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*To this writer, strategy is the comprehensive direction of power to control situations and areas in order to attain objectives. Unless one has an understanding of the concepts of strategy, the art of creating, distributing, and applying military means to fulfill the ends of policy will be haphazard and, in some cases, disastrous—witness the British action in Suez in 1956 and the U.S. Bay of Pigs episode in 1961.*

# STRATEGY: THE ESSENCE OF PROFESSIONALISM

An article

by

Rear Admiral Henry F. Eccles, U.S. Navy (Ret.)

**Introduction.** Strategy can be discussed from two perspectives—that of the student of strategy, who is unhampered by deadlines and free from adherence to any particular formulation or authority other than that imposed by intellectual rigor; and that of the executive authority, who must formulate specific national and military strategic policies and plans. This latter activity must always be done within a specified time and must always be both responsible and authoritative. For the purpose of this article, I will discuss the first point of view, emphasizing the nature and structure of strategy while choosing to omit both the methods and considerations used in reaching strategic decisions, and the critique of specific strategic policies and plans. Unless one is willing to confine discussion of the subject to some specific aspect of the general concept, discussion often tends to dissolve into lamentations and confusing speculative arguments rather than constructive analysis.

In dealing with this subject, I ask that the reader bear in mind that when one has executive responsibility for the formulation of an operative strategy, little time or energy can be devoted to developing constructive theory or concepts. One must decide on the basis of one's basic assumptions, one's view of current facts, and on the fundamental concepts one has already developed. Assumptions and current facts, of course, vary greatly according to circumstances, but concepts, if well thought out, have much greater endurance.

**What Strategy Is.** In his book *Strategy*, Liddell Hart devoted the last 40 pages to the theory of strategy and to grand strategy. Here, in developing "a new dwelling-house for strategic thought," he discussed the ideas of Clausewitz and Moltke and then wrote:<sup>1</sup>

We can now arrive at a shorter definition of strategy as— "the art

## 44 NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW

of distributing and applying military means to fulfill the ends of policy." For strategy is concerned not merely with the movement of forces—as its role is often defined—but with the effect. When the application of the military instrument merges into actual fighting, the disposition for and control of such direct action are termed "tactics." The two categories, although convenient for discussion, can never be truly divided into separate compartments because each not only influences but merges into the other.

As tactics is an application of strategy on a lower plane, so strategy is an application on a lower plane of "grand strategy." While practically synonymous with the policy which guides the conduct of war, as distinct from the more fundamental policy which should govern its object, the term "grand strategy" serves to bring out the sense of "policy in execution." For the role of grand strategy—higher strategy—is to coordinate and direct all the resources of a nation, or band of nations, toward the political object of the war—the goal defined by fundamental policy.

This places strategy, grand strategy, tactics, policy, and objectives in a clear perspective.

The element of policy stressed by Liddell Hart here and elsewhere was clearly brought out in the Naval War College publication *Sound Military Decision* which states:<sup>2</sup>

Understanding between the civil representatives of the State and the leaders of the armed forces is manifestly essential to the coordination of national policy with the power to enforce it. While military strategy may determine whether the aims of policy are possible of attainment,

policy may, beforehand, determine largely the success or failure of military strategy. Therefore, it behooves policy to ensure not only that military strategy pursue appropriate aims, but that the work of strategy be allotted adequate power, and be undertaken under the most favorable conditions.

These thoughts, together with the Rosinski concept of strategy's being the art of control, provide the foundation for the conceptual unity and coherence essential to military theory. Rosinski wrote:<sup>3</sup>

*... Strategy is the comprehensive direction of power; Tactics is its immediate application.*

This definition requires the recognition that there is much more to strategy than mere direction of action. It is a type of direction which takes into account the multitude of possible enemy counteractions and thus it becomes a means of control. It is this element of control which is the

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### BIOGRAPHIC SUMMARY



Rear Adm. Henry E. Eccles, U.S. Navy (Ret.), graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy, Class of 1922. He holds a master of science degree from Columbia University, is a graduate of the Naval War College, and is currently serving as a consultant for logistics at the War College.

He has had a variety of duty in submarines, destroyers, cruisers, battleships, and in 1946-47 commanded the U.S.S. *Washington*. Prior to his retirement in 1952, he was Assistant Chief of Staff for Logistics, Commander Allied Forces, Southern Europe. His publications include: *Operational Naval Logistics*, *Logistics in the National Defense*, *Military Concepts and Philosophy*, and numerous articles for the *Naval War College Review* and other professional journals.

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essence of strategy: Control being the element which differentiates true strategic action from a haphazard series of improvisations.

Thus, strategy in contrast to haphazard action, is that direction of action which aims at the control of a field of activity be it military, social, or, even intellectual. It must be comprehensive in order to control every possible counteraction or factor. . . .\*

**Implications of the Concept of Strategy.** Many discussions of strategy suffer from the semantic confusion arising from the two commonly used meanings of the word "strategic." The first meaning evolves from defining strategy as the art and science of using political, economic, psychological, and military forces of a nation to support national policy. Thus, in this sense, "strategic" refers to the plan or scheme for such use.

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\*This concept of strategy as a comprehensive control has the advantage that it applies equally to the offensive and to the defensive. On the offensive, the aim of strategy is to break down the enemy's control while simultaneously preventing him from interfering with our attack. On the defensive, strategy similarly seeks to constrain the enemy attack to such a form and degree that, while the defense may be forced back, it still maintains control of its actions and avoids collapse. As long as it can manage to do so, as long as it can continue to parry all decisive thrusts of the enemy, it may suffer a series of defeats but it will still be a coherent strategy and avoid wholesale catastrophe.

In this sense a discussion of the strategy of the three services can best be analyzed in terms of control. Control is easiest in land warfare, has always been more difficult in naval strategy, is still more difficult in the field of air warfare, and is most difficult in that of the combined strategy of all three forces. . . .

Herbert Rosinski, "New Thoughts on Strategy," Unpublished Paper, September 1955.

The second meaning defines "strategic" action as the physical destruction of an enemy's war-making capacity. This second meaning refers primarily to economic, agricultural, and military targets. The fallacy that strategy and destruction are synonymous and the consequent development of a "weapon strategy," both come from the careless use of the second meaning of "strategic."

The Rosinski concept of "comprehensive control" has certain specific implications of tremendous importance. In particular, it establishes the primacy of strategy in the conduct of national affairs as opposed to emphasis on destruction that is implicit in any "weapon strategy." The idea that the weapon should determine the strategy to be used is based on the implied assumption that strategy and destruction are synonymous. This simply is not true. Naturally, strategy will be influenced by the availability of weapons, but strategy should use destruction only when there is no other way of gaining or exercising control. The concentration of thought on control naturally leads to a reexamination and better understanding of the objectives whose attainment is the purpose of the attempt to exercise control.

The concept of continuing control prepares the mind for shifting the emphasis from weapon to weapon or from tool to tool in accordance with changing situations or with the changing capabilities or application of the weapon or weapon systems involved. Thus, the intellectual concept of strategy as "comprehensive control" naturally leads to the intellectual concept of flexibility. But "flexibility" itself must be understood lest it degenerate into mere hesitancy, uncertainty, and vacillation. The essence of true flexibility lies in the continuing clear appreciation of the aim, the purposes, the objective.

**Objectives.** Strategy is always concerned with objectives. But merely to

# THE ANALYSIS OF OBJECTIVES

INFLUENCE OF INDIVIDUAL EVENTS AT THIS LEVEL ON OBJECTIVES OF NEXT HIGHER LEVEL

0

GREAT

CONSIDERABLE

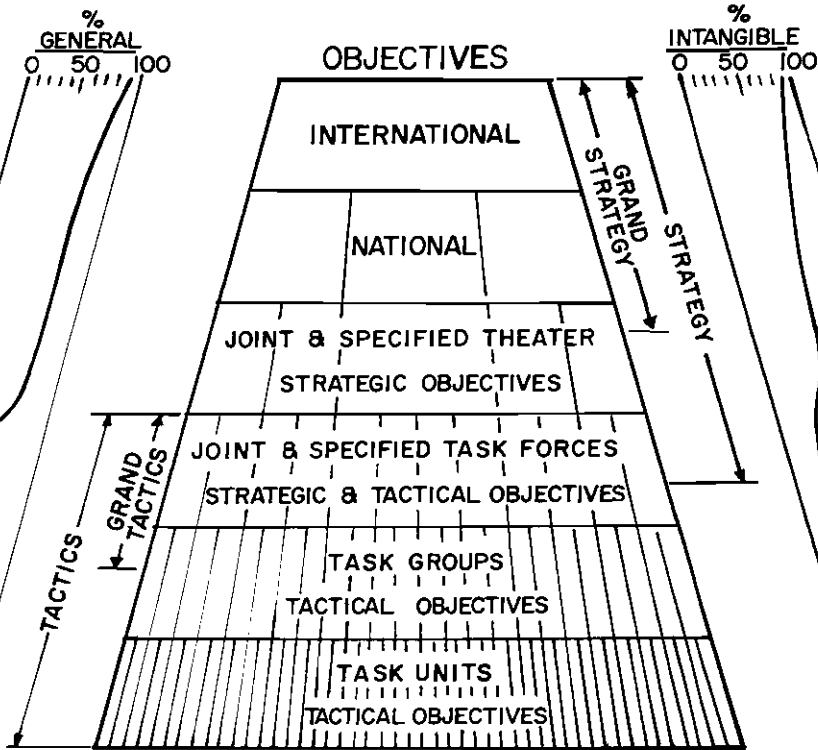
MODERATE

MODERATE TO SMALL

SLIGHT

100 50 0

SPECIFIC



DEGREE OF PERMANENCE

HIGH-- close relation to continuing interests

HIGH-- Drawn from the continuing national interest

HIGH

MODERATE

CHANGE REGULARLY

CHANGE RAPIDLY

100 50 0

TANGIBLE

A GENERAL APPROXIMATION OF A COMPLEX PROCESS WHICH LAYS THE FOUNDATION FOR OPERATIONAL PLANNING

state the objective is not enough; the objective must be analyzed. The mere statement of an objective can easily degenerate into a rigid and dangerous slogan. The analysis should not only clarify the purpose for which action is to be taken, it must also show what constitutes a satisfactory attainment of the objective. Here we encounter one of the chief problems of strategic thinking. How are the objectives influenced by the course of events? How does one distinguish steadfast adherence to a firm purpose from dogmatic pursuit of an outworn or irrelevant objective? In modern conflict, objectives are multiple and seem to have a hierarchy of major and minor, immediate and ultimate. The chart "The Analysis of Objectives," is a grossly simplified picture of an extremely complex and important analytical process which ultimately provides the necessary linkage between national policy and combat action.

But since plans, once prepared, frequently have great and dangerous momentum, the running estimate of the situation must involve an alertness to changes and particularly to the reactions of the opponent which influence one's own objectives. Both political objectives and political control are essential elements of all strategy. This brings us squarely to the vital relation of strategy and tactics.

**Strategy, Interwoven with Tactics and Logistics.** Edward Lasker, the chess grandmaster, made the following perceptive comment:<sup>4</sup>

... Strategy sets down the whole of the problems which must be solved in war, in order to attain the ultimate result aimed at; tactics solve such problems in various ways, and according to the conditions prevailing in the particular case. Sound strategy, when setting the task, must never lose sight of tactical practicability, and only a thorough knowledge of tactical

resources makes correct strategy possible.

This last description explains why the term "strategic doctrine" is so frequently a dangerous misnomer. Doctrine arises from repeated experience and is useful in dealing with recurring situations. Its purpose is to provide a good solution to the repeating problem to be applied almost automatically when a recognized situation occurs. It saves time and achieves instant understanding between unit commanders without the necessity for consultation or elaborate communications. It simplifies decision and facilitates coordination in action. It is an essential element of tactics, logistics, and communications, but has little, if any, application to strategy.

Bear in mind that most strategic problems seldom recur in such a manner that the tactical resources are so disposed as to make a doctrine applicable. There is, however, room for doctrine in the area of grand tactics.

*Sound Military Decision* again is useful in explaining fundamental relations:<sup>5</sup>

... Tactics, unguided by strategy, might blindly make sacrifices merely to remain victor on a field of struggle. But strategy looks beyond, in order to make the gains of tactics accord with the strategic aim. Strategy and tactics are inseparable.

It is thus the duty of tactics to ensure that its results are appropriate to the strategic aim, and the duty of strategy to place at the disposal of tactics the power appropriate to the results demanded.\*

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\*... [The latter consideration imposes upon strategy the requirement that the prescribed aim be possible of attainment with the power that can be made available.

Consequently, while the attainment of the

## 48 NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW

In military strategy the interweaving of logistical, tactical, and strategic considerations in the mind of a single responsible individual will always be an intuitive process based on professional experience and judgment. Both the logistical and tactical factors contain many quantitative aspects whose evaluation is subject to many modern analytical techniques.

In moving from purely military strategy to the level of national strategy, we have an increasing emphasis on economic and political considerations.

Duncan Ballantine's comment on logistics is instructive:<sup>6</sup>

... As the link between the war front and the home front the logistic process is at once the military element in the nation's economy and the economic element in its military operations. And upon the coherence that exists within the process itself depends the successful articulation of the productive and military efforts of a nation at war.

The understanding of the interweaving of strategy-economics-logistics is enhanced by recognizing the two phases of logistics, producer and consumer.

At the level of national strategy, political factors, both international and domestic, are important. At this level strategy, economics, and logistics tend to coalesce; with national and international economics, i.e., producer logistics, limiting the forces one can create, and operational logistics, i.e., consumer logistics, limiting the forces one can tactically employ. Strategic deploy-

ments involve both producer and consumer logistics. As an example, consider the concepts of prepositioning and employment of a fast deployment logistics ship.

Finally, the classic principle of military decision found in *Sound Military Decision* emphasizes this interweaving of integrated thought by testing each proposed course of action for:

- Suitability—Will it accomplish the mission? Attain the objective? This involves both strategy and politics.
- Feasibility—Can it be accomplished with the means available? This involves tactics, logistics, and economics.
- Acceptability—Are the consequences as to cost acceptable? This involves politics, economics, and logistics.

**Control and Deterrence.** Deterrence is certainly a very important aspect of strategy, but it by no means is the only element. But since it is a negative element, undue concentration on it may easily detract from the essential positive aspects of strategy. I believe, however, that its full implications have not been adequately understood.

Concepts of strategy and control must be examined in two major aspects. "Strategy is the comprehensive direction of power to control situations and areas in order to attain objectives." Thus, we can examine the nature of the situations and areas that must be controlled in order to attain objectives, and the means and methods of the use of power in its various forms by which such control will be exercised.

We also must examine the means and the methods by which the power which is being used is itself controlled. The uncontrolled use of power can easily be both self-defeating and disastrous. This means strict political control of all military action must be exercised through the elaborate worldwide com-

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aims of strategy, generally depends upon the results gained by tactics, strategy is initially responsible for the success of tactics. It is therefore in the province of strategy to ensure that the attainment of tactical objectives furthers, exclusively, the aims of strategy, and also that the tactical struggle be initiated under conditions favorable for the attainment of the designated objectives.

mand control system made possible by modern electronic technology.

But the controlled use of force has a further vital implication first brought out by James E. King, Jr., in 1957:<sup>7</sup>

... We must, in short, guarantee that only effectively limited hostilities can be rationally undertaken.

Moreover, we must be prepared to fight limited actions ourselves. Otherwise we shall have made no advance beyond "massive retaliation," which tied our hands in conflicts involving less than our survival. And we must be prepared to lose limited actions. No limitations could survive our disposition to elevate every conflict in which our interests are affected to the level of total conflict with survival at stake.

Armed conflict can be limited only if aimed at limited objectives and fought with limited means. If we or our enemy relax the limits on either objectives or means, survival *will* be at stake, whether the issue is worth it or not . . .

This, in effect, means that the level of tactical defeat which in the past has been acceptable in pursuit of a higher strategic objective has been raised. This in turn places greater burdens on all levels of command. Combat morale, which is the single most important element of combat effectiveness of the armed forces, must be maintained in spite of severe defeats suffered while refraining from the use of powerful and available weapons. This, in fact, is the hidden and heretofore unmentionable aspect of deterrence.

Karl Deutsch in *The Nerves of Government* provides a perceptive discussion of the theory of games. His comments on certain similarities between politics, strategy, and chess, particularly as to the pressure of time allowed for making decisions, is particularly apt. For instance:<sup>8</sup>

The theory—as theory—assumes, in short, that thinking or calculating can be carried on without any limitation of time or cost.

This assumption seems unrealistic in politics. It seems even unrealistic in such cases as chess. According to an unpublished study by Dr. L.C. Haimson, Russian handbooks of championship chess have advised promising players since the 1930's not to follow a "strongest position" strategy, but rather to force their opponent to make some definite commitment on the board, even at the cost of some loss in position to themselves. Once the Russian player has induced his adversary to commit his pieces to a particular position on the board, and to commit his mind to working out the possibilities of a particular kind of strategy, he is then advised according to this theory of chess, to make a radical switch in strategy and to confront his opponent with a new set of problems for which his pieces are not effectively disposed and for which his mind is not prepared. A possible political parallel to these tactics might be seen in the way in which the Soviet-initiated Berlin blockade in 1948 engaged United States attention at a time when the Chinese Communists were winning the civil war in mainland China; and again the way in which the Korean War of 1950 forced United States attention to the Far East, with a corresponding lag in the consolidation of Western positions in other areas.

In such situations the main attack may well be directed at first not so much against the principal material resources but rather against the decisionmaking capacity of the player. Through confronting his mind with a bur-



## 50 NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW

den of decisions greater than he can manage within the limits of available time and intellectual resources, the efficiency of his decisions, and only subsequently his physical position, is to be impaired or disrupted.

... And it should be clear what the Russian theory of chess playing, as described by Dr. Haimson, hopes to accomplish. It is aimed at overloading the second or selection stage in the strategic thinking of its opponent. Once this opponent has been forced into making a commitment that seems advantageous to him when considered by itself, then his material and intellectual capacity for responding to radically new changes may have been overburdened. From this point on, the player has two enemies against him: the radically changing strategies of his opponent and the ticking of the clock.

His footnote is also helpful:\*

In addition to illustrating the interweaving of strategy, tactics, command and morale, the above discussion raises a further point—this point being that the commonly used distinction between strategic and nonstrategic war is, in fact, a semantic trap which can cause real trouble. In recognition of this, I would like to raise the following question: If

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\*This strategy differs significantly from the familiar one of keeping one's opponent "off balance." To keep an adversary off balance may mean, among other things, to prevent him from committing himself thoroughly to any course of action. The Russian chess strategy, like the warfare of the ancient Parthians, would on the contrary encourage him to make such a commitment, in the hope of turning this commitment later to his (opponent's) disadvantage. The latter strategy, unlike the former, can employ deliberate pauses of activity, as well as positive action. The difference between the two strategies resembles thus, in some respects, the difference between boxing and jujitsu.

one attacks the core industries and power and transportation facilities of a nation with high explosive rather than nuclear weapons, does that constitute "strategic war"? Or does the word "strategic" war apply only to the widespread use of atomic or thermonuclear weapons?

I submit that the use of the term "strategic war" is dangerous and may easily confuse us.

**Strategy—Morale and Values.** The understanding of power and force and their effective use is critical to the understanding of strategy. Again, we come to the basic problem of capabilities and limitations and through these to the problems of public, as well as military, discipline and morale. Discipline and morale are frequently taken for granted or else ignored in the writings of so-called military intellectuals.

Strategy becomes most complex when we try to relate concrete tangible military violence to the abstract intangible elements of national interests and national values. This is a necessary, if painful, process, for a strategy which is contrary to the values of the people of the nation concerned will not be successful. A strategy which does not serve the national interest is self-defeating. Yet, how do we define or describe national interests and national values in terms which provide a firm base for a sound strategy?

Obviously, this is a highly intuitive process which means that it is an individual matter in which opinions differ strongly. Here we find the major sources of those elements of paradox, contradiction, and equivocation which today are so apparent and so disturbing.

If our concepts of the nature and structure of strategy and its relation to the other elements of military thought and action are vague or confused, we will inevitably further compound our troubles. Plato's Lament as expressed in

*The Republic*, "Until philosophers are kings," etc., is still pertinent.

**Conclusion.** I have indicated the complexity of thought associated with the use of the word "strategy." The word "strategy" can be properly used in a great variety of levels and contexts. I believe that in some contexts it is desirable to use a qualifying word or phrase to maintain semantic clarity. I believe that when any policy or plan of action, no matter how inconsequential, is labelled "a strategy" rather than simply a "policy" or a "plan," the meaning of the word "strategy" becomes degraded. I further suspect that such usage may sometimes have its roots in the user's pretentiousness or sub-conscious desire to inflate rather trivial ideas by the use of a term which sounds important.

While it is useful and sometimes necessary to discuss strategy in isolation from its associated subjects in the art of war, such discussion does not give one an understanding of more than a small part of the strategy. Strategy in its full sense can be understood only when it is considered as part of an interwoven

fabric of coherent military thought and theory. I believe that such interweaving and coherence are enhanced by the use of the description that:

*Strategy is the Comprehensive Direction of Power to Control Situations and Areas in Order to Attain Objectives.*

I also believe that it is useful to meditate on the words: Comprehensive, Direction, Power, Control, Situations, Areas, Objectives; and that as we so meditate, further ideas will occur.

Finally, I believe that the general quality of military education and, ultimately, military decision and action is improved if the word "strategy" is used with respect and semantic clarity. For if the word is carelessly used, the rigor and comprehensiveness of strategic thinking will be unnecessarily degraded.

If anyone thinks that this discussion has been on a too abstract or theoretical level, I will close by saying that the two greatest specific political-military blunders of our times—the British action in Suez in 1956 and the U.S. Bay of Pigs episode in 1961—contain vivid illustrations of the importance of the points that I have discussed.

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## FOOTNOTES

1. Basil H. Liddell Hart, *Strategy* (New York: Praeger, 1954), p. 334-335.
2. Naval War College, *Sound Military Decision* (Newport, R.I., 1942), p. 9.
3. Herbert Rosinski, "New Thoughts on Strategy," Unpublished Paper, September 1955.
4. Edward Lasker, *Chess Strategy* (New York: Dover, 1969), p. 17.
5. Naval War College, p. 10-11.
6. Duncan S. Ballantine, *U.S. Naval Logistics in the Second World War* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1947), p. 3.
7. James E. King, Jr., "Nuclear Plenty and Limited War," *Foreign Affairs*, January 1957, p. 256.
8. Karl Deutsch, *The Nerves of Government: Models of Political Communication and Control* (London: Free Press of Glencoe, 1963), p. 61-64, 274-275.

