

MILITARY STRATEGY MAGAZINE

Linking Ends and Means

*Antulio J. Echevarria II*  
**Clausewitz’s ‘Warlike Element’ and  
the War in Ukraine**

*M.L.R. Smith*  
**On Efficacy: A Beginner’s Guide to  
Strategic Theory**

*Gordon Bare*  
**A Renewed Nuclear Strategy for  
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**Erich Ludendorff: Successful  
Tactician, Failed Strategist**

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**A Tale of Two Caesars:  
Contemporary Lessons from  
Divergent Caesarian Strategies**

*Michael G. Anderson*  
**The Case for Deception in  
Operational Success**

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## MILITARY STRATEGY MAGAZINE

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# A Note From The Editor

The strength of this new issue of *Military Strategy Magazine* does contrast somewhat with the public discourse on current events in Ukraine, where the Kharkiv and Kherson counter-offensives are underway. It seems that the majority of commentators are, after six months of open conflict, still confused and unfamiliar with what large-scale combat operations look like. Yet, nothing seen in the 2022 Russo-Ukrainian War is new or has not been seen before in other conflicts. It isn't even a particularly big war depending on the scale of measurements you wish to adopt. Given that we live in the information age, it seems somewhat ironic that truth is more elusive than ever before as it concerns actions and outcomes on the ground.

So what for military strategy?

It should be of use to the wider community that military strategy is being done, and being done on a scale large enough to admit insights and wider awareness. The problem is that most commentary is teetering on the edge of click-bait on the one hand and academic self-forgiveness on the other. Much of the conjecture about a war between Russia and Ukraine has not aged well. Nor have the descriptions of the over-hyped performance of the Russian Army available in many articles and essays extant online. We/they need to do better as the West emerges into a reality where it may not be safe to assume that Russia and, therefore, China cannot tie their shoelaces. Still, it would be equally negligent to imagine they can do so while running, as was done with Russia.

Strategy is a practical skill. It needs practice, and theory exists to explain facts, not conjectures. This edition, like all the others, contains some of the best writings on the chosen subject. We are never going to have too much quality.

**William F. Owen**  
Editor, *Military Strategy Magazine*  
September 2022

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# Clausewitz's 'Warlike Element' and the War in Ukraine

Antulio J. Echevarria II - U.S. Army War College



Photo by manhhai (Flickr), CC by 2.0

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As the conflict in Ukraine unfolds, students of the famed Prussian military theorist Carl von Clausewitz may wonder

which of his concepts, aside from well-worn ones such as "war is the continuation of politics by other means," still hold true. Of course, Clausewitz did the bulk of his thinking and writing some two hundred years ago. Since then, military hardware and fighting techniques, the likes of which he could not have imagined, have changed the character of war in both predictable and unpredictable ways. Fortunately, Clausewitz also said a great deal about war's intangibles, those elements of conflict that exist in parallel to its changing character, but which have a timeless quality about them. One such

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concept, the “warlike element” (*kriegerische Element*) and its relationship to a people's war or to the arming of an entire nation (*Volksbewaffnung*), can shed useful light on our observations of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

## The Warlike Element

Clausewitz's warlike element is all but invisible in the Michael Howard and Peter Paret translations of *On War*. [i] Yet the concept was of central importance to the Prussian's overall theory of war and is evident in some of his earlier writings. An excellent dissertation by a Finnish officer, Anders Palmgren, equates it to an “enthusiasm for fighting.”[ii] Indeed, it represents a quality of fierceness in warfare brought about not by destructive technologies, but by human feelings of “hatred” (*Haß*) and “enmity” (*Feindschaft*), both of which Clausewitz equated to a “blind natural instinct” (*ein blinder Naturtrieb*).[iii] The warlike element appears in Clausewitz's trinitarian conception of war's nature as enmity or hostility, and it captures what he understood to be war's true spirit or essence (*Geist*). He used the warlike element—the quality of fierceness or an enthusiasm for fighting—as an antithesis to the geometric rules and principles that Adam Dietrich von Bülow and Antoine Henri de Jomini claimed were the true spirit of modern war. In this sense, Clausewitz's thinking showed the intellectual biases of the cultural movement known loosely as German romanticism, which prized the authentic and the natural over the artificial, and eschewed mechanistic rules and prescriptions for placing form above spirit.[iv]

Contrary to what some interpreters have claimed over the years, *On War* is more about the warlike element than it is about absolute war. Absolute war is nothing more than the warlike element, the true spirit of war, taken to its ultimate expression and the enthusiasm for fighting is unencumbered by any external constraints. Since real war is never absolved of such restraints, however, absolute war could never occur in reality. Napoleon's wars came close to it, Clausewitz argued, due to the participation of the entire nation (*Volk*), especially the populace, which transformed war's nature from the limited conflicts that had preceded it.

The warlike element captured not only how warlike some wars were, but also how unwarlike others were. Clausewitz likened such conflicts to a “restricted, shriveled up form of war” (*beschränkte, zusammengeschrumpfte Gestalt des Krieges*) or “half-things” (*Halbdinge*) because customs and conventions had stifled the true spirit of war.[v] Prussia engaged in such a half-thing in 1812, for instance, when it was forced to contribute some 20,000 troops to the Grande Armée for the invasion of Russia. Most Prussians felt little enthusiasm for the French cause and readily defected when the opportunity arose later that year.[vi] But such half-things, Clausewitz had to acknowledge, were wars too. In fact, they were more numerous historically than

warlike wars. As Palmgren rightly notes, the concept of *Politik* (meaning policy or political interaction, depending on the context) allows Clausewitz to retain the warlike element because *Politik* functions as a guiding intelligence that shapes (or endeavors to) how warlike a war will be. Put differently, *Politik* enables Clausewitz to acknowledge most wars would fall between the extremes of warlike and unwarlike.

## The Warlike Element Plus Arming the Nation

Clausewitz originally expected a war of national liberation, “a war that a people wages on its home ground for liberty and independence,” to be more warlike in nature than most other wars.[vii] The term *Volksbewaffnung* can mean arming the people, thus a people's war, or arming the entire nation. In fact, Clausewitz, his mentor Gerd von Scharnhorst, and others of the Prussian Military Reorganization Commission had begun discussing ways to bring the Prussian populace, the monarchy, and the army together into a unified entity, a total nation in arms, through some form of universal military service.[viii] Either on its own, or as part of a conventional army, or as a combination of both, Clausewitz believed a people fighting for its liberty against an invader would surely display a high enthusiasm for fighting, a fierceness. Partisan activities in Spain, in the Tyrol, and in the Vendee, involved fighting that was especially bloody and merciless. These cases confirmed his views that if a populace wanted to be unconquerable in its fight for freedom, it would be. Even initial defeats would simply inspire later generations to continue fighting and do so at little financial cost. Officers and soldiers waging such conflicts should be considered heroes and patriots, not pariahs. Indeed, the government must compel the populace to take up arms for the preservation of the nation's independence and honor. The involvement of the populace in warfare as soldiers and as partisans meant both the nature and character of war (as we would describe them) had changed.[ix]

Unfortunately, Clausewitz's own Prussia failed to launch an insurrection after its defeat at the hands of the French in 1806/1807. Queen Louise, General Gebhard von Blücher, and other high-ranking officials may well have seethed with the desire for revenge against the French after the Treaty of Tilsit in 1807, which deprived Prussia of half its territory, imposed an indemnity of 155 million francs, and reduced its fighting forces to 44,000 troops.[x] But that animus had not spread to the larger populace. Prussian subjects were not fully enfranchised or invested in the state. Even some of the Prussian *illuminati*, such as Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and Johann Wolfgang Goethe, who lived but twenty kilometers from each other near Jena, were eager for a French victory and had wished the “French army luck.”[xi] Both had embraced the popular narrative that Napoleon was not just a military genius but an agent of social and political change who would sweep away the stifling legal structures



and practices of the "*Ancien Régime*" and replace them with more egalitarian ones.[xii] Hence, only a few local uprisings occurred, such as the one initiated by a cavalry officer by the name Major Ferdinand von Schill in May 1809, and those were quickly put down by the French and their allies. It would not be until 1813, after modest social, political, and economic reforms had taken effect and as a weakened Napoleon retreated from Russia, that Prussia's populace showed any appetite for engaging in a war of liberation.

Clausewitz later analyzed the root causes of Prussia's lack of fighting spirit in 1806 and 1807.[xiii] As he rightly observed, most of Prussia's social classes expressed little desire to fight for the Prussian crown, especially against Napoleonic France. Moreover, Prussia's strategists were divided over the best course of action to adopt as the French columns advanced. Save for a few enlightened souls, such as Clausewitz's mentor Gerd von Scharnhorst, Prussia's military leaders entertained antiquated ideas about fighting and campaigning. The rank and file were the product of mechanistic training devoid of spirit and neither organized nor psychologically prepared for a fast-paced, modern war. In short, the Prussians were decidedly unwarlike across every category of the Clausewitzian trinity. The French, by comparison, were fused together into a coherent, if not always cohesive, fighting machine. The French army, moreover, was led by one of history's greatest commanders; its ranks were filled with citizen soldiers motivated by a keen nationalistic spirit, while the broader populace seemingly supported the war. Every element of the Clausewitzian trinity, in other words, was inclined in a warlike direction for the French; all three elements in alignment would prove too much for the divided and friction-filled Prussian state.

When Clausewitz wrote "The People in Arms," chapter 26, book 6 of *On War* (presumably in the mid-1820s) his outlook had matured. He had experienced the grueling Russian campaign of 1812, had witnessed firsthand some of the brutality of partisan warfare, and had seen the ebb and flow of the fighting spirit of armies with citizen soldiers. Large numbers of *Landwehr* had deserted Blücher's forces during the heavy rainstorm that followed the Prussian defeat at Ligny, for instance. Fusing the government, the people, and the military together was not a panacea. For a people's war or a nation in arms to succeed, Clausewitz maintained, it should be waged in conjunction with a conventional campaign conducted by a standing army. In addition, a people's war must be waged (1) within the borders of the country, (2) not be decided by a single blow, (3) over a large expanse of territory, (4) by a defender with a suitable national character, and (5) across a rough and inaccessible countryside.[xiv] Clearly, these conditions are present in much of modern-day Ukraine. However, number 4, national character, derives from attitudes cultural chauvinism common among developed countries and may be dangerously misleading.

## The Ukrainian Defense of Kyiv in 2022

The Ukrainian defense of Kyiv offers a modern example of Clausewitz's warlike element and his notion of people's war combined. Early reports indicate Ukrainian civilians, plus the 112th and 114th Territorial Defense Forces, as well as the 72nd Mechanized Infantry Brigade conducted a successful defense of Kyiv.[xv] Scores of YouTube videos and other media showed many Ukrainian civilians arming themselves with the most basic of weapons, from Kalashnikovs to Molotov cocktails, and preparing to defend their homes and neighborhoods against invasion. As two retired US Army officers, Colonel Liam Collins and Major John Spenser, both of whom interviewed Ukrainian civilians and military personnel after the battle of Kyiv, explain:

Collins: "On the 24th [of February] the Ukrainian forces definitely had a plan they were going to execute as soon as the Russians launched . . . but were not yet in position . . . [once the assault occurred] they quickly moved into position with the 72nd Mech defending Kyiv proper at the city limits . . . relying on this informal group of volunteer forces operating forward of that main defensive line outside of the city limits."

Spencer: "Right . . . it was an irregular force that was part of this defense in depth . . ."

Collins: "Everyone had heard about the Ukrainian Territorial Defense Force before the war . . . the question is how important was their role and how organized were they? That was one of the surprises . . . the formal Territorial Defense Force was only officially established on the 1st of January . . . but they weren't really organized until the 31st of March or the beginning of April . . . after the defense of Kyiv they were established into formal units. Before that time, it was just a lot of civilians showing up, getting issued a rifle or an AK and couple of magazines with no one really giving them any direction . . . then moving out, self-organizing, to defend a bridge, or defend a position, doing what was necessary to defend their nation . . . Yet the volunteers were extremely effective."

Spencer: "this is the theme in one of the articles we've written about, the role of volunteers in the defense of Kyiv . . . and in outlying cities . . . like Buca . . . literally 'community defenders' were part of this early defense in depth . . . some of them were veterans with prior experience. . . some had a few training events . . . and became leaders."

Collins: "You almost had what I equate to a 'county-level national guard' and they turn their county seat or whatever into a headquarters." [xvi]

Both officers went on to recommend combining regular and irregular forces into a total defense concept along



the lines of the Ukrainian example.[xvii] As always, early observations must be confirmed through further research. Nonetheless, these insights are well enough supported to warrant opening a more deliberate dialogue on the topic.

To be sure, the Ukrainian defense of Kyiv serves well as a microcosm of Clausewitz's related concepts of the warlike element and *Volksbewaffnung* in action. Yet we would do well to remember it was not fighting spirit with an integrated defense that proved decisive; a multiplicity of Russian mistakes also contributed to the successful defense of Kyiv. Russian columns moved without security forward or along the flanks or overhead, and thus drove into ambushes. The Russian airborne units were left unsupported, and hence were wiped out. By the accounts of Spencer and Collins, even Ukraine's Territorial Defense Forces were unprepared for the Russian assault due to poor organization and planning. Fortunately, Ukrainian enmity toward the Russian invader aided the defenders in overcoming their shortfalls. But we cannot count on the Russians to make the same mistakes in the future. We must also keep in mind the warnings of Russian experts who argue the Kremlin is rarely, if ever, likely to be deterred on strategic matters dealing with Ukraine. Therefore, a fully vetted defensive concept, not just one based on deterrence, is necessary. Both concepts should be based on partnering regular and irregular units to achieve a conventional defense augmented by an unconventional insurrection.

Moreover, should another Russian invasion happen elsewhere, the defenders might not have the benefit of facing an ill-prepared and poorly led invading force. Therefore, best to prepare in advance. Accordingly, NATO's member states must conduct rigorous defense reviews of their armed forces and their operational concepts. These reviews must ensure each nation's regular and irregular components are well prepared; they must train together, become acquainted with each other's leaders at all echelons and conduct periodic joint rehearsals of their defensive missions. Indeed, NATO's interoperability challenges may increase greatly as regular armies from one member cross-train with irregular forces in another. Nonetheless, it may be crucial to ensuring the success of Article 5.

## Conclusion

Clearly, the Clausewitz of eighteenth-century Prussia regarded armed conflict differently than we do today. His concepts of the warlike element and its relationship to a nation in arms, to the extent we can reconstruct them today, shed light on some of the events surrounding the defense of Kyiv. While competent military strategists have long appreciated the value of morale, it remains difficult to quantify. Nor is it qualitatively the same as primordial hatred or enmity. Nor is primordial hatred qualitatively the same as passion, which can have warlike and anti-warlike characteristics. In attempting to trace enmity in war to something primordial, Clausewitz might have erred. But his error still gives us food for thought.

Modern military professionals talk of war's nature as chameleon-like. A chameleon's skin may change color to fit its surroundings, but it remains a chameleon. In contrast, war's character—the institutions that participate in war, the weapons, the doctrines, and indeed the whole process of warfare itself—is said to change over time and across cultures. According to military professionals, those changes do not alter war's nature because war, at root, remains war. True. But Clausewitz said war was not like a chameleon. Its surface features change, yes; but, as he tried to say, so, too, do its inner forces. These expand and contract even as they rearrange themselves in ways that sometimes transform armed conflict from one type into another.[xviii] The so-called chameleon might transform into a dragon, for instance; or the dragon might become a lowly newt.

By insisting war's nature is constant—all serve political purposes, fluctuate with the ups and downs of human emotions, and turn more on probability than predictability—modern military professionals deprive armed conflict of its ability to transform from one creature to another. They are, however, not necessarily aware they are doing so. Ironically, military professionals might not genuinely believe war's nature is as constant as they claim, since they tend to regard today's "small wars" much like the half-things of Clausewitz's day rather than as "real" wars. It is probably better this way. Only inept leaders would prepare for the world wars of the twentieth century, with their unparalleled destructiveness and unmatched levels of primordial hatred, in the same way as they would for one of the Banana wars. Clausewitz's warlike element reminds us all wars may be of the same nature, yet truly different.

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- [i] Compare: C. v. Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. and ed. by Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 592–93; C. v. Clausewitz, *Vom Kriege*, 19th Ed. (Berlin: Dümmlers, 1980), 970–74.
- [ii] Anders Palmgren, *Visions of Strategy: Following Clausewitz's Train of Thought* (Helsinki: National Defense University, 2014), 401, and 183ff; this is the only work I have found that treats the concept in depth.
- [iii] VK, Bk I, Chp 1, 213; *On War*, 89.
- [iv] Frederick C. Beiser, *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987).
- [v] VK, Bk VIII, Chp. 6B, 968, 991–92; *On War*, 609.
- [vi] By the Convention of Tauroggen, December 30, 1812, which Clausewitz facilitated.
- [vii] C. v. Clausewitz, *Historical and Political Writings*, ed. and trans. Peter Paret and Daniel Moran (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), Letter to German philosopher Johann Gottlieb Fichte, January 1809, 283.
- [viii] William O. Shanahan, *Prussian Military Reforms 1786–1813* (New York: AMS Press, 1966), 127–49.
- [ix] James Davis and Christopher Daase, *Clausewitz On Small War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 170–96.
- [x] Michael V. Leggiere, *Blücher: Scourge of Napoleon* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2002), 96–97.
- [xi] Letter to Niethammer, dated October 13, 1806, in Hegel: *The Letters*, trans. Clark Butler and Christiane Seiler (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 115.
- [xii] “Thanks to the bath of her Revolution,” wrote Hegel in 1807, “the French Nation has freed herself of many institutions which the human spirit had outgrown like the shoes of a child. These institutions . . . continue to oppress other nations as so many fetters devoid of spirit.” Hegel: *Letters*, 302.
- [xiii] Carl von Clausewitz, *Preussen in seiner grossen Katastrophe* (Wien and Leipzig: Karolinger 2001); the best translation is “Observations on Prussia in Her Great Catastrophe” (written between 1823 and 1825) in *Historical and Political Writings*, 75.
- [xiv] Compare Howard and Paret, *On War*, 480; Davis and Daase, *Clausewitz On Small War*, 222.
- [xv] In Ukraine will be formed more than 150 territorial defence battalions – *Militarnyi*
- [xvi] Studying the Battle of Kyiv, Part 1 | Urban Warfare Project (castos.com)
- [xvii] How volunteers can help defeat great powers (militarytimes.com)
- [xviii] *Vom Kriege*, Bk I, 212–13; *On War*, 89.

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# On Efficacy: A Beginner's Guide to Strategic Theory

M.L.R. Smith – King's College London, Department of War Studies



## About the author

M.L.R. Smith is Professor of Strategic Theory at King's College London. He is the author of numerous books and essays on strategy. His latest publication is *The Strategy of Maoism in the West: Rage and the Radical Left* (Elgar, 2020).

supermarket – or whatever – expostulate their lofty and frequently unattainable aspirations, or simply camouflage what they do already, in flowery, feel-good, rhetoric.[i] The word strategy is invariably deployed in such a way that it is intended to sound authoritative and far-sighted, and to convey the image that the people in charge know what they are doing (when often they don't).[ii]

The term strategy is one of the most over-used words in current language. You might have first become conscious of the term via corporate-speak: long, jargon infused, cliché ridden 'mission' statements or 'vision' documents, usually devoid of any real meaning, where your school, college, local council, university, employer, utility company,

The idea of 'strategy' as something that only supremely accomplished people in high performing roles can understand or accomplish, whilst 'ordinary' people should fall into line and execute the 'strategic plan' prepared for them, is one of the most prevalent of misapprehensions.

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'Strategy' as a source of mystery and elite power is an enduring myth, and one that I, as a self-declared strategic theorist, wish always to dispel.

## The strategic road map

The first task of this analysis, then, is to reveal that the fundamentals of strategy are not complicated because all of us are, at some intuitive level, strategic practitioners. It is about being *effective*, that is, realising desired objectives. However, easy though it may be to comprehend strategy at the level of the individual, as I stated in another article for this journal, putting the fundamentals into practice is hard, especially when strategy expands beyond the realm of personal advancement.[iii]

The essay will outline how the idea of strategy has evolved as a method of understanding about what it means to be effective, and that it is not something that is intrinsically tied to war, as many tend to believe, but is about life choices in general. Simple in concept though the idea of strategy may be, this article elucidates the practical challenges inherent in evaluating the notion of effectiveness. It will show how theorists reflected upon lessons from the Cold War and the Vietnam War era, which were particularly instructive in framing a coherent intellectual basis upon which a discipline of strategic analysis can be constructed.

The basis of good strategic analysis, as this article will argue, is really all about putting in the hard effort to understand your surroundings and the factors that impinge on the decision-making processes of you, your allies and your adversaries. It will suggest that this effort can be distilled into six basic principles of strategic analysis that can act as a guide, and a point of entry for beginners, to become more sophisticated strategists. It will conclude by offering several observations about what it ultimately means to be strategically effective, in particular emphasising that strategy is a universal and never-ending intellectual endeavour.

## It's not complicated

Strategy is neither complicated, nor the preserve of some monastic clique of initiates, who have, in some inexplicable manner, gained insight into the world of strategic affairs. There are those, like myself, who study strategy for a living and who profess to specialise in strategic affairs. However, while there may be communities of thinkers who identify themselves as 'strategists', and institutes and associations that purport to specialise in strategy, there is, strictly speaking, no 'guild' of strategists or well-defined profession of strategy. There is, moreover, no training or fool proof guide that will qualify you as a strategist or make you better at being a strategist.

Nevertheless, in essence, strategy as an idea is straight

forward to comprehend. And the reason for this is because strategy is universal. It is all around us. In fact, strategy, both in concept and practice, is profoundly personal. Strategy is about you.

The best way to think about it, is that we are all at some level capable of strategising. We all make decisions, large and small, each day of our lives, where we weigh up the costs and benefits of different courses of action. Often such calculations exist at the level of the mundane. Our decision making is thus usually intuitive or even unconscious, be it choosing what to wear when we get up in the morning, which route to take to work to beat the traffic, or how to balance our monthly budgets until the next pay day.

In myriad ways, far too many to enumerate, we as individuals think and act strategically almost every moment of our waking lives. To put it another way, human beings are more than able to think strategically about their own personal lives. Anyone who is not is likely to lose their way in the world very quickly.

## Strategy is all around you

Strategy is therefore ubiquitous. It is everywhere. And all of us who function as conscious adult human beings, behave in a manner that might be construed as 'strategic': that is, we think, gauge, and assess, the ways by which we can achieve things that are meaningful to us. In this regard, as a process, strategy can be regarded as a supremely pragmatic enterprise: to achieve our aims, to maximise our well-being, to succeed in our goals.

Since individuals invariably function within collectives – families, clans, neighbourhoods, ethnic and religious communities, and so on – we can discern how strategy proceeds from the micro level of the individual to the macro level of the collective, be it the social, corporate or the state entity. Wider social groupings also possess aggregate goals that they wish to attain, and therefore they, too, operate as strategic actors.[iv]

To be clear, this does not mean that people are evolved to think strategically at the grand collective level, in the spheres of national policy making for example. The preponderance of dreadful policy errors that one can recount throughout history attest to the fact that when it comes to the weighing up of highly complex issues and executing a course of action that is effective and proportional, is all too susceptible to human frailty and miscalculation.

Having the cognition required to think or visualise strategically at the national level, which often means having the courage to take tough decisions, is rare. To reiterate, at the level of the individual most people have the capacity to act 'strategically' in accordance with their own interests. To that extent, the basic principles of strategy are simple and

observable. Putting them into practice at any other level beyond that of individual advancement, however, is always likely to be hard.

To boil down the essence of what it means to be 'strategic', at the level of the individual or the collective, I would say it is to be *effective*: namely, realising the capacity to attain desired objectives. Efficacy, the degree to which a desired result can be achieved, is the process that strategic theory seeks to capture and analyse within a coherent framework.

## What does it mean to be effective?

The objective of this short essay, then, is to reflect upon what it means to be effective, to show how this can be understood and analysed in a systematic manner, and how this process of understanding can be said to constitute the basis of strategic theory. In so doing, the intention is to illuminate what strategic theory entails as an approach to the study of social phenomena, and through the provision of examples from war, politics – and life in general – illustrate how strategy is a universal concept that can apply to anything from national policy, to business, to personal choices.

Above all, the aim is to demonstrate that strategic theory is a method of comprehending how to be *effective* in decision making. The content of decisions, especially when they involve issues concerning the exercise of military power or national policy, can of course be complex and contentious, but the application of strategic theory is geared towards simplifying the process of understanding, not complicating it.

## Demystifying strategy

Demystifying strategy is therefore the first task of the strategic theorist. The easiest way to do this is to first identify, where the word 'strategy' originates. Linguistically, strategy derives from the Ancient Greek word, 'strategos', which literally means 'the general'. The term, in this respect, does clearly have military origins and is usually interpreted as the 'art of the general' to denote the skill with which a commander wields their forces to attain victory in battle.[v]

However, the timeless essence of strategy as the means of 'winning' in war is embedded in the human condition. Whether we like it or not, succeeding in what you wish to gain in competition with others is a universal striving. Therefore, the principles of 'winning' in wars, and in life – that is succeeding in what you set out to do, often in competition with others – is an idea that transcends time and space and applies to numerous spheres of human activity.

So, yes, strategy does have military origins, and relates to 'winning', though as has been emphasised, the notion of

strategy as a pure concept – relating your means to your ends, to achieve your goals – is much broader than war and the practice of military power. Here, I need to outline why strategy, beyond its linguistic origins, is often coupled with war in the popular imagination, rather than life choices in general.

## Why is strategy associated with war but is not intrinsic to war?

Strategy is associated with war, namely, the physical clash of organised armed forces, because the outcomes in war are *usually* easier to observe and evaluate than other areas of life. The choices and consequences in war often present themselves in stark, binary, terms: life and death; victory and defeat, success and failure. Therefore, the criteria for observing or measuring effectiveness is often clearer to see. The same cannot necessarily be said of other areas of life, where the distinctions between what is a successful outcome and one that is not is debatable.

That said, while there are parallels between life, business, and war. The challenge in each of the many areas of human conduct – be it in life, business, politics, or war – is that people often fail to define what constitutes success (or 'winning') in clear or measurable ways that lend themselves to an objective assessment of success. No one area, including the stark domain of war, necessarily presents clearer criteria than another; it is how we define (or fail to define) those criteria that is crucial.

Differing approaches to parenting provide a telling example. Raising children is invariably a challenge for anyone, and there is certainly no 'rule-book', but there are different styles, or strategies, that might be considered. One parenting style might emphasise discipline, rules, and boundary-setting. The parental goal here might be to ensure that the child grows up with a strong sense of morals, a clear sense of direction and the capacity for self-organisation. The downside of this, however, might be that far from inculcating these values, the child evolves into adulthood feeling insecure, repressed, and resentful against their upbringing.

Conversely, a more liberal parenting style might accentuate a freer and less rule-bound upbringing, with the intention of nurturing the child's ability to flourish and express themselves. The potential downside is that the child might grow up lacking sufficient self-restraint or be unfocused in their life goals. They too might, in fact, begin to resent their parents as a result.[vi]

Of course, most parents, one surmises, probably do not deliberately think in terms of differing strategies. As Steve Leonard sagely notes, 'parents can choose to take a strategic approach to raising children, but they generally don't. By the time they are wise enough to understand how things

work, their children are adults already paying for therapy'.  
[vii]

Nevertheless, the point is that different approaches or styles, if executed only intuitively, will involve the consideration of difficult, often conflicting, choices, where the ultimate outcomes are harder to evaluate in terms of whether they were successful or not. This is the stuff of the 'strategy' of everyday life. Different courses of action involve subjective choices, dictated by different value systems, different ways of looking at the world, and different forms of analysis about what is right and wrong, or 'good' and 'bad'. Life is perpetually lived in shades of grey. To be efficacious, is well, complicated! Give me a war to study any day in comparison.

### Competence, optimisation, efficiency, rational action and performance

The point is that to be effective in life involves the weighing up of choices and potential consequences. In many cases, there is no obvious right and wrong path.[viii] Strategic theory is therefore all about the study of what it means to be effective in highly contingent settings. But you may ask, what does 'effectiveness' mean?

- Does it mean *competence*: possessing capability, skills, knowledge, and expertise?
- Does it mean being able to achieve *optimal outcomes*: the ability to reach the most favourable, interest-maximising, situation?
- Does it mean *efficiency*: the attainment of goals with the minimum of effort and resources?
- Does it mean *rational choices*: taking decisions based on objective reason and logic?
- Does it mean *performance*: the accomplishment of a task to a high standard?

Or is it all the above? Oh, and by the way, can any of this be objectively measured?

Hmm...well...? Such questions have preoccupied self-proclaimed strategic theorists, usually in the fields of economics and political science, over the decades. A mixture of theory, reflection and experience has tended to lead to a broad conclusion that may not come as a stunning surprise: namely, that being a slave to some or all of the above is a fallacy. The criteria of competence, optimisation, efficiency, rational action and performance cannot establish any objective measure of effectiveness, let alone predict who is likely to be successful in their chosen strategy.

### The problem of theorising in the Cold War

American theorists did try, nonetheless, to map out just such a criteria. During the Cold War, theorists of nuclear deterrence – perhaps the earliest, and undoubtedly some of the most sublime, practitioners of a discipline of strategic theory – used Game Theory, imported from the fields of mathematics and economics, to model optimal outcomes and behaviours. This involved a great deal of abstract theorising and modelling.[ix] However, the employment of rational actor-based game theory during this era exposed its limitations as an explanatory and predictive tool.

The problem was this: the whole point about nuclear deterrence was never to use nuclear weapons. Therefore, what was the criteria for effectiveness? Answer: not using them. But you can't really prove a negative. You cannot show definitively why someone did not do something. Come the end of the Cold War in 1990, you might conclude that you had succeeded in your basic objective of not starting a nuclear holocaust, but it doesn't give you any measurable criteria of effectiveness. Why so?

Well, in the first instance, proving a negative is conceptually unfalsifiable, but the broader empirical truth is that abstract theorising doesn't consider the infinitely varied complexities of human conduct. Humans are motivated by issues and concerns that are not always, or even primarily, governed by a material cost-benefit analysis. Your idea of 'rationality' or what constitutes an optimal outcome is not necessarily someone else's idea. Your cost-benefit analysis may be entirely unique to you, informed by your own subjective values and experiences as to what is meaningful and important. Thus, your appreciation of what it is to be effective in the world may be very different from everyone else's.

### The Americans are taught a lesson

So, that's a problem for diagnostically minded theorists: effectiveness cannot be measured accurately according to some objective scientific criteria. And how do we know this? Because United States policy makers were taught a gorilla of a lesson to this effect in the Vietnam War. In this era, the Americans fought with a plan to impose a 'rational' cost-benefit analysis on the North Vietnamese regime. The intention was to inflict more suffering on North Vietnam than the Americans thought they could possibly withstand, particularly through very large aerial bombing offensives and by utilising enormous amounts of firepower on the ground. Yet, North Vietnam possessed a completely different set of moral and practical considerations than the Americans, encapsulated by President Ho Chi Minh who is reported to have remarked to a US diplomat that 'You will kill ten of us, we will kill one of you, but in the end, you will tire of it first'.[x]



In other words, the North Vietnamese fought to a diametrically opposed strategic calculus. For the Americans, being 'effective' was the imposition of 'unacceptable' costs on the North, through the massive employment of firepower. The United States asserted a cost-benefit analysis that made sense to them but had no purchase on the North Vietnamese. Why? Because the North Vietnamese communists did not share the same value system as the Americans. The Hanoi regime was prepared to accept huge costs in pursuit of unification and national independence. These were values and goals for which many Vietnamese were prepared to sacrifice everything.

## Putting in the hard yards

Usually, I hate cliches, but Sun Tzu's ancient wisdom that to 'know the enemy and know yourself and in a hundred battles you will never be defeated' rings true.[xi] The Americans did not go through the effort of understanding their adversary. They did not seek to appreciate the underlying nationalist appeal embodied in Vietnamese communism.

The Americans are not uniquely guilty of failing to appreciate the adversarial viewpoint. It is a common failing almost everywhere. Had there been, for example, serious consideration given to understanding Russian geo-strategic sensibilities over Ukraine, then Europe may have averted the current crisis on its continent (as several eminent strategic thinkers from Henry Kissinger to John Mearsheimer have already pointed out).[xii]

And that is what a great deal of strategic theory is all about. There is no mystery to it. It is putting in the hard yards to understand your strengths, your limitations, your adversary, and your allies. But, above all, it is about understanding your situation. Remember, strategy is all about you, and what you want. However, what you want is quite often dependent upon the choices and actions of others, who you must influence to obtain what you desire. That doesn't mean being self-centred or narcissistic. Being effective – being a good strategist – should be an antidote to such failings, because ultimately, strategic theory teaches you not to be intellectually lazy.

But of course, this is all easier said than done. This is why so many policy responses fail. There may not be any mystery to it, but the hard work is antithetical to many. It is not complex, necessarily, but it can be complicated, especially as strategy evolves in scope and scale. The basic formula does not change, but the numbers of variables in the equation increases exponentially. And that gets complicated. That is also where strategy evolves beyond the science and into the art – a truly exceptional strategist is one who can see those variables and sense the interaction between them.

## How not to be lazy: what is strategic theory?

Even if the practice of effective strategy remains elusive in many policy making circles, at least in theoretical terms, arising out of the trauma of the Vietnam War, a more secure and balanced understanding of the nature of how to evaluate effectiveness began to emerge within scholarly analysis. It was in the aftermath of this era, that we can therefore suggest that a 'discipline' of strategic theory took shape, framed by six underlying principles. It is around these six principles that one can cohere a systematic understanding, of how to investigate matters of strategy.

Before identifying these six principles, let us briefly define what we mean by a 'theory' in this context. A scientific understanding of theory is that a hypothesis can survive experimental testing to yield replicable results, and thus reach an approximate truth about a particular matter. Strategic theory cannot aspire to this level of predictive accuracy, but it does constitute a theory more broadly in that it advances a set of propositions that can be held to explain certain facts or phenomena, which can then be subject to scrutiny and analysis. In that sense, strategic theory is less a hard 'theory' or set of rules than a set of purposive assumptions that seek to clarify what it means to think and act effectively in the world.[xiii] These can be summarised briefly as follows:

1. *The study of ways, ends and means*: Strategic theory is concerned with the ways in which available means can be employed to reach a desired end. As Michael Howard put it, strategy is the 'use of available resources to gain any objective'.[xiv] Here the term resources (the 'means'), refers not just to the material elements of power (e.g., economic strength, the numbers of soldiers and weapons, technological prowess, etc) but to the many intangible elements that might impose themselves on a decision maker such as the degree of popular enthusiasm for a cause and the extent to which popular will is prepared to support particular courses of action to achieve or defend certain goals and values.
2. *Interdependent decision making*: This is the assumption that decision making is influenced to some degree or another by the existence of a wilful adversary, or adversaries, or other actors more generally, who are also engaged in a determined pursuit of their own values and interests, which may be antagonistic to your own. This assumption means that decision-making cannot be measured against any fixed standard of efficacy, but in the light of the responses that your actions can be expected to elicit from an adversary. Effective decision making, therefore, is dependent on the consideration of the choices and actions of others with whom you might be in contention.
3. *Unitary actors*: Strategic theorists concern themselves

with 'unitary' actors, be they states, sub-state entities, or any other social grouping. Even though all social actors are comprised of individuals and other collectives (for example, armed forces, civil service bureaucracies, social classes, etc.), strategic theory assumes that the decision to act is an expression of a singular collective will. Therefore, strategic theory is primarily interested in examining the choices available to such actors and evaluating the composition of their decision-making, tracing the line of thought any social actor seeks to follow in pursuit of its stated objectives with its chosen means.

4. *Understanding value systems*: Evaluating decision making requires the attempt to comprehend a social actor's value system – that is, how it sees the world, how it thinks about its own motivations and preferences. Strategic theory is, in this respect, interested in how actors construct their interests in the light of their 'values', informed as these are likely to be by all manner of contingent historical and social forces. Strategic theorists are therefore concerned with how value systems shape the understanding of national objectives (in the case of a state), and choices and the means that they subsequently employ to achieve them.
5. *Rationality*: Strategic theory assumes the actor is behaving rationally, according to its own value system, namely, that it is behaving in a manner consistent with the attainment of its desired ends. This is not, please note, the imposition of rational-actor modelling. Nor does it presume that the actor functions with perfect efficiency or that its decisions will automatically lead to a successful outcome. It does, though, assume that the actor's decisions are made after some kind of cost-benefit analysis that makes sense to the actor concerned in a way that results in a choice of action designed to optimise the attainment of a desired end in accordance with its own value system.
6. *Moral neutrality*: To avoid distorting ethnocentric evaluations, that is, judging others by your own values, strategic theory is disinterested in the moral validity of an actor's ends, ways, and means. Evaluation of the effectiveness of an actor's decision making is confined principally to how well the chosen means are used to attain stated ends. This applies to all ways and means, including the use of violent methods, which are viewed solely in instrumental terms. This assumption is a necessary requirement to ensure that insight is gained dispassionately, and to avoid conflating the attempt to describe and understand social action with normative judgements that inevitably undermine any attempt to provide objective analysis.

## A point of entry

These six basic assumptions provide a serviceable way to reflect upon the idea of effectiveness. These assumptions incorporate as few postulates as possible, and readers can discern how ideas of competence, rationality, optimisation, efficiency, and performance are presented in qualified terms that are conditioned by an understanding of how any individual actor sees its own place in the world. Presented in this manner, the assumptions of strategic theory are configured to help the analyst avoid situational bias and offer a parsimonious way to investigate social behaviours, particularly in environments where social actors are endeavouring to gain their interests and values against the interests of other actors.

All these assumptions do is provide a point of entry into a much wider set of questions, which those who take an academic approach to the study of strategy would naturally seek to explore, such as how is it possible to gain insights into someone else's value system? How do we know if an actor has engaged in a cost-benefit analysis? How might we discern whether an actor has reached a point where it has maximised its potential with its chosen means? Like any mode of inquiry strategic theory can be complexified and problematised, but in its fundamental precepts it provides a simple, straightforward, method of analysing how, why, and with what purposes social actors work to attain the goals and objectives they set themselves.

## Conclusion: In the end, there is no end

In understanding how people, either individually or collectively, seek to make themselves successful and effective in the world, strategic theory merely endeavours to render explicit what is already implicit in human behaviour. To this end, and drawing upon reflections from recent events (for example, the failures of Western foreign policy interventions in places like Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria, 'surprising' political events like Britain's decision to leave the EU, the election of Donald Trump as President in the US, the disproportionate and economically damaging policy responses during the Covid-19 pandemic),[xv] some of the more thoughtful and interesting engagements in strategic theory have sought to establish several solid conclusions about social and political behaviours. With this in mind, and by way of conclusion, let me leave readers with five broad insights that we can derive from this brief discussion:

1. Effectiveness cannot be measured accurately, but it can be evaluated according to one unimpeachable criterion: namely, did you succeed in achieving your objectives? This statement is subject to nuance and qualifications, but it is an objective marker of success. Did you achieve

what you set out to achieve? If the answer is yes, then you have, definitively, performed effectively.

2. Effectiveness – achieving what you set out to achieve – can be boiled down to good judgement, that is, making good decisions within the contingent settings that you find yourself in at any given time. Of course, this raises more complicated questions as to whether good judgement can be learnt or whether it is something innate, but it points to a particular ability to discern and calculate issues proportionately in a way that attains your goals but at an acceptable cost, howsoever that may be defined.
3. Non-materially based values often matter much more than material ones. Traditions, identity, customs, and community, as the Americans found in Vietnam, and as elite policy makers are apt to re-discover time and again, are put at a higher premium than temporal concerns. Consequently, cost-benefit appeals based on pure self-interest, preaching or fear have a propensity to fail, at least over the longer term. In other words, money and fear, attractive and powerful incentives though they may be, doesn't buy loyalty or conquer the mind of those you are trying to win over.
4. You win against your own value system. The notion of 'winning' is not necessarily objective. According to strategic theory, the most important consideration is what matters to you.[xvi] If you have conformed to, or gained, relative to your value system – if you have defended, advanced, or upheld what is important to you – then you have been effective, *regardless of what anyone else thinks*.
5. Lastly, even if you have been effective, achieving what is meaningful to you according to your own values, it is wise to appreciate that one's strategic success is usually only ever provisional and temporary. Strategy is about life and life is continuously evolving. Life is an eternal struggle. As Carl von Clausewitz observed, the 'result in war is never final',[xvii] and strategy, like life itself, goes on, and on. It never ends.

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# Clausewitz as a Practical Philosopher

Vol. VI, issue 1/2022

Edited by **Andreas Herberg-Rothe**



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# A Renewed Nuclear Strategy for NATO

Gordon Bare – U.S. Army (Ret) and U.S. Department of State (Ret)



NATO military alliance summit. Photo 121276724 / Nato © Palinchak | Dreamstime.com

## About the author

Gordon Bare is a retired U.S. Army Colonel who served in advisory units in Vietnam and in nuclear targeting in the Defense Intelligence Agency. He is also a retired State Department officer who served on the U.S. Delegations for Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty compliance and the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty.

With the invasion of Ukraine now settling into an artillery-centric war of attrition, Russia has demonstrated the utility of possessing a nuclear arsenal and deterred a more robust American response. The global and longer-term significance of Russia's aggression is to call into question the already frayed credibility of the American

security guarantee to friends and allies and therefore create major adverse implications for the international non-proliferation regime. The United States needs to revive its Cold War era flexible response strategy, upgrade its nuclear posture, and forward deploy intermediate range nuclear delivery systems to Europe and Asia.

To state the obvious, it is better to dissuade aggressors from starting a war than to respond to an invasion once launched. In the present crisis and despite all evidence of past Russian aggressions, the United States and NATO delayed both significant arms aid and major economic sanctions until the beginning of the invasion

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essentially for two reasons: a failure of imagination to believe that major cross border aggression was still possible in Europe and fear that any robust actions would lead to escalation with a nuclear power possessing regional nuclear superiority. It was hoped that the threat of future economic sanctions, limited arms aid, and token force deployments to frontline NATO members would deter invasion. The actions taken in the runup to the invasion were mainly verbal and imposed no costs on Russia. It is hardly surprising that Putin underestimated the willingness of the United States and NATO to impose major sanctions and provide major arms aid given the flaccid response to his previous aggressions. Deterrence failed.

To understand the reasons for this failure it is useful to recall the history of American and NATO nuclear strategy. In the 1950s the Eisenhower administration adopted a strategy of massive retaliation: in the event of a Soviet attack on Western Europe, the full force of America's strategic nuclear arsenal would be employed. This strategy had plausibility at a time when U.S. nuclear capabilities greatly outnumbered those of the Soviet Union. It also had the advantage of being much cheaper than any effort to match the Soviet's numerical superiority in ground forces. As the Soviet nuclear arsenal grew to a rough parity with that of the United States, massive retaliation lost credibility. The Kennedy administration developed a strategy of flexible response which called for forward deployed conventional forces, shorter range nuclear strike options, and ultimately supported by the U.S. strategic nuclear triad. This triple threat doctrine came to be challenged in turn in the late 1970s by an emerging theater nuclear imbalance with the Soviet deployment of SS-20 intermediate-range missiles with nuclear warheads (INF) capable of striking Europe and U.S. forces deployed there.[i] On top of the Soviet's massive superiority in conventional armored forces with 20 divisions in the former German Democratic Republic as the spearhead of 100 plus divisions of the Warsaw Pact, SS-20 deployments made problematic NATO's strategy of flexible response.

Sharing of risk was the essence of "extended deterrence," a concept which received much attention during Cold War I.[ii] The question was how to firmly establish the credibility of the American guarantee if NATO Allies were attacked by the Soviet Union. To sustain the flexible response strategy the Carter administration initiated and the Reagan administration executed the deployment of U.S. intermediate range nuclear missiles in response to the Soviet buildup of SS-20 missiles. The United States deployed 108 Pershing II ground-mobile ballistic missiles and 464 Ground Launched Cruise Missiles (GLCMs) in five European NATO members.[iii] Both were capable of striking deep within the Soviet Union. There was a "dual key" arrangement required for launch thereby giving Allies a formal role in nuclear use decisions. President Reagan proposed a global "zero option" under which the U.S. would eliminate systems with ranges between 500 and 5500

kilometers if the Soviet Union destroyed all comparable systems, both in Europe and Asia.[iv] When in December 1987 the sides agreed to the zero option, two factors made this possible. First, the successful deployment of INF established American and NATO credibility in a way that mere words could not. Had the West succumbed to the peace demonstrators and the nuclear freeze movement, Russia would have had little reason to seek agreement. And absent a credible arms control offer, deployment would have been beyond European political tolerance. Second, the succession of Mikhail Gorbachev brought to power in the Soviet Union a leader intent on revitalizing the foundering Russian economy and willing to establish positive relations with the West.

NATO no longer possesses the force structure to support a flexible response strategy. In the mid 2000s, Russia began a major rearmament program including the deployment of cruise missiles with the prohibited range of 2500 kilometers known as the SSC-8.[v] Russia has responded to Finland and Sweden seeking NATO membership by threatening to deploy nuclear forces in the Baltic region which it in fact already does.[vi] Russia has an estimated 1912 nonstrategic nuclear warheads and a full range of ground and air launched ballistic and cruise missile delivery systems.[vii] There are currently an estimated 200 U.S. tactical nuclear warheads of which 100 are air deliverable weapons stored in five original members of NATO; none are in the front-line member states.[viii] This is a token force, appropriate for the peaceful interlude of the first fifteen years of the post-Cold War era. American distractions in the Middle East, European perceptions of an endless golden age of tranquility, and a general distaste for nuclear weapons, including by military leaders, combined to defer serious attention even as Russia violated the INF Treaty. The United States has slid into a minimum deterrence strategy in the European theater more by inattention than by design and it proved insufficient to deter Russian conventional aggression. The U.S. strategic triad failed to provide extended deterrence against a conventional invasion coupled with nuclear threats.

Russia meanwhile has adopted an "escalate to de-escalate" declaratory policy which calls for use of nuclear weapons to avoid defeat in conventional conflict. In some respects, this mirrors NATO's flexible response strategy of Cold War I. Putin's nuclear threats made at the time of the 2014 invasion of Ukraine and since have served their purpose.[ix] Putin is close to establishing that he may deter NATO by waving the nuclear card for any Western military act of his choosing.[x] The U.S. intelligence community takes the threat seriously but there has been no discernible policy response, only a ritual expression of confidence in the U.S. strategic nuclear posture.[xi]

Since the signing in 2010 of the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, Russia has deployed over 2000 shorter range systems not limited by the Treaty.[xii] The current



Administration extended New START for five years and abandoned efforts to cover these systems and to include China in limitations. In 2020, the United States announced a low-yield nuclear warhead (the W76-2) on submarine launched ballistic missiles (SLBM) with the stated intent of being able to respond to Russian tactical warheads in kind as called for in the 2018 Nuclear Posture Review.[xiii] The Biden administration sought to cancel this system but Congress seems intent on continuing modest levels of funding.[xiv] While this does take advantage of the essential invulnerability of the platform, this strategy does not provide the same level of deterrence or reassurance to our Allies as would a ground deployment in forward countries with shared control. Additionally, any launch of a “tactical” SLBM would initially be indistinguishable from a strategic launch thereby risking escalation to a general exchange.

American statements and actions over the last four administrations going back to Russia’s dismemberment of Georgia in 2007 and of Ukraine in 2014 have fostered the failure of deterrence. The 2014 Russian seizure of parts of Donetsk and Luhansk and the annexation of Crimea resulted in modest sanctions, largely symbolic NATO deployments to Poland and the Baltics, energetic but ineffectual diplomacy by France and Germany, and no lethal military aid from the U.S. until inconsistently undertaken by the Trump administration. In the runup to the present war, White House officials put its limited arms aid on hold prior to last year’s Biden-Putin summit, vetoed an expanded training mission to Ukraine, withdrew warships from the Black Sea, and postponed then cancelled a long-planned Minuteman III ICBM test.[xv] The United States refused to supply Stingers until the start of the war, announced provision of Harpoon anti-ship missiles only in June (though previously supplied by the UK and Denmark). Only in the third month of the war did the U.S. finally begin to provide heavy armaments, notably critically needed artillery, and moved to a somewhat more aggressive declaratory policy. In the fourth month of the war, the administration sent mixed signals on provision of longer- range multiple rocket launchers (MLRS and HIMARS) before deciding to do so in very small numbers with a prohibition on hitting targets in Russia (which Ukraine has done on a few occasions with other systems). As of this writing, the United States remains unwilling to provide Patriot anti-aircraft missiles and more capable UAVs such as the MQ-9 Reaper.

Intelligence sharing did not cover Russian occupied areas of Ukraine until April and does not include Russian territory from which strikes are launched into Ukraine.[xvi] The Administration has agonized over the false distinction between offensive and defensive weapons and its statements frequently highlighted what the United States was not prepared to do. The unstated concern underlying the MIG-29 fiasco in March was the understandable Polish desire to have NATO with its American nuclear guarantee share the risk.[xvii] Nonetheless, Central and Eastern European countries – Poland, the Baltics, Slovakia, and the Czech

Republic – acted earlier and more courageously than did the U.S. or larger Allies with the exception of Great Britain. Moreover, Britain had earlier announced the expansion of its nuclear forces from 180 to as many as 260 warheads. [xviii]

The administration has failed to undertake the traditional American role of assuring freedom of access to the global commons. The United States and NATO were slow to formulate a strategy to address the emerging global food crisis occasioned by the Russian blockade of the Black Sea. The agreement brokered by Turkey and the United Nations in July to permit monitored food exports from Odessa has allowed flows of grain to resume but remains subject to Russian intervention at any time.

Neither political leaders, military commanders, nor strategic analysts want to venture into the fraught thicket of “thinking about the unthinkable” to resurrect Herman Kahn’s memorable phrase.[xix] A gap has emerged between intention and capability. NATO can no longer afford this lethargy. What is called for now is immediate deployment of additional dual-capable strike aircraft together with their nuclear armaments to forward airfields in Poland, likely the staunchest of the Allies, possibly to Romania, and to some number of the Baltic states. Every effort should be made to get full NATO approval but not at the expense of delay. NATO consensus all too frequently is at some lowest common denominator. If necessary, a coalition of the willing should be constructed.

This deployment should be accompanied by a U.S. announcement of prompt development of mobile, ground-based nuclear missile and artillery systems with an explicit plan for forward deployment and announcement of a renewed flexible response strategy. The particulars of the systems are less important than the fact of a forward deployment of dual key systems in reassuring Allies and deterring Russia. These could initially be refurbished older systems, and later new hypersonic missiles. Consultations should also be held with France and Britain on limited forward deployment of their dual-capable aircraft and associated nuclear weapons. While American forces inevitably form the core of NATO’s capabilities, French and British forces add a measure of deterrence, provide a hedge against a failure of U.S. leadership, and complicate Russian decision making on escalation. NATO deployments should be coupled with an offer to forego deployment or remove systems in the event of some acceptable peace agreement in Ukraine and removal of shorter- range nuclear forces by Putin or his successor.

There is no indication that NATO is prepared to move in this direction. At the NATO Summit in Madrid in June, modest steps were announced to expand conventional deployments in the frontline states but no changes in nuclear policy were announced. The Strategic Concept adopted at the Madrid NATO Summit on June 28 does not address or respond to

the threat posed by Russia's vast superiority in shorter range nuclear delivery systems.[xx] It devotes a perfunctory two paragraphs to nuclear issues and implies satisfaction with current NATO nuclear force levels. There is nothing in the document to keep Putin up at night.

Whether Russia prevails in occupying some significant portion of Ukraine or not, it will emerge with a greatly weakened economy and a decimated conventional force. It will have few power levers other than its nuclear forces. Needless to say, increased Russian reliance on nuclear weapons is not a reassuring prospect. This circumstance increases the urgency of a NATO counter. The Administration has repeatedly stated its intention to defend every inch of NATO territory and NATO's Article V guarantee has thus far deterred any Russian strike on NATO members. But will this hold in light of Russia's theater nuclear superiority? As the rubble settles in Ukraine's cities, the question will become more urgent. And do American security guarantees still reassure other allies who have foresworn nuclear weapons? If Russia emerges from the conflict with even a modest claim to success, it will have confirmed the utility of its nuclear capabilities and its strategy of nuclear threats.

There is likely to be renewed interest in procuring a nuclear arsenal in at least a half dozen states over the next decade. Prime candidates would include not only Iran but also Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Turkey in an increasingly unstable Middle East from which the United

States is withdrawing. Middle Eastern leaders will remember the fate of those who lacked nuclear weapons. Had Saddam waited a couple of years to invade Kuwait when he could well have possessed a crude nuclear device, the American response would have been more problematic. And in Libya, Gaddafi literally died in a ditch after permitting the U.S. to ship his early-stage nuclear program to Oak Ridge. [xxi] The initial failure of the United States to respond to Iranian sponsored attacks on Saudi and UAE oil facilities under different American administrations in 2019 and 2021 highlighted their security concerns. An International Atomic Energy Agency report states Iran now possesses enough highly enriched uranium for one weapon.[xxii] Iran is now weeks away from a nuclear capability after a decision is made.

The American nuclear umbrella shields Japan and South Korea by treaty and ambiguously shelters Taiwan. In the 1980s the United States turned off South Korea's and Taiwan's emerging nuclear programs with the threat of withdrawing the American security guarantee.[xxiii] The late Japanese Prime Minister Abe has suggested Japan should consider a nuclear-sharing arrangement with the U.S. This will not be a short-term possibility – current Prime Minister Kishida rejected the idea – but the issue is now joined.[xxiv] Newly elected South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol has supported the return of U.S. tactical nuclear weapons withdrawn in 1991.[xxv] All three countries must balance their perception of American credibility against their capability to move rapidly to a minimal nuclear arsenal. Forward deployment of U.S. nuclear capable systems to the Western Pacific is fully warranted by the major acceleration of China's buildup of nuclear forces.

The substantial success of the global nonproliferation regime over the last 50 years has been perhaps the greatest success of American security policy on a par with the collapse of the Soviet Union. The post-Soviet agreement under which Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan gave up the nuclear weapons on their territories seemed a great achievement at the time. That the number of nuclear weapons states is so few depends far more on the credibility of American strategic deterrence than it does on the 1968 Nonproliferation Treaty. Particularly after the debacle of Afghanistan, American credibility is very much on the line in Ukraine. There is now the beginning of a re-evaluation of America's nuclear posture. President Biden stepped back from a campaign vow echoing the old Soviet proposal of "no first use" of nuclear weapons, a feel-good declaratory policy of no real significance.[xxvi] Under pressure from Allies, he embraced the longstanding NATO strategy of using the threat of a nuclear response to deter nonnuclear dangers. And the recently completed but not released nuclear posture review apparently recommends only modest funding to modernize the triad and none for intermediate range systems. Nothing is more critical than that the United States re-establish extended deterrence and the credibility of its security guarantee. To do so it must begin the long-neglected modernization of its strategic nuclear forces and deployment of an enhanced theater nuclear force. Deterrence is a result of both capability and will. The United States has been tragically short of both.

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# Erich Ludendorff: Successful Tactician, Failed Strategist

*Richard Tilley - Office of Irregular Warfare & Competition, U.S. Department of Defense*



Erich Ludendorff, by Bundesarchiv, Bild 183-1992-0707-500 / CC-BY-SA 3.0, <https://bit.ly/3TtS6tG>

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By the summer of 1916, Germany was suffering mightily on the western front. First on the offense at Verdun and later on the defense at the Somme, the German forces continued to accumulate unsustainable losses. Recognizing a perilous loss of momentum, on August 29th the Kaiser installed Paul von Hindenburg as the Chief of the General Staff and Erich Ludendorff as Quartermaster General (chief of staff). Though Hindenburg held

the title general-in-chief, Ludendorff, the hero of battles at Liège and Tannenberg in the east, charted the course for not only the *Deutsches Heer* but the entire German Empire through the end of the Great War.

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Having achieved great successes against the Russians, Ludendorff was ostensibly a superb choice to lead the nation in the decisive theatre: the trenches opposing the bulk of French, English, and later the American armies. Over the subsequent two years, Ludendorff proved himself the most adaptable tactician of the war. His development of defense-in-depth repelled the Allied offensives of 1917. And in 1918, his “infiltration tactics” generated breakthroughs during the *Kaiserschlacht* German offensives. His ability to formulate, proliferate, and incorporate these two revolutionary tactics across the massive Central Powers forces demonstrates a collegial character uncommon in the highest marshals, particularly of the era. For these battlefield successes, Ludendorff is lauded by Murray and Lupfer and seems to emerge as a military genius.

Yet, at the strategic levels of warfighting and statesmanship, Ludendorff failed to adequately adapt in a way that could bring victory to Berlin. As Ludendorff’s tactical successes brought increased domestic power, the general struggled with his newfound strategic responsibilities.[i] As the war progressed and conditions worsened for the Triple Alliance, Ludendorff proved unable to develop a comprehensive national strategy that could avoid disaster. By failing to adequately assess strategic risk and failing to nest military objectives within political ones, Ludendorff’s 1918 offensives exhausted his army and led it to defeat. Ludendorff the strategist succumbed to myopia, a characteristic that prevented the General from fully adapting his martial knowhow to strategic success. In contrast to Murray and Lupfer adulation, Herwig finds Ludendorff’s regime “must be judged ineffective, especially in the areas of politics and strategy. In a nutshell, German military policy... was inconsistent with the demands placed upon it.”[ii] Ludendorff, distracted by tactical technicalities, could never evolve to an effectual strategist and avert disaster at Versailles.

## Ludendorff the Tactician

Though he was hired to break the stalemate and win victories as he had done in the east, Ludendorff recognized the western front was a different type of warfare. In his post war publication, the General remarked, “Here [in the west] we met with new conditions and it was my duty to adapt myself to them.”[iii] Ludendorff needed to understand his new tactical environment and needed to prepare himself for the coming Allied attacks in 1917. In his typical collegial style, Ludendorff set off on a sensing session to hear the truth from the bottom-up. He visited the front lines and listened to the assessments and comments from junior foot soldiers to the senior commanders. These exchanges produced the battlefield insights Ludendorff craved. Conversations with bright young officers such as Captains Geyer, Rohr, and Pulkowski allowed Ludendorff to formulate new defensive, offensive, and artillery tactics respectively. Ludendorff demanded honesty not “favorable

report[s] made to order.”[iv] In just several months of field surveys, Ludendorff recognized his army needed a novel approach to the defense to weather the coming Allied onslaught.

On December 1st 1916, the German General Staff promulgated *The Principles of Command in the Defense Battle in Position Warfare* – marking a significant departure from previous doctrine. Ludendorff’s new defense-in-depth recognized the devastating effects of artillery fire and rebuked the massing of troops in forward static positions in favor of distributed forces throughout battle zones. He eliminated the notion that the defender ought to fight till the last breath for every inch of ground and lightly populated his outermost positions. Placing the majority of his forces in trenches well behind the front, Ludendorff located the German infantry beyond the range and observation of Allied artillery. From here, counterattack forces could marshal free from adversarial indirect fire. By utilizing reverse slope positions defenders could direct their own artillery on the enemy away from observation by the attacker’s front lines.

But publication of a new doctrine was not enough, as Lupfer notes, “doctrine published is not always doctrine applied.”[v] Ludendorff recognized he had to ingrain the new techniques in his forces. Utilizing the winter of 1916–1917, Ludendorff established and oversaw an intensive training regimen to employ defense-in-depth. Ludendorff established multiple training academies near his front lines where he could rotate troops through his defensive regimen. Indicative of his collegial style, when his trusted Colonel Fritz von Lossberg dissented to portions of his approach, he graciously accepted his concerns.[vi] Ludendorff did not even demand recognition or ownership of the tactics; instead, he referred to the field grade writers.[vii] Though the German Army’s adoption of defense-in-depth’ was not total, Ludendorff’s adaptation survived the Allied spring offensives and bought time until the Central Powers could attack.

As Russian resistance disintegrated during the summer and fall of 1917, Ludendorff was able to build combat power in the west. German divisions along the Hindenburg Line increased nearly one third between October 1917 and March 1918.[viii] With this newfound strength, again Ludendorff adapted and prepared for a major offensive, something the Triple Alliance had only conducted once before – Verdun. As it had just thirteen months prior, the German General Staff published new doctrine – *The Attack in Position Warfare*. As he had with the defense, Ludendorff’s new “infiltration techniques” eschewed what was previously sacrosanct – the multi-day massive artillery barrage.[ix] Rather than hoping to destroy the enemy from afar with colossal indirect fire, the German Army adapted to short preparatory fires meant to only disrupt the defenders. With less notice of the coming attack, defenders could not mass forces – preserving an element of surprise and degrading chances of a counterattack. Ludendorff reorganized his



infantry to carry their own firepower (mortars, machine guns, explosives, etc.) and created 30-plus elite “attack” divisions.[x] Additionally, advancing German troops would no longer destroy all enemy soldiers in their path. Rather, attackers would penetrate as far as possible into the enemy’s rear, leaving strongpoint positions for follow-on forces to capture. Interestingly, French Captain Andre Laffargue proposed many of these tactics in a 1915 pamphlet, entitled “The Attack in Trench Warfare.” Though the adaptations remained relatively obscure amongst the Allies, the German General Staff quickly translated and distributed the document. Again, this speaks to Ludendorff’s collegiality; the presumptive general-in-chief was willing to base many of his tactical evolutions on the scribblings of lowly captain – a French one at that.[xi] With Ludendorff there was little pretense, a trait that allowed him to adapt an organism as stoic and dogmatic as the German Army for tactical success.

On March 21st 1918, Germans initiated Operation *Michael* with a several-hour (versus the typical several-day) artillery barrage. Ludendorff’s tactical adaptations decimated the British east of Amiens. By displacing the artillery while the infantry advanced, the Germany Army was able to echelon indirect fires while the soldiers penetrated through the defender’s lines. Ludendorff achieved what had alluded his peers heretofore – a breakthrough of the trenches. His tactical adaptations had proven successful, but what now?

## Ludendorff the Strategist

The Kaiser’s appointment of Hindenburg and Ludendorff was a sign of desperation and frustration with the course of the war. Over the next eighteen months, the generals slowly accumulated power. By the 1918 offensives, Lupfer notes that the generals were now “the virtual rulers of Germany,” and with that Ludendorff became responsible for not just the military successes of the Empire but the political ones as well.[xii]

As he had done prior to the Allied 1917 offensives, Ludendorff prepared for his own 1918 attacks by estimating his tactical situation. Though he was personally bolstered by his defensive stands in 1917, Ludendorff failed to realize that his army was simply exhausted. Yes, the front line troops on whom he focused were eager for the offensive, but his reserves and German war-making capacity was at the brink.[xiii] Ludendorff failed to properly estimate his strategic condition. He wrongly trusted that the *Kaiserliche Marine* High Seas Fleet could isolate and remove Britain from the war.[xiv] He also falsely believed he could defeat the British and French on land prior to the Americans arriving on the continent.[xv] Ludendorff rejected investments in new offensive technology, such as the tank, that could have

turned the tide of *Kaiserschlacht* campaign.[xvi] Ludendorff may have been capable of estimating a tactical plan for winning a battle, but his myopia prevented a comprehensive understanding of his strategic environs.

By 1918, Hindenburg and Ludendorff removed the civilian chancellor and foreign minister and effectively assumed control of all German foreign policy.[xvii] Based on his limited understanding and faulty assumptions, Ludendorff crafted a strategy doomed for failure. Ludendorff’s premise of *Kaiserschlacht* was tragically simplistic: “We will punch a hole into [their line]. For the rest we shall see.”[xviii] The 1918 offensives had no strategic objectives, only tactical ones. Ludendorff’s strategy inversed the relationship between strategy and tactics. Rather than German national strategy driving tactical objectives, Ludendorff hoped battlefield breakthroughs could lead to some sort of strategic victory. Ludendorff failed that fundamental Clausewitzian premise that tactical warfare must be a slave to geopolitical strategy when the theorist remarked, “Warfare is the highest expression of the national ‘will to live,’ and politics must, therefore, be subservient to the conduct of war.”[xix] Lacking a coherent strategy that might bring victory, the 1918 offensives achieved tactical breakthroughs but failed to win strategic victory. The now exhausted Central Powers quickly succumbed to Allied counteroffensives, signing an armistice by November and suffering humiliation at Versailles the following year.

History has been kinder to Ludendorff than perhaps it should. Following the war, he became a prominent national socialist, participated in the Beer Hall Putsch, and was largely responsible for the *dolchstoßlegende* (stab-in-the-back-theory) upon which Hitler built the Nazi Party. Nevertheless, Ludendorff’s tactical adaptation, realized through his uncanny collegiality, is rightfully held in high regard. Yet, Ludendorff’s myopia prevented him from realizing the same success as a strategist. In contrast to a Grant or Eisenhower, he failed to transition from military to geopolitical leadership. In many ways, Erich Ludendorff mirrors the American Civil War’s Robert E. Lee. Both generals achieved remarkable tactical successes, due in no small part to collegial temperaments and exceptional subordinates (e.g., Ludendorff’s von Lossberg and Lee’s Jackson). Yet, as the conditions turned more dire and military policy became national policy, myopia doomed them both. Ludendorff in *Kaiserschlacht* suffered the same flaw as Lee at Gettysburg, neither attack demonstrated a cognizance of national strategy that had a chance at snatching victory from the jaws of defeat.[xx] Ludendorff is a true paradox of military history. At his best, he revolutionized the tactics of World War I. At his worst, he failed to adapt to the political power his battlefield successes brought him and doomed his nation.

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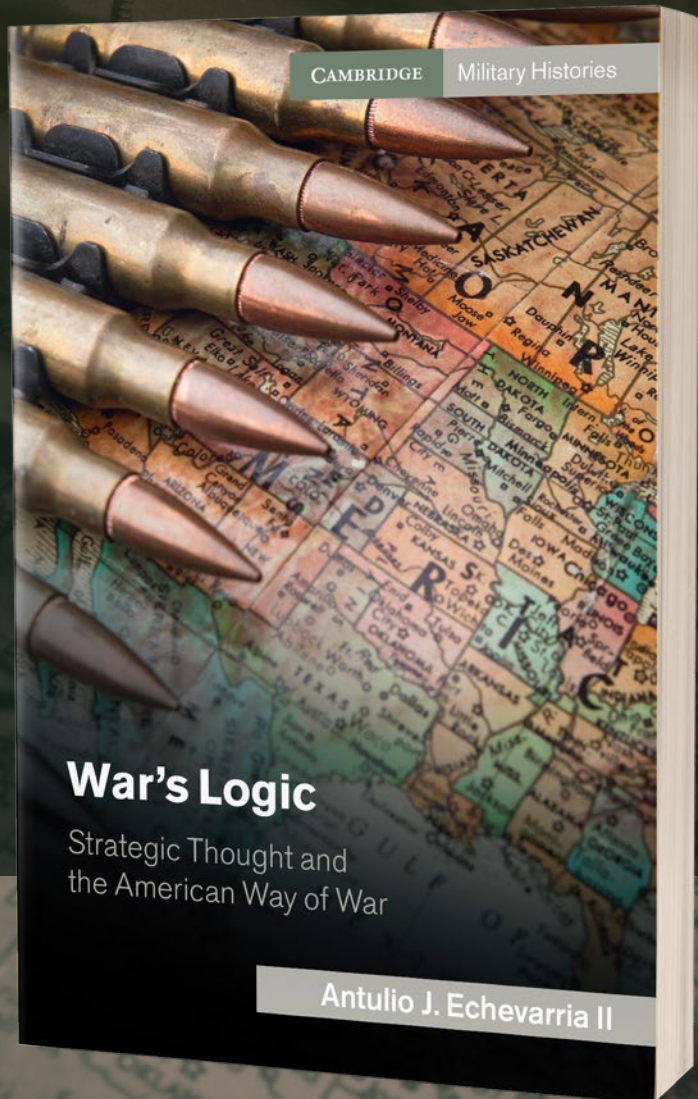
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# A Tale of Two Caesars: Contemporary Lessons from Divergent Caesarian Strategies

*Benjamin E. Mainardi – Center for Maritime Strategy*



Special Forces Operations – Ukraine. Image by ArmyInform – <https://bit.ly/3Axue4O>, CC BY 4.0, <https://bit.ly/3qogudK>

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Benjamin E. Mainardi is an analyst at the Center for Maritime Strategy. He holds an MA in War Studies from King's College London. His primary research interests are in strategic theory and military history.

## **Introduction**

As Russian forces face mounting setbacks and increasingly effective resistance in their invasion of Ukraine, a certain degree of sensationalism among foreign policy analysts and journalists remains. Declarations of the inevitability of

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Ukraine's victory seemingly draw more so on the very legitimate and morally grounded emotional resonance of the Ukrainian cause than the firm foundations of historical military precedence.[i] While it is certainly true that the Russian military's performance in the war has thus far been lackluster and likely surprising even to the Kremlin, this does not necessarily mean that failure for Russia is all but guaranteed. There are still many escalatory options, conventional and nuclear, that remain in the Kremlin's hand to be played as the war continues. Indeed, there has been an observable change in the conduct of Russian forces, paralleling the "end of the first phase" of the conflict.[ii] After failing to capture Kyiv and depose the Zelenskyy government in what may have been an attempted *fait accompli* maneuver, the conduct of Russian forces has increasingly targeted the people of Ukraine – infamously including the Bucha Massacre and levelling of Mariupol.[iii]

For many, the war in Ukraine has been perplexing and difficult to follow with victories and setbacks reported one after the other. The Kremlin's aims appear to be amorphous as well, seemingly changing by the week in relation to the tides of the war. In times of great complexity, international relations commentators as well as foreign policy and military analysts often return to their "strategic canon" to illuminate the present. While applied history certainly holds great value, that attempted by such commentators too often relies on an exceedingly narrow body of literature that frequently proves itself less than sufficient for the nuances of the object of comparison. Those analysts, planners, and scholars seeking to engage in critical applications of history to the present must broaden their frames of reference and means of analysis to better capture the distinctive characteristics of their present objects of observation.

Perhaps no western historical figure is as underutilized in contemporary applied historical analysis as Gaius Julius Caesar. Among the most well-known historical figures of all time, his life and works have stood for thousands of years as pillars of the West's political and strategic canon. And yet, in many of today's examinations of strategic theory, strategy-making, and contemporary foreign policy analysis, lessons which may be drawn from antiquity are almost entirely confined to Thucydides' *The History of the Peloponnesian Wars*, and perhaps Sun Tzu's *Art of War*.<sup>[iv]</sup> For centuries, however, military leaders from Montecuccoli to MacArthur were reared on Caesar's *Commentarii de Bello Gallico* (*Commentaries on the Gallic War*) and *Commentarii de Bello Civili* (*Commentaries on the Civil War*). Caesar's wars and, more importantly, narratives provide not only a framework for connecting how wars are prosecuted and attaining one's political aims, but are themselves an example of how to influence the public's perception of war. In these ways, the lessons which may be drawn from these works, albeit flawed in their historiographical veracity, are as relevant today as they have been for generations of warfighters, strategists, and political leaders.

## A Historiographic Note

It is important to acknowledge that Caesar's own writings, like those of all political figures, are narrative works with the distinct objectives of yielding political capital in his career as a Roman general and politician – essentially synonymous roles in Roman society by his time. What this means for the discerning historian and modern observer is that his writings should not necessarily be accepted at face value. What does not follow, however, is that they should be written-off as useless relics fit only for classicists. The case is similar for other contemporary sources, such as the letters of Marcus Tullius Cicero. Yet the biased narratives that virtually all works of antiquity present indicates the values of their time and author. They are likely to mirror reality through the writer's own lens. Thus, the historian must piece together a patchwork of biases and likelihoods to paint a picture of what indeed occurred.

## A Preface on War in Caesar's Time

As Clausewitz observed, "every age has its own kind of war, its own limiting conditions, and its own peculiar preconceptions."<sup>[v]</sup> Just so, the *raison d'état* of war in the ancient Roman world is nearly unrecognizable to the modern observer. By today's standards, war for Rome was almost always total in its aims and prosecution.<sup>[vi]</sup> It was frequently waged to its fullest extent possible with great violence to soldiers and civilians alike. Nor was the plundering and razing of villages, towns, and cities taboo among contemporary Mediterranean civilizations; it was, in fact, often viewed as an "upside" of war from which the army and state would profit.<sup>[vii]</sup> One side, often the Romans, subjugated the other and the enemy was decimated, frequently reduced to a state of slavery. Indeed, the later historian Tacitus, a Roman himself, observing Gnaeus Julius Agricola's wars in Britain, declared "[the Romans] make a desert and they call it 'peace.'"<sup>[viii]</sup>

Modern scholars have begun to critique Roman, and particularly Caesar's, conduct more closely than did earlier readers of Caesar's *Commentaries on the Gallic War*. Rightfully so, such authors note that by any measure of today, Caesar would be a war criminal likely guilty of genocide.<sup>[ix]</sup> While there were fewer restrictions on the conduct of war in Caesar's time, there were contemporary objections to how he prosecuted his wars – most notably by Cato the Younger – albeit not entirely morally informed but politically motivated as well.<sup>[x]</sup> How substantively Caesar's war against the Gauls differentiates itself in brutality, however, from the earlier conquests of Alexander III of Macedon or that of Scipio Africanus in the Third Punic War, who were revered then and often now, is not clear. Yet the common people of Rome seem to have largely approved of Caesar's actions, relishing his dispatches on the conquest of Gaul and mollified in the aftermath of his Civil War. Thus, reflecting upon the actions of Caesar and

the public reception of them must be tempered by a certain understanding that Roman culture of the first century BCE maintained intrinsically different norms surrounding war than we do today.

### The Gallic Wars (58–50 BCE)[xi]

Caesar's wars against the peoples of Gaul – roughly modern France, Belgium, and portions of Germany – were the conflicts that earned him the wealth and influence to eventually contend for dictator of Rome. Prior the Gallic Wars, however, Caesar was but one of many notable figures in the Roman Republic. For their part, the Gauls were a distinct cultural group from the Romans, and one which the latter considered to be uncivilized. As the Gauls were not a unified state, but rather a culturally similar collection of individual societies, Caesar's conquest of Gaul unfolded over almost a decade of conflict with various coalitions of Gallic tribes and, on occasion, Germans.

The conduct of Caesar's conquest of Gaul was waged with sternness and brutality common to Rome's wars against "barbarians," a fact which Caesar at no point attempts to obscure in his *Commentaries*. Quite the contrary, he frequently relates that enemies, both combatants and civilians, were killed or sold into slavery. He razed town after village, destroying not only Gallic military strength and political order but also cultural heritage and identity. For example, in the capture of the town of the Atuatuca, Caesar relates:

"As many as four thousand were killed, and the rest were pushed back into the town. The next day the gates – which no one was now defending – were broken open and our soldiers sent in. Caesar auctioned the booty acquired in the town in a single lot. The buyers reported to him that the number of heads amounted to about fifty-three thousand." [xii]

Of course, Caesar did accept the surrender of numerous tribes and towns, showing relative clemency to their inhabitants. It would be, however, a truly unique conqueror who does not accept the voluntary subjugation of an opponent.

Throughout the Gallic Wars, Caesar's *Commentaries* couch his purpose for waging the conflicts in a three-fold pitch to the Roman people at home. The first being his assertion of his role in defending the liberty of the Gallic individual from tyrannical outsiders and oppressive regimes. The second, that his conquest of Gaul will eliminate the historic threat that the people of Rome have long feared from the North. And finally, that doing so elevates the prestige of Rome itself. Given Caesar's ultimate victory in his conquest of Gaul and ensuing immense popularity with the common people of Rome, it can be presumed that they generally accepted this tripartite narrative thereby ratifying his

conduct and achievements. In many ways, both in conduct and rationale, it is a method similar to those employed by European conquerors during the age of colonialism. Perhaps unsurprising, given that many of the colonial-era's captains were reared on Caesar's account of the Gallic Wars.

### The Civil War (49–45 BCE)[xiii]

On January 10, 49 BCE, so we believe, Caesar and his army crossed the Rubicon River, escalating the long-boiling civil strife in Rome to open war. In contrast to the Gallic War, however, Caesar's war against Pompey and the Senate was one of internal division whereby Caesar sought to reestablish order amongst a people who largely shared his own cultural heritage – understanding of Roman norms and values – as well as political tradition. His prosecution of the Civil War thus necessitated an entirely different *modus operandi* centered on unifying the Roman population and winning the unconvinced to his political position, rather than simply breaking the will of resistance. Caesar's strategy in this conflict is best stated in his own words:

"Let us see if in this way we can willingly win the support of all and gain a permanent victory, since through their cruelty others have been unable to escape hatred or make their victory lasting – save for Lucius Sulla, and I do not intend to imitate him. This is a new way of conquest, we grow strong through pity and generosity." [xiv]

From this letter, Caesar outlined the framework that guided his warfighting doctrine. His goal became to minimize the brutality of war through forgiveness and rehabilitation to facilitate a *lasting* reestablishment of political order. His comment on a "permanent victory" is a pointed contrast to the man he mentions, Lucius Sulla. Sulla had been the victor of Rome's last major civil war in 83–81 BCE. His prosecution of that conflict was notably similar in brutality to Caesar's own exploits in Gaul and yielded him power over Rome, but nonetheless imbued the Roman state with the ailments that set the stage for Caesar's civil war.

In his conduct of the Civil War, Caesar largely adhered to his "strategy of mercy." Routinely, he granted clemency to and often integrated the soldiers of his adversaries. Should those benefitting from his mercy not decide to join him, he sent them home, sometimes supplied with money and food. [xv] Not only did this often provide supplementary manpower, but these soldiers were the very Roman citizens who held voting power in the ostensibly still functioning Roman electoral system. By granting his erstwhile opponents clemency, he often bought their political favor and good will. Of course, it should be acknowledged that these sentiments appear to largely have been confined to the average individual. For upper-class Romans, Caesar's clemency was a knife to the heart for their sense of self and prestige, seemingly a contributing factor to his later

assassination.

In many ways, Caesar's warfighting conduct was so thoroughly subordinated to political ends that it began to undermine his forces' operational efficiency and ability to achieve victory. Towards the end of the war, one finds that many of the Pompeian commanders had already been pardoned by Caesar at least once and decided to take up arms again. Regardless, Caesar's treatment of the common Roman soldier with "pity and generosity" appears to have succeeded in achieving his desired outcome: preeminence in the Roman Republic. Whilst his assassination by Roman elites – many of whom he had granted clemency to during the War – shortly after casts aspersions on the full efficacy of his victory, it is notable that his chosen successor Gaius Octavian, later Caesar Augustus, ultimately secures the political system laid down by Julius Caesar with the general support of the wider Roman public.

## Reflections for Today, as Seen Through Russia's War Against Ukraine

In both the Gallic Wars and Civil War, Caesar sought to attain ends which included not only the cessation of armed conflict but also the establishment of a civil order following the war. Yet the methods which he utilized to do so are radically different in nature. Whereas Caesar pursued harsh retributions against and the subjugation of the Gallic peoples, bordering on the genocidal, he operated in the Civil War in precisely the opposite manner. In large part, Caesar's divergent strategies can be explained by the contrast in *who* he was fighting.

The Gauls were a foreign people living in independent societies. Caesar's unrelenting conduct in the war sought to break not only the military capacity of these groups but also the societal will of the Gallic peoples to resist the Roman yoke. For which his brutality served its purpose. In contrast, the Civil War was waged against fellow Roman citizens who shared much of the same norms and institutional experiences of Caesar himself. As Romans, the population already existed in a socio-political order largely akin to that which Caesar was attempting to establish. Moreover, as active members of Rome's body politic, the soldiers and commanders of the Pompeian faction were themselves political actors feeding into Roman society's opinion of Caesar's new order. Whether Caesar's clemency in the Civil War was motivated by genuine humanity or cynical calculations, as is hotly contested by historians, is not necessarily important to the strategy's value as a way of attaining his political ends.

Over two thousand years later, another would-be conqueror has embarked on the first major conventional war Europe has seen in decades. Russia's invasion of

Ukraine is the crescendo of nearly thirty years of Russian irredentism birthed in the collapse of the Soviet Union. The conduct of the war, however, is remarkable for many reasons but particularly in its reflection of both of Caesar's quintessential conflicts.

The early stages of Russia's invasion appeared targeted towards a quick victory, seemingly emphasizing the capture of Kyiv alongside an attempted coup. Perhaps informed by its relatively bloodless and popular success in annexing Crimea, the Kremlin may have believed that should the Ukrainian government be toppled quickly, Russian troops could enter as a force for order welcomed by the Ukrainian people. Certainly, the 2014 annexation of Crimea was made possible by a population largely identifying with Russian culture, reminiscent of Soviet institutions, and acceptive of the new political order – of course, heavily influenced by Russian information operations.[xvi]

Before the war, Putin's 2021 manifesto, "On the Historic Unity of Russians and Ukrainians," signaled his cultivation of a narrative laying the groundwork for Russo-Ukrainian unification through a stylized version of the connectedness of both nation's histories and identities.[xvii] The failure of a supposed coup plot and to capture Kyiv quickly has, however, left the Ukrainian government in power and hardened its resistance.[xviii] Thus, rather than bringing Ukrainians into Russian fold, the invasion galvanized renewed Ukrainian nationalism.

In the wake of the collapse of a possible semi-peaceful reunification *modus operandi*, the Kremlin seems to be reshaping its own three-part narrative – strikingly similar to that of Caesar's tripartite narrative justifying the Gallic Wars – of countering Western encroachment on Russia's national security interests, liberating the Ukrainian people through conducting the denazification of Ukraine, and reviving the "prestige of historic Russia." [xix] This narrative implicitly signals a shift in audience away from the Ukrainian people and towards the Russian public – just as Caesar's corresponding strategic narratives altered based on the domestic versus foreign enemy of his wars. So too then, does the conduct of Russian forces appear to be increasingly brutalizing as the perception of Ukrainians within Russia's strategic narrative has changed.[xx]

The rapid shift in identifying Ukrainians as a people with shared Russian identity and Soviet heritage to that of a foreign other is manifesting in what appears to be an unfolding cultural genocide.[xxi] As such, in a bleak reflection of the contrast between Caesar's wars in Gaul and Civil War, the Kremlin may believe, or increasingly come to believe, that the necessary conduct of its war has shifted from ostensible "pity and generosity" used for reunification to necessary brutality to break Ukraine's will. It remains to be seen, however, if Russia is ultimately willing and able to create a desert and call it peace, short of nuclear use, that is.



## Conclusion

As with all efforts to apply history directly to the present – particularly in the context of a still unfolding conflict – there are a great number of unknowns that, until likely long after, will not be resolved and thus impact the accuracy of any comparison. History's value for scholars and practitioners seeking to make sense of the present resides then in its ability to undergird one's perspective and demonstrate possible outcomes. Over-reliance on a small

sampling of literature from over several thousand years of human civilization, runs the risk of misdiagnosing strategic situations, misunderstanding decision making processes, and most perilously, producing confirmation bias in one's preconceived conclusions. By expanding the historical frame of reference scholars and practitioners alike draw upon, they can – hopefully – not only avoid the perils of misapplied history but also account for a wider array of situations, choices, and outcomes that a select few tomes cannot hope to encompass.

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# The Strategy of Maoism in the West

## *Rage and the Radical Left*

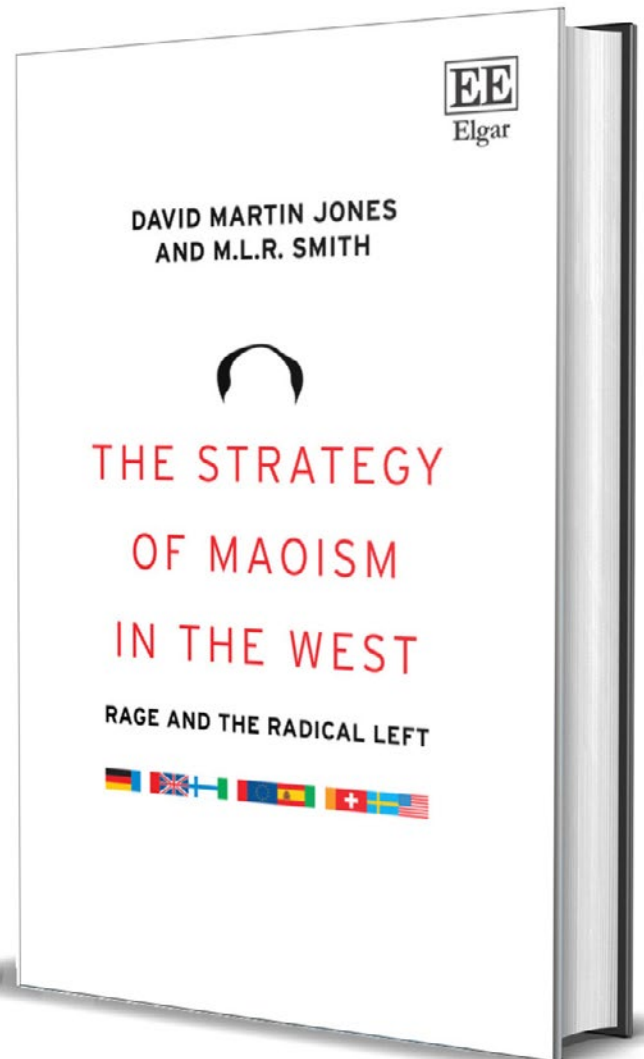
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# The Case for Deception in Operational Success

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## About the author

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In an era dominated by ever-increasing and rapid information saturation, deception in warfare is paradoxically more difficult to achieve and more critical to operational success. Often military deception is overlooked or outright discounted by many planners, especially

western and commonly United States planners, relegated to the niche “specialists” or “experts”. Military deception is commonly developed in a compartmentalized process limiting its impact on the broader campaign planning, rather than a deliberate part and consideration of the entire planning effort often resulting from its perceived difficulty, its complexity, sensitive nature, but also from its degree

of doctrinal emphasis, specifically in the case of the US military. Military deception’s role in history and theory is distinctly present throughout, however, the United States’ elements of operational art doctrine does not include it.

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Military deception is more limited and compartmentalized throughout United States doctrine to the detriment of future operational success, and by association perhaps its allies and partners as well. Military deception, is defined as actions executed to mislead opponent decision makers into taking specific actions or lack of action that contributes to the success of one's own efforts, is a timeless aspect of warfare with varying degrees of reception in theories, and nuanced acceptance in doctrine.[i] Perhaps deception is in conflict with some foundational western cultural and moral connotations with deceit that disinclines its emphasis. While military deception is not only a key aspect of successful operations, but so integral as to deserve inclusion in operational art doctrinal precepts, where it is currently absent. The inclusion of military deception in operational art of the 21st Century is a natural evolution and should also include individuals receiving increased exposure to military deception precepts through direct education and training and the establishment of codified, specialized institutional military deception requirements for operational planning positions.

## Deception in Military History

There is an inarguably long and rich history of deception in warfare. From the early records of military history, deception played an integral part in multiple successful operations, some of which it played a decisive part, in others a key supporting effort leading to victory. Early history records several examples, like the infamous, legendary Trojan horse which led to the Greek seizure of the seemingly impregnable fortress of Troy in classic literature, ending the decade-long ineffectual siege. As the story goes, the Greeks convinced the Trojans to bring a gift of a large wooden horse, unknowingly filled with select warriors, inside the city as an offering towards peace. Once inside the walls, the chosen Greek warriors were able to open the gates to the city and allow the hidden Greek forces to breach the city as the Trojans celebrated the false peace.[ii] Examples also exist in the shared Jewish Tanach and Christian Old Testament where deception and cunning were used to place the outnumbered Jewish warriors in positions of advantage.[iii] During the Seven Years War, known as the French and Indian War on the North American continent, deception allowed British General James Wolfe's successful maneuver to draw out French General Louis-Joseph de Montcalm from his stout defenses at Quebec. In this manner, Wolfe achieved his decisive, though costly, battle of the Plains of Abraham. He achieved this by sailing his troops ships past the Quebec defenders to land north of the fortress city by having French-speaking sailors answer the defenders' hails and critically playing on the defender's anticipation of a French resupply flotilla. Once on the northern plains of the city, Wolfe effectively closed off the city and forced Montcalm to sally forth for a set-piece battle to British strengths. Prior to this, Wolfe had been unable to crack the deliberate defenses of Quebec and risked stymied

defeat.[iv]

Military deception in warfare is not restricted to classical or early modern military history and is only growing in importance for ever-increasingly complex military operations. Several major examples of military deception in 20th Century military operations show that deception remains integral to military victory. During the Second World War contested amphibious operations stood apart as some of the most complex, risky, and decisive operations of the war. In two cases military deception played a major role in their successful execution. In support of the invasion of Sicily in 1943, British intelligence planted false information on a corpse and deliberately orchestrated it to fall into German possession. Operation Mincemeat played a large role in deceiving the Germans regarding the next Allied operation, allowing the invasion of Sicily to surprise the Germans who expected the next move to be an invasion of Corsica, Sardinia, or Greece.[v] Deception played a major role in the success of Operation Overlord and the landings in Normandy in 1944. Within the overall deception coordination within Plan Bodyguard, Operation Fortitude was a major deception effort. Fortitude was broken up into two focuses, Fortitude South towards France based out of Dover, England and Fortitude North towards Norway based out of Scotland. In the case of Operation Fortitude South the deception was with the fake First United States Army Group, the "Ghost Army", led by American General George S. Patton. With a headquarters deception unit, this made-up army group produced fictitious radio traffic, displays, and falsified media coverage, including faux wedding announcements between American soldiers and local English and amateur sport team records from alleged unit teams. Through the military deception of a fake army across from the Pas-de-Calais, the German western front defenders remained fixed even as the invasion of Normandy unfolded, still anticipating the Patton's army group assault. Providing the Germans exactly what they anticipated from location (Pas-de-Calais the shortest cross-channel distance and most direct path to Germany) to Allied leadership (the aggressive and successful Patton). Similarly, Fortitude North created a fictitious combined Anglo-Canadian army oriented towards Norway, likewise achieving the commitment of limited German army groups in defense of the occupied Scandinavian countries.[vi] In later wars, the Egyptians deliberate and extensive military deception prior to the outbreak of the 1973 Yom Kippur War through releasing false poor equipment maintenance reports to the multiple exercises, which they used to move troops and lull Israel into complacency, allowing them to achieve fundamental surprise over the Israelis in the Sinai. Much like in the 1973 war, the US Coalition in 1991's Operation Desert Storm achieved surprise against Saddam Hussein's Iraq with the United States Marine Corps amphibious demonstration in the Persian Gulf and the VII Corps deception efforts with the First Cavalry Division's feint through the Wadi al-Batin covering the famous "left hook" through the desert into Kuwait.[vii]



In 21st Century conflict, Israel's alleged military deception activities in the summer 2021 conflict with Hamas provides a cautionary example for the saturated information environment, as well as one that is not in a major, large-scale war. The Israeli Defense Force reportedly created a General Staff Deception Unit, and the international media allegations indicate they, in coordination with official Israeli military spokespersons, leveraged the media to portray that an Israeli ground assault had begun into the Gaza Strip. This was meant to trigger Hamas to react by uncovering their anti-tank teams early and massing their troops in underground tunnels previously identified by Israeli intelligence. Israel then conducted sustained strikes against the tunnels and the anti-tank teams moving in the open until two hours later the Israeli military released a corrected report that no Israeli forces had crossed the border, but rather air strikes and ground strikes had occurred *into* Gaza but only from the Israeli side with no ground forces having physically entered Gaza, as previously reported. The Israeli use of calling up reserves, massing along the border with Gaza, and conducting noisy positioning of vehicles and limited artillery strikes was directed towards reinforcing the Palestinian's belief an invasion was imminent. Then, through social media announcements and the spokesperson comments, Hamas was led to believe the invasion had begun and reacted accordingly, opening them up to an effective Israeli surprise attack, damaging the Palestinian defense. [viii]

While the controversy over the reported ground invasion that never happened grew, the Israeli military claimed it was over a communication misunderstanding, while at the same time many analysts applauded the Israeli's effective deception and surprise. Regardless of the truth, the credibility of the Israeli military public affairs apparatus was deliberately and aggressively questioned by the international media, revealing a cautionary warning of leveraging media through public affairs activities in support of modern military deception, even if it supports successful operational surprise.[ix] With this example, the information saturation that mass media with social media in real time offer provides both an effective venue for military deception, but also demands careful application. The alleged Israeli military's manipulation of media to reinforce the already perceived expectations of Hamas of an imminent ground invasion could have been achieved without pulling in the official public affairs apparatus of the Israeli military, thereby preserving the military's official spokesperson credibility while still deceiving the opponent through other methods of information operations. Likewise, the US military could leverage similar "tricks" through social media account postings, Tweets, and manufactured videos and posed pictures, using the venues known to be monitored and analyzed by the opponent, presenting them a picture they already expect to see before surprising them. This takes deliberate planning, preparation, and execution as part of the overall operation, and is not something stapled on at the end as an afterthought without adequate

resources – including the correct authorities, time, people, equipment, and financing. Much as the nature of war is unchanging but its character evolves, the fundamentals of deception have not changed from the industrial age to the information age to the social media age, only the tools and methods by which to employ them.

## Theorizing On Military Deception

Deception has played a large, timeless role in military theory as well. As far back as the classical Chinese military philosopher Sun-Tzu who mentions deception's importance, "Warfare is the Way of deception. Thus although capable, display incapability to them. When committed to employing your forces, feign inactivity. When [your objective] is nearby, make it appear as if distant." [x] However, in contrast to finding it in the Asian way of war, military deception received a lesser welcome from the classical western military philosopher, Carl von Clausewitz. In his seminal book, *On War*, Clausewitz denigrates the role of deception "cunning", saying, "To prepare a sham action with sufficient thoroughness to impress an enemy requires a considerable expenditure of time and effort, and the costs increase with scale of the deception.... [A] nd consequently so-called strategic feints rarely have the desired effect." Elsewhere Clausewitz writes, "The use of a trick or stratagem permits the intended victim to make his own mistakes, which, combined in a single result, suddenly change the nature of the situation before his very eyes" but makes sure to caveat this with, "It is itself a form of deceit... yet not deceit in the ordinary sense of the word, since no outright breach of faith is involved." [xi] This idea found in a foundational western military theorist's work, perhaps explains the lack of military deception's high regard as that in other cultural military theories from a western cultural aversion to deception is in some way tainted by immorality or ungentlemanliness, as to be careful that "no outright breach of faith is involved". While Clausewitz applauds surprise as an essential element (and indeed it is a principle of US joint operations), he is wary of deception (which is not a US joint principle of operations).

Even with this less than enthusiastic support for deception planning from Clausewitz without question deception plays a large role in 20th Century American John Boyd's military theory with interrupting to deconstruct the opponent's strategy and their observe, orient, decide, act (OODA) loop, thereby confusing, paralyzing, and disrupting the adversary's decisions and actions.[xii] Also, deception fulfills a critical part in achieving Israeli theorist Zvi Lanier's theory of fundamental or situational surprise over an adversary, another key factor of many successful military operations, exemplified throughout military history across cultures. Lanier defines fundamental surprise as when there is a mindset failure, things did not go according to plan – a failure of the imagination – leading to deeper questions beyond just a specific singular circumstance.

Situational surprise is understood to be a singular event where surprise is caused by failure of processes, the signal was lost in the noise. With fundamental surprise, the signal does not even register within the noise because “it just is not possible”.[xiii] It is when one learns the mindset of their opponent through diligent study that they can then craft a deliberate, planned, resourced and executed deception to exploit fundamental surprise in their opponent, achieving operational success.

## Deception in United States Army Doctrine and Practice

Although deception has a deep record in military history and theory, as enumerated above, it is lacking in foundational US military doctrine. In current US Army doctrine, deception is rarely seen in emphasis outside the information operations doctrine. Deception is absent in the principles of joint operations, principles of unified land operations, and, perhaps most importantly, in the elements of operational art.[xiv] In both common intermediate staff college curriculum and the advanced military studies programs for American staff officers, military deception is not directly instructed, and its emphasis, if at all, in wargames and planning exercises is individual-specific. This is not only a US military concern as well. There are even commentators on the British military’s atrophy in the art of military deception. This is notable as in the West, Britain always held a strong military deception reputation throughout history and deliberately incorporate deception into their planning process.[xv] With the information saturation of the current battlefield and the historic case for pivotal success from deception and its inclusion in theory, military deception’s place is growing in importance and benefit to 21st Century operational art planners more than ever before. This growth is exemplified in observations of current conflicts, such as the 2022 Russo-Ukraine War where the application of military deception is starkly illuminated and analyzed in assessments of combatants’ successful, or lack thereof, operations.

Beyond the institutional intellectual emphasis on military deception that elevating it within doctrine from the niche to the fundamental, there are additional steps that could be taken to improve deception in the US Army. Increasing educational exposure across staff courses and senior non-commissioned officer courses, expanding access to and material covered in current US military deception courses, and coding planning positions to require institutional military deception education and training for brigade and above units with battalion staff’s having it as an additional duty. First, the current US Army Deception Planners Course is an 80-hour course. This curriculum should be included as a week of instruction in all US Military staff college and course curriculums, preparing all future staff officers and non-commissioned officers for a base understanding of military deception. In the US Army this should also include

the senior non-commissioned officer courses as well, such as the Battle Staff Course and Sergeants Major Academy. Secondly, if the fundamentals of military deception covered in the current military deception course is covered in staff schools, then the specialized course should expand in material, deeper into understanding the application and process of military deception. The current US Joint MILDEC Training Course at the Joint Forces Staff College is a two-week long course, possibly the services could expand theirs to even more align with rigor and detail of the Joint Forces course.[xvi] Additionally, these courses are limited in their cycles and attendance, both should be expanded to support and increased throughput and broadened exposure of military deception practices to the force. Lastly, to ensure military deception planner availability to commanders and staffs each brigade and higher headquarters should have their operational section planner positions coded for required attendance to these expanded military deception planner courses, and battalion staffs would have an operational planner with the additional duty as a military deception planner to facilitate coordination and essentially provide a gradual exposure to deception operations. This way, every staff is guaranteed to have planners trained and educated in deception practices and not fully rely on a small section of the planning staff, typically the information operations cell. Instead, all planners would be able to have a working knowledge of it with the information operations cell the specialized lead planners, while all staff officer and non-commissioned officer graduates having received basic fundamentals of deception in their curriculums.

Military deception is highly sought and emphasized in the military doctrine and theory of the US military’s primary adversaries. A prominent example of this is how the Russian Federation armed forces espouse and prize military deception, placing it among their foundational principles for successful operations, though it was arguably absent in the outbreak of hostilities on February 2022 in Ukraine, as opposed to other recent Russian military operations. [xvii] The military professionals stand to benefit from an increased emphasis and practice of the art of military deception as exemplified through military history, theory, and a further incorporation into the operational doctrine in the 21st Century with increased exposure to military deception across staff colleges, senior non-commissioned officer courses and expanded detailed military deception courses for required staff operational planners.

If Western militaries, particularly the United States, who generally are deception-averse seek to increase probability for operational success in future large-scale combat, then a shift in prioritizing planning, resourcing, and execution of military deception is warranted. A start for this is the elevation of deception from a niche doctrinal approach, to inclusion in the foundational principles and elements of doctrine. While the risks remain to faulty deception operations in military activities, the opportunities also grow from achieving surprise, indecision, and stagnation in



opponents from successful military deception, and fortune favors the bold. It will require a fair allocation of resources in both training and educating the force appropriately but also in resourcing the military with the technology and

assets to make deceptions believable. Both in resource allocation and in battlefield implementation it is a notable risk military leaders and civilian decision-makers must be willing to accept.

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