decisive battle off against unskillfully employed smaller-sized armed forces but it is unlikely to happen in wars between superpowers or even mediumly sized armies. The suitability of this strategy therefore varies with the relative size of the adversary's armed forces and the way in which they are employed.

The third option is to use cumulative strategy of underwhelming attacks to exhaust the adversary.[xii] The theory of victory in this case resides in the continual attacks conducted below the level of the adversary's current capabilities. This approach gives the adversary's military capability no opportunity to grow, because the latter is already above the level of the attacks. In the ideal case, cumulative strategy of this sort applies violence unilaterally in order to avoid the interaction with the adversary altogether. Terrorist attacks or raids are ideal examples of this approach, but occasional battle may also work. The key difference between this strategy and the search for attrition is that the former purposefully limits the frequency and the intensity of the violent interaction while the latter does the opposite. This strategy is unlikely to destroy the adversary's military capability. But, by denying the adversary the

opportunity to grow stronger, the strategist may be able to exhaust the adversary. The strategy is most likely to succeed if the strategist pursues limited objectives and if the adversary does not value these objectives very much. There are considerable limitations to the effectiveness of this strategy. The strategist may be unable to do enough damage over time to exhaust the adversary. This may happen because of the intentional weakness of the attacks or because the adversary is able to recover from them. More importantly, even this strategy can turn into detrimental attempts to attrite. The confidence elicited by the successful conduct of repeated attacks may boost the strategist's confidence as well as increase the effort he is willing to put up with. Once he feels strong enough, he may recklessly escalate his endeavour into the struggle where the search for attrition replaces the more modest aim of exhaustion. The suitability of this strategy then varies with the political objectives of the strategist, with his own capacity to exercise restraint and with the value the adversary ascribes to the objectives.

The last option is to use peace, that is to deliberately abstain from the use of violence. In this scenario, the theory of victory relies on the detrimental consequences of peace on the adversary's military capabilities as well as on the supplemental use of non-violent instruments of power. In general, peace tends to have a negative impact on the cohesion of society as well as on military capabilities in particular.[xiii] Conflict lines between different segments of society tends to grow and military forces face gradual capability degradation as a consequence of not facing appropriate challenges.[xiv] Governments seldom prioritize the development of military capabilities to the extent this happens in war. To put it simply, in peace most people care about things other than war. The great demobilisations that followed the Napoleonic wars, the First World War, the Second World War and the 1990s are good examples of this tendency. Furthermore, some non-violent instruments of power tend to be stronger in peace than in the times of war.[xv] Propaganda, for example, is more effective in peace than during the war, because it amplifies the already present conflict lines within a society. During war, societies tends to get more homogenous and united when facing a common adversary, leaving little space for the exacerbation of conflict lines.[xvi] However, this option is hard to sustain and its effectiveness varies widely. It is not easy to keep the adversary at peace, because any attempt to do so forcibly is likely to ignite war. Besides, the strategist has limited capacity to prevent the adversary from engaging in war with other actors. Additionally, not every peace has the same effects on all the actors. Some adversaries may understand peace to only constitute a preparation for war. Prussia after the Napoleonic wars, Germany in the interwar period as well as the US and the Soviet Union after the WWII all maintained strong military capabilities or considerably improved the existing ones. Arguably, these developments were of lesser quality than if they were stimulated by regular violent interactions with the adversary. Nonetheless, they still provided these actors with capable military

instruments while their potential adversaries got weaker (except in the US vs USSR relationship). The effects of this option can therefore easily backfire if the adversary focuses substantial attention to the preparation for war. Above all, the suitability of this approach depends on the adversary's own understanding of the peace at hand.

There is a room for combination of the above approaches. For example, the strategist can deliberately abstain from the use of violence and then crush the adversary within the framework of the annihilation strategy. Or he can use the cumulative strategy of underwhelming attacks to first numb the adversary and then to surprise the latter by a rapid sequential campaign. The suitability of any combination of options depends on the unique circumstances of each strategic relationship. By this I mean the political objectives of both actors, the strategist's willingness to exercise restraint, and the adversary's relative size and employment of armed forces as well as his understanding of the potential peace. Just as there is no single option to guarantee success against all adversaries, so there is no combination of strategies suitable for every situation.

Conclusion

The new typology is more useful than the others because it directs the attention of the strategist to what really matters – to the effects of strategic performance. The typology does not tell the whole story of strategic interaction but it explains the scheme. It outlines the character, the challenges and the options to deal with the specific adversaries. By this it provides strategic practitioners with essential lenses to understand and anticipate what happens in strategic practice. Above all it conveys the message that strategist has an active role to play in shaping the character of his own adversaries. The ways in which the strategist treats his adversary may alter the latter's characteristics and profoundly improve the prospects of the strategist's success. The typology therefore motivates statesmen to think as much about their own strategic performance as about the adversary.

The typology can provide guidance for contemporary as well as for future strategic practice. Some readers may consider the clear distinction between war and peace that underlines the proposed typology as a limiting factor in the utility of the typology. It has now become fashionable to speak about the so called "gray zone". The term stands for a mysterious but ill-defined space between war and peace where most of the contemporary conflicts are supposed to take place. Such a line of thinking is inaccurate. War is a state of affairs in which organized violence is employed for political purposes in an interactive manner. Peace stands for every other situation. There is no room for any space in between the two states. What some consider gray zone activities are too often merely unilateral applications of violence or the uses of non-violent instruments of power.

[xvii] In either case, since there is no violent confrontation with the adversary, these measures occur in peace. The distinction between war and peace as well as the typology itself are therefore as relevant to contemporary wars and peace as to every other age.

Besides being practically useful, the new typology sheds new light on our understanding of strategic history. For example, it is often argued that the Romans conquered the Greeks because the former's units were tactically more flexible than the sturdy Greek phalanx. While that second assumption may be true, it does not necessarily explain much beyond what occurred at the battlefields. The new typology assumes that the consequences of the battle are more important than its progress. It therefore draws attention to the different effects the strategic performance had on the respective sides. In other words, resilient Romans defeated fragile Greeks because strategic performance had little effects on the former but it had devastating impact on the latter. The battlefield victories or defeats mattered much less than the overall capacity of the respective sides to absorb the effects of strategic performance. The new typology uniquely complements more traditional explanations.

This article constitutes only a brief introduction to the topic, leaving open several possible avenues for further research. The article zoomed on the adversary's military capabilities and it left the issue of the will to fight largely untouched. However, it is easy to conceive of situations in which strategic performance increases the adversary's will to fight. The terrorist attacks of 9/11 certainly fall into this category as much as the thousands of other provocations across strategic history. Sometimes it may be what the strategist desires, at other times it may be an undesired consequence of his strategic performance. If the second is the case, then we need to know how to prevent and counter these situations. Additionally, the mechanisms by which the strategist's own forces can become antifragile in the future strategic performance warrants further exploration. The Theban example gives some clues, but these are unlikely to be exhaustive, not least because of the ever-changing character of war. Political, social and technological changes of the last few decades may convey new sources of antifragility and we need to know more about them. Exploration of all these research topics would benefit strategy-makers in practice.

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Charles D. Freilich

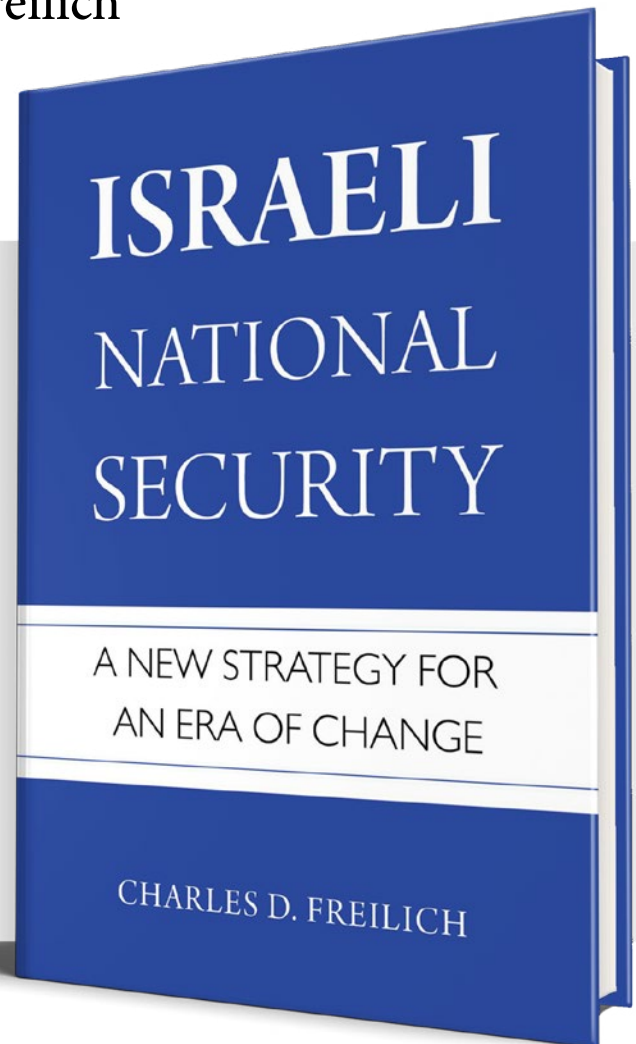
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From Strategy to Military Capability: the Austrian Example

Matthias Wasinger – Austrian Armed Forces



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1. Introduction

More and more, Western-oriented armed forces, especially

in Europe, get confronted by the public, asking why the military funds should be raised after years of decreasing budgets, triggered by the collapse of the Soviet Union? Military equipment is, in general terms, far more expensive

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than off-the-shelf civilian goods due to characteristics like survivability, sustainability, and assertiveness. Usually the taxpayer does not consider the fact that there is a logical link between their nations' National Security Strategy and required military assets.

The following article will illustrate elements of this process on a level generic enough to create an understanding for simple processes but sufficiently specific to recognize its essentials. Choosing the Republic of Austria as an example ensures recognition of force management from an actor, which is not driven by an alliance or the need to possess all thinkable capabilities due to its worldwide ambition. In consequence, it grants a sterile environment to describe the process of deducing the need for an asset out of a capability based on an ambition outlined in a strategy. However, where appropriate parallels or discrepancies to other neutral European nations will be outlined.

Two concepts drive Austria's security policy - On the one hand, its neutrality, and on the other its embedding in the European Union's common security policy. Besides Austria, Switzerland, Finland, and Sweden are neutral states in Europe. In all of them, the concept of neutrality was heavily discussed after the Soviet Union's collapse. Whereas Switzerland kept its entirely genuine neutral status, Austria and Sweden joined the European Union. Although none of these states joint an alliance as a full member, Austria, Sweden, and Finland are members of NATO's partnership for peace.

2. The Strategic Setting

"The objective of Austria's security policy is to make Austria the safest country with the highest quality of life."^[i]

Like other nations, the Republic of Austria links its Armed Forces' capability building process to strategic threat assessments, political as well as strategic ambitions and national policy. The Austrian Security Strategy outlines threats such as global terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, domestic and regional conflicts, failing states in its surrounding and cyber-attacks. Besides those threats, conventional conflicts can never be excluded. The Austrian Armed Forces, as one of the national Instruments of Power, have to fill a specific role in contributing to the Republics' strategic goal mentioned above. Based on the constitutional tasks and embedded in a whole-of-nation approach, the Armed Forces are intended to defend Austrian sovereignty, protect constitutional institutions, assist in ensuring internal peace in case of public riot and contribute to enforcing as well as maintaining of peace in hot spots of interest.^[ii] Being a neutral state, these tasks will be fulfilled either purely nationally or in close cooperation with partners in the European Union, the United Nations, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, or the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).^[iii]

The National Defense Strategy narrows the strategic environment for the Armed Forces by stating that national defense as a core competence is to be ensured against conventional as well as non-conventional attacks, and military contributions have to be prepared to back joint European military operations.^[iv] It explicitly outlines the relevance of partnerships to realize Austrian interests abroad^[v], whereas, due to neutrality, the defense of Austrian sovereignty remains a purely national task of the Armed Forces.

The Republic of Austria shares this challenge with the other neutral European states. Both the threat analysis, as well as the tasks, are comparable. Only the way to fulfill these tasks differ based on the understanding of neutrality. Sweden and Austria are, technically speaking, embedded in the European Union's Common Security and Defense Policy. Finland and the two before mentioned are troop-contributing nations to a broad spectrum of UN, EU, or NATO missions, whereas Switzerland maintains its genuine neutral status. Peace support operations are supported occasionally, but with restrictive national caveats. However, the respective defense budgets outline less the nations' strategic ambition or embedding, but far more their vicinity to the Russian Federation. Switzerland and Austria spend less than 1% of their GDP on defense, Sweden, and Finland more than double this. These figures are often misleading since they are related to the scale of GDP, and the question of what in detail has to be financed out of the respective defense budget. Additionally, Sweden and Finland have to maintain naval forces, a cost-driver in acquisition and maintenance, at least to the extent that allows the surveillance of territorial waters. Nevertheless, it is an indicator of political interest, value, and perceived necessity.

It is an interesting detail in this regard that these national defense schematics are at least theoretically comparable. All to follow the conscription concept, but to a different degree. Austria, Switzerland, and Finland adhere to general conscription, allowing females to serve voluntarily in the Armed Forces. Sweden, having suspended the same concept in 2010, reintroduced it in 2017 during the Crimea crisis, but as a requirement based general draft concept, including both male and female citizens. Consequently, there are several similarities between these neutral European states. The Austrian example is representative when it comes to the framework of requirements.

Within this framework, the Military Strategic Concept expects the Austrian Armed Forces to be able to ensure initial defensive operations against a conventional invader. Sustaining a long-term war, as well as re-establishing sovereignty and territorial integrity, has to be ensured after the intervention of the international community. The risk of standing a frozen conflict on Austrian territory is accepted.^[vi]

Based on these strategic documents as well as the political and constitutional framework, the Armed Forces are to be capable of initial defensive operations without partners. Geography, landscape, and environment of Austria make two areas appear of particular interest, both for Austrian neighbors or minor/medium powers, but also in the case of major conventional warfare between east and west:

1. The Brenner, a transversal over the Alps from Italy to Germany, attractive due to the possibly required movement of forces and
2. the river Danube valley as an axis of advance to avoid otherwise required frontal offensive operations through Poland and Germany.

(1) has been assessed as minor problem due to the Austrian Armed Forces' unique mountain warfare capabilities as well as geography and landscape, favorizing defensive operations. (2) will most likely be objected by a land-heavy penetration, covered by wide-ranging maritime support to land operations, timely and locally limited Air Superiority, and dominance in the Cyber and Information Domain. In an initial phase[vii], land operations will most likely be conducted by a Corps-sized force, consisting of three Divisions. Mobile defense operations will defeat the first attacking Division. It can be assessed that the attiring effect, combined with lacking air coverage after the (to be assumed) disruption of the Austrian Air Force, will push the Austrian Land Forces back to the depth of its territory when operating against the aggressors second and third echelon. The Austrian border will turn to the own "Deep Area". To be able to engage in these areas, a long-ranging force element for "Deep Operations – Interdiction" will be required.[viii]

The Austrian State Treaty signed 1955, limited Austrian military capabilities concerning nuclear weapons, weapons of mass destruction, fire-and-forget weapons, torpedoes, submarines, and artillery, ranging wider than 30km.[ix] It can be assumed that Long-Range Strike Bombers are out of the military-strategic ambition. Therefore, Air Assault Forces, respectively Air Maneuver Troops, could be the required force element to cover this capability gap.

Currently, there is one Airborne Battalion within the Austrian Armed Forces. Both Air Assaults and Air Maneuver are satisfactorily incorporated in the doctrine, setting the frame for leadership education and training. These efforts seem to be fruitful. Austrian force elements regularly get NATO evaluated and pass accordingly. The problem is, however, Austrian Airborne Troops are reliant on selected equipment for these evaluations, such as Attack Helicopters.

Although running the conscription for the entire Armed Forces, this battalion consists purely of professional soldiers with a high personnel combat effectiveness organized in an Airborne Battalions' order of battle. When it comes to materiel, it is equipped equivalent to a Light Infantry

Battalion. The facilities are assessed as satisfactory. The barracks are huge, modernized, and possess helicopter landing zones. Additionally, the international airport nearby in Klagenfurt has a separate restricted area, maintained by the Armed Forces, applicable for staging fixed- and rotary-wing aircraft up to the size of strategic airlifters.

3. The Approaches

The above said described the political and strategic frame of action for the Austrian Armed Forces. This environment, as well as standard tactical procedures, make Air Maneuver and Air Assault Troops a valuable asset. Besides the fact that they can cover the capability "Deep Operations – Interdiction", they might be engaged as well for tactical flank coverage. Hence, one force element could fill several capability gaps when synchronized in operations. This multiple-capability asset is also in line with the Austrian Armed Forces' ambition of covering flanks, shifting main efforts, and keeping designated Airborne Forces highly mobile by air assets.[x]

The current force status of the Airborne Battalion let doctrine, leadership, personnel, and facilities appear appropriate. By contrast, organization, training, and materiel are currently shortfalls, required to fill the outlined capability gap. The following will elaborate on covering a materiel solution.

It is an interesting detail that both Sweden and Finland maintain this capability, too. Either has at least an Airborne Company structured in their respective standing Army's. It is legitimate to assess these company-sized elements to serve to maintain the capability to conduct Airborne Operations. The employment of a single Company in Deep-Operations appears unlikely. Switzerland, on the contrary, is lacking this capability. The geography, as well as the unique landscape in the middle of the Alps, and the lack of any robust expeditionary ambition might be an explanation for this fact.

4. Materiel solution

a. Current Status:

Currently, the Austrian Armed Forces have a brigade-sized Army Aviation Element.[xi] To be able to conduct ground operations after air movement, the Austrian Armed Forces possess the previously mentioned Airborne Battalion. This battalion consists of two Light Infantry Companies, one Combat Service Support Company, and one Heavy Combat Support Company, comprised of a Mortar Platoon, an Anti-Tank Guided Missile Platoon, a Sniper Platoon and an Anti-Material Rifle Squad. The entire battalion has no specific airborne materiel, vehicle, or equipment.

b. Deduction:

The ambition of engaging one battalion-sized element after air movement in several Company-lifts[xii] can be assessed as feasible with the given assets. Even the mentioned tactical shift of main effort, as well as tactical/operational mobility, would be achievable with the current posture. On the contrary, tactical flank coverage and especially Deep Operations require assets with higher survivability and assertive force. By characteristics, landing zones will not always be permissive from the very beginning. Opposing forces might, at least, be bypassed, and landed forces might need direct fire support while re-organizing. It is assessed as being doubtful that a type OH-58, equipped with a Minigun, will provide sufficient fire coverage and support for such an operation.

The Eurocopter Tiger, the AH-64 Apache, an AH-1 Supercobra as well as the Mil Mi-24 would contribute to filling this capability gap. The Mil Mi-24 seems to be especially attractive on the first view because this weapon system allows transportation of troops during the engagement as a Combat Helicopter. Since available ground facilities are currently directed to support and maintain equipment of western origin, the acquisition of Russian equipment would imply a total shift on the Austrian Armed Forces' acquisition philosophy and can, therefore, be excluded. This restriction is, by the way, valid as well for Sweden and Switzerland. Whereas Sweden relies, wherever possible, on domestic products and Switzerland focuses on western products, Finland maintains its traditional mixture of western and eastern materiel.

Considering the current fleet, ground facilities are already shaped for maintaining Bell-Products like the Supercobra, which would exclude the AH-64 and the Eurocopter Tiger. Nevertheless, the latter remains attractive due to European partnerships, a solid industrial base nearby, and the strategic national interest of facilitating independent European industries. A solution based on unmanned aerial vehicles might be attractive considering future trends. However, it is excluded as Austrian philosophy will not change concerning a human pilot being the precondition for any combat engagement.

However, aviation assets are just one part of these tactical maneuvers. Airborne troops are to conduct operations after having occupied the landing zone. Therefore, tactical mobility and firepower seem to be crucial as well as sustainability in terms of airmobile combat service support elements, e.g., a ROLE1E medical installation to ensure the required 24 hours self-sustainability. Without these assets, any Airborne Operation contains the risk of deliberately sacrificing its forces without any benefit.

Typical solutions could be the Russian, airdroppable BMD-4, or the German-produced Mungo and Wiesel. Excluding Russian solutions again due to policy, the Wiesel might

be the required because one type of vehicle could cover several roles, such as direct support, indirect support, reconnaissance, or Command Post Vehicle. In contrast, the Mungo would host a higher number of soldiers, but without fire support capability.

c. Conclusion:

Within the given framework, the weapon systems Eurocopter Tiger and Wiesel would be recommended for an acquisition program. Asset-wise, this would be the nucleus for a light Air Maneuver Task Force. To enhance sustainment, container-solutions seem to be appropriate. So far, the Austrian Armed Forces possess container-based ROLE1E equipment but fitted for the C-130. It is to be ensured that these solutions can be fixed-wing airlifted, too.

d. Side-Effects:

To ensure equal velocity within this task force, the AB212 is to be replaced by at least 12 additional UH-60. Due to the decision to opt for the Tiger instead of the Supercobra, the "Bell"-infrastructure would not be required anymore.

The introduction of a new class of ground vehicles like the Wiesel would require a limited amount of additional necessary maintenance facilities. The already available maintenance basis for the current armored fleet is assessed as being an excellent baseline for this acquisition, especially in connection with the existing strategic partnership with the German Bundeswehr.

All assets are in a mature status when it comes to the technological readiness level, but still not outdated. It can be assumed that a Combat Element like this could cover the requirements for the next 15-20 years.

5. Conclusion

Although not always recognized by the vast majority of a nations' population, there is a direct link between the National Security Strategy and the required materiel. A strategy never explains a requirement in detail. It defines an end state, outlines objectives, describes ways, and sometimes even means. It sets the frame for further planning of the nation's instruments of power. In combination with the strategic environment, threat assessments, and the legal framework, the way ahead narrows during the planning process. Doctrine and tactical requirements finally outline the need for equipment.

Nevertheless, it is still in connection with the National Security Strategy. The above-mentioned sterile example of a neutral state depicted this process along a logical line. A nations' security is ensured amongst others by military capabilities. A whole-of-nation approach demands an

effective and efficient armed force as a prerequisite. Nevertheless, this process needs a broad public, and in consequence, political support. Political interest and respect are measurable in financing. However, armed forces are targets of daily political discussions and populism, linked to the severity of the perceived threat, urgency, and necessity. Whereas investments in the armed forces in Sweden and Finland are mostly kept out of public discussions, Austria and Switzerland are suffering from the perception of eternal peace in Europe, not even affected by the Crimea crisis.

Nevertheless, that should not affect the military planning process when it comes to capability building. The security

situation has become volatile in Europe. Consequently, plans need to be developed before acquisitions are granted. Requirement-based contingency planning is the motto instead of just-in-time planning. The military is to be prepared in case of emergency, no matter how popular in times of peace. A precondition for success is to explain the requirements in time and financing for the military capability building process, to emphasize the link between strategy, ambition, strategic environment, and armed forces. Understanding might create support for the military. Designated to fight a nation's wars, it contributes to a nation's strategy price-tag.

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- [iv] [4] Federal Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Austria, Teilstrategie Verteidigungspolitik – National Defence Strategy: TV (2014), 11.
- [v] [5] *ibid.*, 13–15.
- [vi] [6] Federal Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Austria, Militaerstrategisches Konzept 2017 – Military Strategic Concept 2017 (2017), 17.
- [vii] [7] The limiting factor will be the available axis of advance, narrowed by the landscape. Bypassing the Danube valley will nevertheless be inevitable since NATO members like Slovenia or the Czech Republic are not able to provide the required infrastructure for force movement. Both states were, even during the Cold War, reluctant to improve this infrastructure in order to keep it "unattractive" as an objective in a significant conflict scenario.
- [viii] [8] When referencing "Deep Operations – Interdiction" the author is primarily referring to Multiple Rocket Launch Systems (MLRS), High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HIMARS), or Long-Range Strike Bombers.
- [ix] [9] The National Council of the Republic of Austria and Allied Powers in World War II, State Treaty of the Republic of Austria: Staatsvertrag (1955), Art. 13 (1). Although the Austrian government unilaterally proclaimed this regulation ineffective in 1990, the signing countries never revoked this restraint, based on the assessment that these restrictions do not interfere with the neutrality. (Sigmar Stadlmeier, *Dynamische Interpretation der dauernden Neutralität*, Schriften zum Völkerrecht Bd.95 (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1991), 180.)

[x] [10] Federal Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Austria, *Militaerstrategisches Konzept 2017 – Military Strategic Concept 2017*, 15.

[xi] [11] It consists, excluding the relevant land-based maintenance facilities and Command Elements, of 3 C-130 Tactical Airlifters, 8 PC-6 fixed-wing utility aircraft, and a rotary-wing fleet of 9 S-70 "Blackhawk" transport helicopters, 21 Alouette III liaison helicopters, 23 AB212 transport helicopters and 10 OH-58 scout helicopters. The C-130 and the S-70 were just recently updated with self-protection measures, whereas the PC-6, the Alouette III, and the AB212 possess neither active nor passive weapon systems or protection measures. Only the OH-58 are equipped with an M-134 Minigun. (Kommando Luftunterstuetzung, "Austrian Army Aviation: Assets," last modified August 28, 2019, <http://www.bundesheer.at/sk/lusk/unterstuetzung.shtml>.)

[xii] [12] Federal Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Austria, *Militaerstrategisches Konzept 2017 – Military Strategic Concept 2017*, 18.

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