

Developing Strategy that Achieves Aims: Negotiations of an Operational Artist

A Monograph

by

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Abstract

Developing Strategy that Achieves Aims: Negotiations of an Operational Artist, by MAJ Trent W. Talley, USA, 43 pages.

This monograph seeks to answer what the implications are for the operational artist negotiating for strategy to achieve political aims. The forthcoming understanding of the operational artist's authority, responsibility, and location will aid in future emergent strategy negotiations between military and political entities used for military application in limited war. Using comparative analysis to identify and contrast the failed and successful negotiations of two operational artists with policy shows that successful discourse enables application of emergent strategy to achieve time and space for political aims.

The failure of General MacArthur in Korea, 1950, represents the artist's inability to accurately interpret policy and the changing conditions of the operating environment. Furthermore, it highlights the failure to identify an appropriate strategy and lack of ability to influence approval of emergent strategy for achieving military objectives in support of United States policy. The success of General Abrams in Vietnam, 1970, exemplifies the artist's ability to accurately identify a change in the environment and political aims, develop an acceptable emergent strategy of military objectives, and negotiate for the approval of those means and ways to achieve time and space for political aims. Comparing these two examples highlights the positive and negative attributes for emulation and avoidance for current and future operational artists' application through authority, responsibility, and location. Developing military strategy in concert with policy results in effective military objectives achieving time and space for political aims.

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Acronyms

ARVN	Army of the Republic of Vietnam
ASV	Associated State of Vietnam
CCF	Chinese Communist Forces
CINCUNC	Commander-in-Chief United Nations Command
COMUSMACV	Commander Military Assistance Command Vietnam
COSVN	Central Office for South Vietnam
CPVA	Chinese People's Volunteer Army
CTZ	Corps Tactical Zone
DRV	Democratic Republic of Vietnam
JCS	Joint Chiefs of Staff
JP	Joint Publication
MAAG	Military Assistance Advisory Group
MACV	Military Assistance Command Vietnam
NLF	National Liberation Front
NSC	National Security Council
NVA	North Vietnamese Army
RVN	Republic of Vietnam
SCAP	Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
USAFFE	United States Armed Forces Far East
VC	Viet Cong
VWP	Vietnam Workers' Party

Introduction: Negotiating the Art of Politics

War is an instrument of policy. It must necessarily bear the character of policy and measure by its standards. The conduct of war, in its great outlines, is therefore policy itself, which takes up the sword in place of the pen, but does not on that account cease to think according to its own laws.

—Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*

Background and Significance

The United States of America historically utilizes its military for the application of force, or threat thereof, to resolve diplomatic disagreements. As an extension of politics, the aims of the military and the aims of the politician should align, however, often they appear at odds in the execution. Since 1945, the principal and defining characteristic of the United States' employment of military force is in accord with wars of limited political aims.¹ In many of these limited wars, the military engagement became mired in long, exhausting combat that could never achieve the desired US political and foreign policy outcome.

Policymakers apply military force to provide the time and space to achieve the political aim. This paper seeks to identify the nature of discourse between the operational artist and the policymaker responsible for authorizing the application of military force. The result of the discourse between civil and military roles is the development of the emergent strategy that will carry forward the political aim or foreign policy matched with the military objectives during times of limited war.

To fully understand the implications that can develop from the civil military discourse, it is important to first understand the context of limited political aims, with respect to wars with a political objective of final victory or absolute war. Clausewitz states that “the degree of force that must be used against the enemy depends on the scale of political demands on either side.”² If the

¹ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 582.

² Ibid., 585.

intent of the civil political entity calls for complete subjugation of an enemy, then the force applied must be greater than the enemy's ability to resist. This does not take into specific consideration will, nor capacity of an enemy, but rather in simplest terms the belligerents' ability in whole. When the civil political entity limits the aims to specific requirements, then the amount of force is also limited to only that which is required to persuade the enemy to adopt the policy stipulated.

To articulate the intended policies, or political aims, the term 'ends' is often used. Examples of these political ends could be a regime change, a democratized form of government, or even the change of specific actions a government is conducting. To achieve these aims, ways, or types of force are identified. This is where the element of military national power comes to play. When physical force, or threat thereof, is deemed a viable option or necessary, the political entity authorizes the military to conduct operations as the ways. The strategy employed by this force is developed from the discourse between the operational artist and the civil political body that granted the authority. Additionally, the discourse identifies the means, or the specific level of violence the military will be allowed to employ within the construct of the specified aims. It is in this discussion that the operational artist receives guidance from the civil entity controlling the military, interprets and forms an understanding for the intent of that entity, and frames a strategy for employment of the means to achieve the desired outcome. While the military articulates its aims as objectives, they should support the policy aim sought.

Hypothesis, Methodology, and Criteria

Understanding the role of the operational artist in the development of the emergent strategy, the means and the ways, in negotiation with policy provides the best opportunity to match the military objective to the political aim in limited war. In other words, what are the implications for an operational artist negotiating for a strategy that includes military objectives to achieve political aims? This paper uses a comparative analysis to identify and contrast the

negotiations of the operational artists with policy to show that successful discourse enables application of emergent strategy. Using three criteria to test this hypothesis, the paper evaluates the interactions of two operational artists with their respective policymakers in limited wars after 1945. These case studies are General Douglas MacArthur as the Commander in Chief United Nations Command (CINCUNC) during the Korean War from 1950 to 1951, and General Creighton Abrams as Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV) Commander 1969-1970, specifically the Cambodia operation in 1970. The criteria for evaluation are noted in, first, the inherent authority of an operational artist to develop strategy; second, the responsibility given to the operational artist to develop an emergent strategy in which political aims are achieved; and finally, the location of the operational artist defines and elaborates how this position affects both the authority and responsibility of the operational artist.

One case study results in a failed discourse between General MacArthur and President Truman, ultimately leading to MacArthur's relief in 1951. The second case study offers a contrasting successful engagement between the operational artist and policy in which General Creighton Abrams, in discourse with President Richard Nixon, achieved a modification of policy in the accomplishment of his military aim in Cambodia in 1970.

These two theater commanders directly engaged as operational artists with the civil political entities and set the stage for understanding the nature of discourse between the military operational artist and the civil political entity that maintains implications for current day military engagements. By gaining insight to the operational artists' authority and responsibility to understand policy, their ability to negotiate an emergent strategy by their location, and the implications for emergent strategy development represented by the continuity of these negotiations, staff officers and commanders will gain an understanding that will aid in advising political entities for proper development and application of emergent strategy in support of the political aims of limited wars.

To embark on this effort to improve understanding, the two case studies demonstrate in turn failure and success, and the criteria allow for the comparison across the studies. The resulting understanding of the operational artists' authority, responsibility, and location will aid in future emergent strategy negotiations and limited war military application.

Literature Review

Conducting research for synthesis of these two case studies produced primary sources such as direct correspondence from MacArthur to the Joint Chiefs of Staff as well as the direct meeting notes and recordings of briefings from the Abrams' tapes with specific details for understanding similarities, differences, and unique aspects of both civil and military aims.³ The tactical actions, operational design and strategic efforts of both political and military entities are fully available for review. Primary sources provide the historical content and evidence for review in line with the criteria while secondary sources support the primary evidence with context of the individual theaters of war, the personalities involved with the political administrations, and the command elements leading the military actions being reviewed.

General MacArthur's case study produced particularly interesting aspects of human nature with respect to individual personalities. Multiple secondary sources support MacArthur's *Reminiscences* citing the differing opinions between himself and President Truman on the Korean conflict, which possibly influenced negative sentiment between the two.⁴ However, primary sources suggest the disagreement lay more accurately with the military and political aims, respectively, and their objectives in limited war. Such primary sources like the documents from the Truman Presidential Library shed light on the directives that President Truman issued with regards to the political concerns of the administration, limitations, and rules of engagement he

³ Douglas MacArthur, *Records of General Headquarters Far East Command*, Record Group 6, Box 1, Reel number 619, Folder 11, Message C-52391 from MacArthur to the JCS (MacArthur Memorial, Norfolk, VA, 1950); Lewis Sorley, *Vietnam Chronicles: The Abrams Tapes, 1968-1972* (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2004).

⁴ Douglas MacArthur, *Reminiscences* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1964).

placed on military actions, and the guidance for the employment of forces during combat operations. Correspondence records retrieved from the MacArthur Memorial in Norfolk, Virginia provided insight to the theater commander's mindset of military objectives, the theories of limited versus absolute victory, and the specifics for his proposed means and ways of achieving the victory the military commander sought.

While there are many similarities for General Abrams' case study of the Cambodia incursion during a limited aims war, there are dissimilarities with the evidence for emergent strategy developing from civil military discourse. Primary sources exist from the historical records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff articulating the directives for military restriction, limited objective guidance, and most importantly the shift in administration policy during the Vietnam War.⁵ Additionally, information from the historical series of the office of the Secretary of Defense depict the civil military discourse that occurred between the theater commander and the Commander in Chief.⁶ The General Abrams' case study is bolstered by secondary sources setting the conditions for the Vietnam theater, and particular the conditions that resulted from the civil military discourse.

To organize this monograph's historical case study comparison, the study first describes and narrates the Korean conflict with emphasis on the military objectives General MacArthur sought. The paper then transitions to General Abrams' Vietnam conflict highlighting the factors that led up to the change in military strategy and the factors that resulted in political administration policy adjustment. The conclusion compares these two case studies focusing on the previously stated criteria of authority, responsibility, and location.

⁵ Graham A Cosmas, *MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Withdrawal, 1968-1973* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, US Army, 2007).

⁶ Richard A. Hunt, *Melvin Laird and the Foundation of the Post-Vietnam Military, 1969-1973* (Washington DC: Historical Office, Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2015).

Section II: Korean Conflict—MacArthur’s Failed Opportunity

The Korean conflict is arguably the first limited war the United States was directly involved in since the end of the Second World War. From its formal onset of 25 June 1950, when North Korean military forces attacked south of the 38th Parallel until the signing of the armistice on 27 July 1953, the Korean War was a political conflict that found its legitimacy in defending the freedom of democracy and stopping the spread of communism.⁷ When reviewing the Korean War for the application of operational art to determine the manner in which its strategy emerged, it is important to first recognize the development of the operational artist, understand the situation, recognize the operational artist’s role, and then form conclusions of the resulting implications of those factors. With the evidence, it can be argued how General MacArthur’s failure to negotiate for a military strategy supporting given political aims was a missed opportunity for the Korean conflict’s resolution.

Setting the Conditions—Pre-1950

Who was Douglas MacArthur and how did his military career and education affect his understanding of his role as operational artist in 1950? Douglas MacArthur was the third son born to a lineage of military officers in 1880.⁸ At a young age he observed his Civil-War-hero father’s leadership during the Indian Wars on the frontier which framed his understanding of leadership. It was while attending the West Texas Military Academy that the “desire to know, a seeking for the reason why, a search for the truth,” overcame Douglas and led him to graduate from West Point in 1903 with the highest scholastic average in 25 years.⁹ As a young officer, Douglas observed civil-military relationships as an aide to his father during the Russo-Japanese War and later, in 1906, First Lieutenant MacArthur served in the capacity of aide-de-camp to President Theodore

⁷ Edgar O’Ballance, *Korea: 1950-1953* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1969), 15.

⁸ MacArthur, *Reminiscences*, 14.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 17, 27.

Roosevelt while assigned to the Engineer School of Application at Washington Barracks.¹⁰ Both of these positions allowed MacArthur to gain insight to strategic thinking and political matters, especially developing his political education from a level as high as the Commander-in-Chief.

MacArthur served as the most junior member of the General Staff in Washington in 1913 where his daily interactions included senior ranking Army and Navy officers, as well as a specific relationship with the Chief of Staff, General Leonard Wood.¹¹ While serving additional duty as the military assistant to the Secretary of War in charge of the Bureau of Information, Douglas engaged closely with the media in matters pertaining to national military policy. When the United States declared war on Germany in 1917, MacArthur's position found him, again, in personal contact with the highest political entity, President Wilson. The Secretary of War, Newton Baker, requested MacArthur's presence to explain the policy letter he had reviewed and endorsed to President Wilson for his final decision on the application of National Guard use overseas. The President and MacArthur exchanged viewpoints and dialogue for over an hour, and throughout the discourse, MacArthur persuaded the President to agree to federalize the National Guard divisions bolstering the forces available for the world war. Major MacArthur, demonstrating his abilities and having impressed the Secretary of War, was then promoted to Colonel (COL) in the Infantry branch and assigned as division chief of staff for the 42d Division, the 'Rainbow Division' that would fight in Europe.¹² Throughout World War I, COL MacArthur served as a chief of staff and fought as a brigade commander earning a second Silver Star and a

¹⁰ MacArthur, *Reminiscences*, 33.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 39.

¹² Eric Durr, "Rainbow Division" That Represented the United States formed in New York in August 1917, New York State Division of Military and Naval Affairs, 24 July 2017, accessed 24 January 2018, https://www.army.mil/article/191270/rainbow_division_that_represented_the_united_states_formed_in_new_york_in_august_1917.

Distinguished Service Cross. As a Brigadier General (BG) he was awarded his second Distinguished Service Cross and earned the position of Division Commander.¹³

BG MacArthur returned to the United States following the war and assumed the position of Superintendent at West Point where he influenced the future leaders of the Army from 1919 to 1922. His experiential knowledge and leadership proved valuable as he overturned the academy's reputation, rebuilt the educational system from lessons learned, and instilled the standards of a three-year, and subsequently four-year program. MacArthur's strong philosophical beliefs in academic institutions, instilled at the West Texas Military Academy, and later supported by his own attendance of the Service Academy, was evidence of his perseverance and success in transforming the institution.¹⁴ In the interwar period, Major General (MG) MacArthur served as a corps commander and Army Chief of Staff, affording him additional opportunities to liaison between civilian and military senior leadership. The relationships he witnessed and ultimately fostered among both military and political leaders arose from his understanding of people, his ability to persuade, and the life experiences that guided his future actions for right or wrong.

MacArthur's military career progressed and continued to flourish throughout a successful World War II campaign in the Pacific Theater as the commander of US Armed Forces Far East (USAFFE). Japan surrendered at the conclusion of the war and General MacArthur assumed the title of Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (SCAP) during the Allied occupation of Japan. During this time the United States and Allied forces and the Soviet Union divided the Korean peninsula by agreement and accepted the surrender of Japanese forces there. The Soviet Union maintained control and influence over the north, while the United States did the same in the south, with the distinction between the two at approximately the 38th Parallel. This demarcation line was formed due to the limit of advance from both entities on their approach

¹³ MacArthur, *Reminiscences*, 65-67.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 83.

march for their respective lines of operation. Those Japanese forces north of the line were to surrender to the Soviet Union; those south of the line to the United States. The ensuing forms of government developed from this line of separation formed an ongoing boundary that maintained the separation of future states. The Communist Soviet Union strongly influenced the development of the Korean People's Republic under the leadership of Kim Il-sung in the north, while in the south, communism was held in check by the presence of US forces until Syngman Rhee's election as president of the Republic of Korea in August 1948.¹⁵

Division between the governing parties remained as a sense of nationalism grew in the two factions. At this point in time, the United States' foreign policy sought the containment of communism and the Soviet Union. It was not the political intent to destroy communism, only dissuade its expansion threatening the economic situation of the capitalist democracies in western Europe and the United States, and to safeguard the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.¹⁶ On 12 January 1950, Secretary of State Dean Acheson made an inadvertent statement during a press conference to the National Press Club that excluded Korea and Formosa in the US defense perimeter.¹⁷ It was not Acheson's intent to neglect South Korea with respect to their defense, nor was it to provoke Soviet, Chinese, or North Korean aggression. However, when South Korea's provocative leader made statements of defeating North Korea and seizing Pyongyang, the Korean People's Army, with the approval of the Soviet Union, required no additional catalyst and attacked in June 1950.¹⁸

¹⁵ O'Ballance, *Korea*, 22-23.

¹⁶ John W. Spanier, *The Truman-MacArthur Controversy and the Korean War* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1965), 11.

¹⁷ David Rees, *Korea: The Limited War* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1964), 18.

¹⁸ O'Ballance, *Korea*, 27-29.

Korea, The United Nations, and Implementing Policy—1950

A theater commander, in any campaign, is not merely limited to the handling of his troops; he commands that whole area politically, economically, and militarily. You have got to trust at that stage of the game when politics fails, and the military takes over you must trust the military.

—Douglas MacArthur, Testimony before the Armed Services and Foreign Relations Committees of the Senate following his relief from command

A United Nations (UN) General Assembly was called on the defense of North Korean aggression towards the Republic of Korea (ROK- South Korea). This was only possible because the Soviet ambassador, Jacob Malik, boycotted the security council meetings due to previous disagreements on recognition of the communist government in China. On 27 June the United Nations sanctioned the military actions in defense of South Korea. On 29 June President Truman authorized ground forces to join air and naval forces against the aggressor North Korean forces.¹⁹ One week later, the 84th UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) authorized the consolidation of military force under a unified command of the United States.²⁰ By this authorization, General of the Army MacArthur, Supreme Commander Allied Powers in the Far East, was appointed Commander in Chief, United Nations Command (CINCUNC).²¹

The United States needed to gain entry and access into the Korean peninsula to support South Korea and combat the spread of communism. Thus, military aims required tactical actions through forcible entry. The operational artist produced a tactical and operational plan for the initial invasion of Korea that aimed at achieving political ends sought by the United States, and most importantly, the authorizing entity of the United Nations. MacArthur's responsibility to negotiate for the means was captured in the notes of the 8 August 1950 conference on military operations in Korea and Formosa. It was here that MacArthur stated, "I asked for a Marine

¹⁹ Allen Guttman, *Korea and the Theory of Limited War* (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath and Company, 1967), 2-3.

²⁰ United Nations General Assembly, *84th Resolution of 7 July 1950*, accessed 31 October 2017, http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/84 (1950).

²¹ O'Ballance, *Korea*, 37.

division and one infantry division and on 9 July I asked for an army of (four) divisions...now 40,000 short. I have received (one) division and elements. I've constantly been informed of needs elsewhere.”²² Discourse continued between the CINCUNC, Joint Chiefs of Staff representatives, and the special representative of the president until its conclusion resulting in an agreement for force levels and rules of engagement for air, sea and land.

The tactical actions, or ways, of X Corps at Inchon established the basis for operational success in Korea. When X Corps conducted the amphibious operation to secure the foothold on 15 September, the conditions for follow on operations of securing Seoul ensured military aims could be achieved by 27 September.²³ Securing Seoul was a strategic military objective, however, it achieved in part the political aim of ensuring a sovereign and democratic South Korea. The American and combined forces defeated the North Korean People's Army south of the 38th Parallel, reestablished the demarcation line, and achieved the original military aims.²⁴ General MacArthur understood the United States' policy on the containment of communism and interpreted the requirement to secure the South Korean capital as part of the strategy that emerged from his interaction with policy; he received approval by the United Nations and President Truman. MacArthur's emergent strategy and military objective was in line with the political aim to enter Korea, repel North Korean forces while securing Seoul, and ultimately restore the 38th Parallel.

MacArthur directed highly successful military strategies throughout previous wars and conflicts, both as a leader and a follower, that achieved absolute aims. These experiences influenced his subsequent actions in late October 1950 when China's aggression and pending attacks into Korea required counteraction by GEN MacArthur. On 25 October, the first Chinese

²² Douglas MacArthur, "Notes on the Commander-In-Chief's Conference on Military Operations in Korea and Formosa, 8 August 1950," MacArthur Memorial, Norfolk, VA, Records Group 6, Box 1, Reel 618, Folder 9.

²³ Rees, *Korea*, 85-89.

²⁴ Ibid., 90-94.

Communist Forces (CCF) engaged a combined US/ ROK patrol north of Unsan resulting in the first Chinese prisoner of war.²⁵ The approximate 300-soldier Chinese enemy force was sizeable; however, reports from the prisoner of war of 10,000 CCF were unbelievable. The reports were so unbelievable that the US Eighth Army intentionally neglected to inform the Far East Command, and in turn Washington, of the Chinese severity with more than, “some further reinforcement of North Korean units with personnel taken from the Chinese Communist Forces, in order to assist in the defense of the border approaches.”²⁶ The effects of MacArthur’s failure of responsibility to inform the political administration of the changing operational environment would be seen in the future.

With the guidance and reminder from Secretary of Defense, former General George C. Marshall, of the desire for MacArthur to “feel unhampered strategically and tactically to proceed north of the 38th Parallel,” MacArthur adjusted his strategy for supporting political aims and ordered all subordinate commands to orient north to the Yalu River.²⁷ Victory in the campaign to date, both militarily and politically, created the impetus for this change in the political aim, and demanded a revised military strategy to achieve the new aim.

Changing Conditions, MacArthur and Truman, Emergent Strategy—1951

President Truman feared that the United Nations/ United States’ actions in Korea and victory over North Korea would provoke communist China and incite involvement of their military forces in the Korean conflict. If China entered the war, not only would support for North Korea be felt against UN forces, but a vastly greater threat would be faced with neighboring Soviet forces. MacArthur was allowed to orient north and proceed; however, he was to maintain South Korean forces in the lead and cease movement and actions should Chinese forces be

²⁵ Bevin Alexander, *Korea: The First War We Lost* (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1986), 263.

²⁶ Roy E. Appleman, *South to the Naktong, North to the Yalu, United States Army in the Korean War* (Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1961), 677.

²⁷ Guttman, *Korea and the Theory of Limited War*, 9.

encountered. This action was an attempt to prevent Chinese influence on South Korea's democracy and maintain the time and space for the sovereign country to strengthen its own defenses and legitimacy, all the while not fully understanding China's current involvement. In line with MacArthur's authority, he directed the advance north with American forces. The Joint Chiefs of Staff, who were more closely connected to the political entities in Washington, reminded him of their intent to only utilize South Korean military forces north of the halfway point between the 38th Parallel and the Yalu River. While vague and unspecified with respect to military boundaries and proposed political aims, this was the guidance the operational artist was responsible to interpret.²⁸ It was also the limited aims/ military restraint guidance that MacArthur could not accept.

When the Korean People's Army was destroyed south of the 38th Parallel and conducting a withdrawal, President Syngman Rhee placed pressure on MacArthur to support fully uniting all of Korea under his governance. The United Nation's political decision for new aims was delayed while the operational authority and responsibility remained with the operational artist. On 27 September the United Nation's General Assembly recommended new political aims:²⁹

- (a) All appropriate steps be taken to ensure conditions of stability throughout Korea;
- (b) All constituent acts be taken, including the holding of elections, under the auspices of the United Nations, for the establishment of a unified, independent and democratic government in the sovereign State of Korea;
- (c) All sections and representative bodies of the population of Korea, South and North, be invited to co-operate with the organs of the United Nations in the restoration of peace, in the holding of elections, and in the establishment of a unified government;

²⁸ Guttman, *Korea and the Theory of Limited War*, 9.

²⁹ O'Ballance, *Korea*, 54.

- (d) United Nations forces should not remain in any part of Korea otherwise than so far as necessary for achieving the objectives specified in sub-paragraphs (a) and (b) above;
- (e) All necessary measures be taken to accomplish the economic rehabilitation of Korea.³⁰

In support of these newly proposed political aims, it remained the operational artist's responsibility to develop an emergent strategy. The strategy, however, would have to take into consideration the possibility of instigating Chinese intervention and potentially worse, the provocation of Soviet intervention via nuclear weapons.³¹ The political directives issued from Washington by the Secretary of Defense for only ROK soldiers operating in vicinity of the Yalu River attempted to prevent Chinese intervention while remaining focused on the political aims of uniting the Korean state. When the unified command offensive of November 1950 approached the Yalu, the Chinese conducted a counteroffensive that embarked upon the attritional war MacArthur wished to avoid.³²

Throughout his tenure as CINUNC, MacArthur conducted his command and control in the way he knew from previous experiences that produced positive and effective results. He developed strategy with decisive achievements in mind that equated to absolute victory. The discrepancy appeared between achieving UN political aims for defeating the Korean People's Army, and stopping China's aggression and attacks into Korea.³³ MacArthur's disagreement with the US policy of appeasement, as he called it during his hearings to Congress in 1951, while risking American lives fighting a limited war, drove him to suggest military aims that would achieve the decisive victories he sought.

³⁰ Guttman, *Korea and the Theory of Limited War*, 7-8.

³¹ Ibid., 94.

³² Rees, *Korea*, 155.

³³ Guttman, *Korea and the Theory of Limited War*, 24.

The 'MacArthur Plan' proposed as strategy featured the following ways:

1. To use 20 to 30 atomic bombs to destroy Chinese air installations and supply bases in Manchuria.
2. To lay a radio-active belt of nuclear material across the northern neck of the peninsula.
3. To use the 500,000 Nationalist Chinese troops from Formosa (plus two Marine divisions) to make amphibious and air landings simultaneously on both the east and the west coasts of the neck of Korea, to join up overland and so cut off and contain the CPVA (Chinese People's Volunteer Army)
4. To move a reinforced 8th Army northwards to crush the trapped CPVA.³⁴

MacArthur's *courage d'esprit* was evident as he strove to implement his strategic plan.³⁵

His ability to achieve success at Inchon was an example of his competency as the operational artist during this conflict; however, as MacArthur encountered a further attritional and limited war, he developed an emergent strategy given the conditions of the environment that changed while attempting to align the military objectives with the political aims in a limited war to which he was unaccustomed.

Given the operational artist's location as theater commander, and given his interaction with civil authorities and media, he openly voiced his dissent to reporters against the limited war policies. As he was accustomed, MacArthur wanted "all-out victory in Korea even at the cost of enlarging the war."³⁶ In March 1951, MacArthur wrote a letter to US Representative Joseph Martin in which not only did he violate the presidential directive of not speaking of policy to

³⁴ O'Ballance, *Korea*, 94.

³⁵ Clausewitz, *On War*, 102. *Courage d'esprit* references not the strength of action in the face of danger but rather the courage to accept responsibility for action which is created by intellect. It is tied to the *coup d'oeil*, or inward eye, of knowing from education of experiences and study.

³⁶ Doris M. Condit, *History of the Office of the Secretary of Defense, Vol II, The Test of War: 1950-1953* (Washington, DC: Office of the Secretary of Defense, Historical Office, 1988), 97.

outside sources prior to Joint Chiefs of Staff approval, he undercut the political leadership in an attempt to advance his own policy and strategy of “no substitute for victory.”³⁷

Outcomes

As the Korean War continued, the operational environment changed with the addition of hostile Chinese forces supporting the communist movement in North Korea. General MacArthur, filling the role of operational artist in contact with policy to negotiate for forces (means) and military objectives (ends), failed to successfully propose his strategy (ways) for achieving the desired political aims. The discourse between the operational artist and the policy makers in Washington was the point of failure. His guidance and recommendations from the field failed to adjust the political aims Washington policy makers sought. MacArthur’s authority was legitimate and successful as the operational artist; however, his failure arose from his responsibility and his location as that artist. Ultimately, General MacArthur was relieved of his position as the CINUNC and removed from the theater of operations.

The delegation of authority bestowed upon MacArthur by the United Nations Security Council, the title of theater commander, resulted in the assumed role of operational artist. It was his responsibility to develop the strategy for implementing military forces, or the means under his command, to achieve military success by repelling North Korean forces and restoring the 38th Parallel as the separation between the two states.

Exhibited in this case study is General MacArthur’s inability to positively influence through discourse the acceptance of a new policy for war, by which he would accept the military means for achieving the ends of a sovereign South Korea, and ultimately a unified Korea. What originated as a foreign policy of containment, stated as synonymous with limited war due to the presence of nuclear weapons and the consequences of absolute war aims, ultimately caused the

³⁷ Allen R. Millet, *The War for Korea, 1950-1951, They Came from the North* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2010), 420.

changing political aims and MacArthur's failure to negotiate successfully for his preferred strategy and the adjustment of foreign policy to achieve his military aim.

Recognizing this responsibility charged to him, MacArthur implemented military aims to achieve the time and space for political ends to be reached. In line with the original defense of the Republic of Korea, the unified command destroyed elements of North Korean forces south of the 38th Parallel, seized Seoul restoring the governance's capital, and reestablished the demarcation line of the 38th Parallel separating communist North Korea from Democratic South Korea.³⁸ MacArthur's responsibility did not, however, include the revision of political aims to unite all of Korea by continuing north and not only destroying the North Korean military, but additionally carrying military effects into Manchuria north of the Yalu River.

Given the operational artist's location as theater commander, and his exposure by position for interaction with others, he found himself interpreting US international policy inaccurately and unable to influence through civil-military discourse the adjustment of that policy. By responsibility and location, General MacArthur conducted military operations in an environment that was bound for attritional political defeat due to failed discourse for development of his preferred emergent military strategy for political aims achievement and placed him in direct and continuing disagreement with the policymaker, President Truman. This refusal to accept the changed political aim and an alignment of the military aim with stated policy, led directly to MacArthur's relief as CINUNC.

³⁸ O'Ballance, *Korea*, 54.

Section III: Incursion into Cambodia—Abrams’ Successful Opportunity Setting the Conditions—Pre-1954

What caused the war in Vietnam and why did the United States take part in the conflict? The history of disagreement and the United States’ participation dates to the conclusion of World War II and more specifically to the Geneva Accords of 1954. At the conclusion of World War II, France was set to regain power and control of Indochina (which at the time included Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos). However, the countries comprising Indochina fought for their independence from French rule from 1945 to 1954 in what became known as the First Indochina War.³⁹ While the United States supported French colonial possessions against spreading communistic ideals, the United States’ strong commitment to the Atlantic Charter supported independent and “national self-determination for all countries.”⁴⁰

Ho Chi Minh grew up in central Vietnam under the tutelage of a staunch anti-French nationalist father.⁴¹ In his early twenties, Ho learned of the world through his travels on a French ocean liner experiencing American democracy in New York, witnessing French brutality in North Africa, and observing English atrocities in South Africa.⁴² In March 1919, Ho received his first official communist training during the Comintern Conference in Moscow and would later attend the Eastern Worker’s University in 1924.⁴³ During the 1920s, after traveling to China, Ho began his outward anticolonial political movement in Paris, ultimately leading the North Vietnamese nation in open resistance for reform of government against the French oppression in North Vietnam. While it was Ho’s dream for North Vietnam to be independent, it was synonymous with

³⁹ James S. Olson and Randy W. Roberts, *Where the Domino Fell: America and Vietnam 1945-2010*, 6th Edition (West Sussex, UK: John Wiley & Sons, 2014.), 18-24.

⁴⁰ Ulysses S. Grant Sharp, *Strategy for Defeat: Vietnam in Retrospect* (San Rafael, CA: Presidio Press, 1979), 5.

⁴¹ Olson and Roberts, *Where the Domino Fell*, 5.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 10.

⁴³ John Riddell, *Founding the Communist International: Proceedings and Documents of the First Congress, March 1919* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1987), 7.

unification of a singular, undivided Vietnam. Ho Chi Minh's leadership for a nationalist-focused reformation in May 1941 created the "political organization: the Viet Nam Doc Lap Dong Minh, or Vietminh- The League for Vietnamese Independence."⁴⁴ Following the Japanese surrender in August of 1945, enabled by the weakened French authority over the protectorate state, and framed by the US Declaration of Independence, Ho proclaimed the Democratic Republic of Vietnam with the statement:

"We hold these truths that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness...

The French have fled, the Japanese have capitulated, Emperor Bao Dai has abdicated; our people have broken down the fetters which for over a century have tied us down; our people have at the same time overthrown the monarchic constitution that reigned supreme for so many centuries and instead have established the present Republican government."⁴⁵

The newly formed political faction rooted in nationalistic ideals to be unbound by imperialistic control, fundamentally communist and supported by communist China, established a strong coalition, and prepared for French attempts to regain power. President Roosevelt felt strongly about the rights of the Indochinese people and recognized their plight, however, due to pressure from France and Britain, he was persuaded that discussions of colonial independence would only bolster and strengthen the communist movement and cause. Given the tensions and continued fears of budding Marxism, Leninism, and communist power in general, when President Truman was elected, the United States officially sided with France in February of 1950 to curb the spread of communism and prevent the first domino from falling in Indochina.⁴⁶ The 'domino theory,' similar to that during the Korean War, was that if one nation in Southeast Asia should fall to communism, all nations would fall like dominoes stacked in a line. By siding with France,

⁴⁴ Olson and Roberts, *Where the Domino Fell*, 14.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 17.

⁴⁶ US National Security Council, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1950. Vol. 6: East Asia and the Pacific* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1976), 745-747.

the United States also recognized the French-backed Associated State of Vietnam (ASV), led by the former emperor of Vietnam, Bao Dai.⁴⁷ In September 1950, President Truman continued established policy against the spread of communism and supported the French by creating Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) Vietnam to combat the Vietminh movement in the north with both advisory forces and financial aid.⁴⁸ President Truman instituted several MAAGs in 1950 in support of anti-communist efforts and the restoration of peaceful democracy through financial aid and military equipment; specifically to France and Indochina at the cost of 10 million dollars.⁴⁹ The national anti-communist narrative begun under President Truman continued through four future presidential administrations—Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, and ultimately Nixon.

The Indochina War, now fully underway, was an ideologically divergent conflict in space and politics. Those who believed in the independence and sovereignty of a Vietnamese controlled state generally resided in the north and followed Ho and the Vietminh movement fighting against French attempts to reestablish colonial rule. Ngo Dinh Diem, a steadfast anticommunist, strongly influenced the southern attitude to resist the spread of communism aligning with French democracy. Despite American financial support to France in its military endeavors, the leadership of Ho Chi Minh bolstered the support of the people, garnered matched support from the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China, and conducted guerrilla warfare of the people until the decisive victory at Dien Bien Phu.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Edward G. Miller, *The Vietnam War: A Documentary Reader* (Chichester, West Sussex, UK: Wiley Blackwell, 2016), 26.

⁴⁸ Sharp, *Strategy for Defeat*, 13-14.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Miller, *The Vietnam War*, xx- xxi.

The Situation Develops—1954 to 1968

One day prior to the start of the Geneva peace conference in Geneva, Switzerland, on 7 May 1954, the French garrison was defeated at Dien Bien Phu, providing the Vietminh a positional advantage for negotiations.⁵¹ At the end of the conference, France relinquished its colonial claims of Indochina creating independently recognized states Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam. Due to ideological disagreements, Vietnam would remain divided for a period at approximately the 17th Parallel.⁵² The Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV), under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh, maintained control of North Vietnam, establishing the capital in Hanoi. The French-created South, led by Ngo Dinh Diem, established their capital in Saigon. With Diem in position, and political control consolidated in the south, Diem rejected the Geneva Accords mandate for electing representation for a unified Vietnam in 1956, and the ideological division remained, separating the North and South Vietnam states into socialist north and republican south.⁵³

The separation of state and mind was not strictly at the 17th Parallel. A movement in South Vietnam by the Vietnam Workers' Party (VWP) in 1956, led by Le Duan, called for three tasks of southern Vietnam—consolidate the North, push the Southern revolution movement, and win the support of people throughout the world.⁵⁴ The southern movement, spurred by impressions of the United States as an imperialistic puppet master for Diem, ultimately gathered momentum among the people, especially in the rural areas. US policy remained unchanged—stop the spread of communism.

⁵¹ *The Department of State Bulletin*, XXXI, No. 788 (August 2, 1954), p. 164, accessed 5 February 2018, <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1954-geneva-indochina.html>.

⁵² Miller, *The Vietnam War*, 33.

⁵³ Michael H. Hunt, *A Vietnam War Reader: A Documentary History from American and Vietnamese Perspectives* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 29-30.

⁵⁴ Gareth Porter, *Vietnam: The Definitive Documentation of Human Decisions, Vol 2* (Stanford, NY: E.M. Coleman, 1979), 24-30.

Communist China supported the VWP organization and Ho Chi Minh's efforts bolstered the North's capabilities. Uprisings in South Vietnam violently targeted Republic of Vietnam (RVN) officials in the summer and fall of 1959 giving birth in December 1960 to the National Liberation Front (NLF); the official movement against the perceived dictatorial President Diem's leadership. With the active assistance of the United States, the NLF capitalized on the opportunity for a story of continuing imperialism.⁵⁵

The effort of North and South unification escalated with armed insurrection to the point where President Diem's committed military forces struggled to maintain the status quo against an increasingly organized resistance. President Diem requested through the MAAG channels an increase of US support. In line with US policy, the Joint Chiefs of Staff presented Diem's request to President Eisenhower in March of 1960, and with his support, in May the administration authorized an increase of personnel to support the MAAG positioning military advisors down to the battalion level.⁵⁶ This troop increase filled the ARVN leadership void and supported train and advise efforts to combat the growing guerrilla forces.

With a new administration assuming office in January 1961, President Kennedy continued diplomatic efforts to achieve US policy for combating the spread of communism. Guerrilla attacks by the NLF increased into late 1961, and in response, the administration and Department of Defense began considering greater military support for President Diem. Since 1954, each US administration's policy aligned with the proposition of "commit[ting] itself to the clear objective of preventing the fall of South Vietnam to communism...", evident now through efforts of limited bombing and increased numbers of support personnel and equipment.⁵⁷ As

⁵⁵ Bernard Fall, *The Two Viet-Nams: A Political and Military Analysis*, rev. ed. (New York: Praeger, 1967), 442-443.

⁵⁶ Sharp, *Strategy for Defeat*, 13-14.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 19.

advisor numbers increased, the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV) was established in February 1962 under the command of General Paul Harkins.

In November 1963 the United States' leadership found themselves in a position of diplomatic uncertainty with Vietnam. Diem's brother, Nhu, was in a position of power and outwardly displayed prejudice towards the Buddhist population. The United States, aware of growing animosity towards the Diem regime, informed a group of dissenting Generals via Ambassador Lodge that the United States could not support Diem if his brother remained alongside. Further, the United States would not intervene if attempts were made to remove Diem from power.⁵⁸ An internal military coup in South Vietnam removed the unpopular President Diem at the beginning of the month and assassinated the brothers. Three weeks later in November, President Kennedy was assassinated, though with no association to the Diem incident. Due to the US commitment to resist communist expansion, now President Johnson reaffirmed the Kennedy administration policies to maintain military support through advisors, logistics, and financial aid, and sustain the recognition of the newly formed Saigon government.⁵⁹ While advisor numbers in Vietnam continued to grow, MACV absorbed the MAAG in June 1964 and with reorganization, command transferred from Harkins to General William Westmoreland.

In August of 1964, North Vietnamese Navy ships reportedly attacked the destroyers *Maddox* and *C. Turner Joy* with torpedoes.⁶⁰ While the military maintained the right to self-defense, President Johnson sought congressional support and approval for direct military retaliation and linked his argument and administration's policy aims with those of former Presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy. The Tonkin Gulf Resolution was passed on 10 August stating congressional support for the foreign policy of taking all necessary actions, including use

⁵⁸ Sharp, *Strategy for Defeat*, 21.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 29

⁶⁰ Douglas Kinnard, *The War Managers, Thirtieth Anniversary Edition* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1977), 19.

of armed force, to prevent further aggression ensuring “national peace and security in Southeast Asia.”⁶¹ This authorization for action was delegated by the President to the Commander Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (COMUSMACV).

As military actions ensued throughout the following months, the responsibility for developing strategy to achieve US policy was Westmoreland’s as COMUSMACV. The US policy at the time, briefed by President Johnson in his Statement of Objectives, July of 1965, was that the South Vietnam people should have the right to “shape their own destiny in free elections in the South, or throughout all Vietnam under international supervision, and they shall not have any government imposed upon them by force and terror so long as we can prevent it.”⁶² To achieve this end, Westmoreland’s ways for combatting the threat revolved around attritional war of large formations conducting ‘search and destroy’ missions.⁶³ These missions were aimed at achieving a greater body count of a hybrid threat comprising of guerrilla forces (formed from the NLF and subsequently referred to as Viet Cong) as well as the regular North Vietnamese Army forces.

The strategy of MACV from 1965 to 1968, allied with the Republic of Vietnam, was strategically defensive centered on the limited aims of restoring and maintaining South Vietnam’s political status quo in Saigon. The United States believed that by committing US military might to the strategic defense, the inferior NVA would succumb to the firepower of the American military.⁶⁴ This attritional style of war proved unsuccessful and shortly after the political and national perception of the US and ARVN defeat by the Viet Cong and NVA at the Tet Offensive of 1968, a new operational artist, General Creighton Abrams, succeeded Westmoreland as the

⁶¹ Kinnard, *The War Managers*, 20.

⁶² Ibid., 22-23.

⁶³ Sorley, *Vietnam Chronicles*, XVIII.

⁶⁴ John M. Shaw, *The Cambodian Campaign: The 1970 Offensive and America’s Vietnam War* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005), 8.

COMUSMACV, and assumed the authority and responsibility for developing an emergent strategy to the attritional war he inherited.

Abrams Takes Command—1968 to 1969

Creighton Abrams, born to a modest farming family in the fall of 1914, grew up in Massachusetts where he excelled in academics, exemplified competitive football sportsmanship, and developed his caring, family-first attitude from his stern and controlling father.⁶⁵ The first time Creighton left his home state of Massachusetts was when he left for his United States Military Academy appointment in 1932. From the time he first enrolled to his graduation and commission in 1936 as a Cavalry officer, Abrams was assigned leadership positions due to his modest personality and driven character.⁶⁶ Not long a cavalry officer, Abrams entered the 1st Armored Division, and received promotion to Captain four years later. During World War II, Major and subsequently Lieutenant Colonel Abrams commanded a Tank Battalion in the 4th Armored Division where he led the first element of the Third Army to break through to the cut-off 101st Airborne Division at the Battle of the Bulge.⁶⁷ Progressing through the World War, Abrams went on to command another tank battalion and the 2nd Armored Cavalry Regiment; during the Korean war he served as Chief of Staff for three different corps in Korea.⁶⁸ After promotion to Major General, he commanded the 3rd Armored Division in Germany, while Cold War tensions were extremely high. Major General Abrams was then stationed at the Pentagon as the personal representative to the Army Chief of Staff where he earned a reputation for tact and coolness serving at the scene of multiple civil rights crises.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ Lewis Sorley, *Thunderbolt: General Creighton Abrams and the Army of His Time* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), 14-15.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 17-21.

⁶⁷ Lewis Sorley, “Creighton Williams Abrams, Jr”, *Encyclopedia Britannica*, September 15, 2017, accessed February 15, 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Creighton-Williams-Abrams-Jr>.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Sorley, *Vietnam Chronicles*, XVIII.

General Abrams, now a Four-Star General, entered the Vietnam War as the Deputy COMUSMACV for General Westmoreland in April of 1967. Abrams' location as the deputy commander frustrated him as he was not in a position with any authority to adjust the ways the war was being conducted. Upon Westmoreland's appointment to Army Chief of Staff in June 1968, Abrams assumed the command position with authority and responsibility as the operational artist.⁷⁰

Throughout the fall of 1968 and the remainder of Johnson's presidency, policies for the Vietnam War continued along the attritional, and limited aim strategy. MACV had intelligence that the North Vietnamese forces were using the safe-haven of the Sihanoukville trail through Cambodia bypassing American and ARVN patrols; however, Johnson would not support the consistent requests by Abrams to engage cross-border Cambodian sanctuaries.⁷¹ The decision to respect Cambodia's neutrality allowed the NVA to extend its operational reach by establishing the basing requirements for projecting further into South Vietnam and closing the distance on Saigon.⁷² President Sihanouk of Cambodia claimed sovereignty and neutrality of his nation in an effort to negate the American/ RVN attacks in his country. This was done to assuage the stronger and more aggressive Hanoi political and military leadership, despite the requests for resistance from the politically and militarily weaker Saigon government. By permitting the NVA to ship supplies into the port village of Sihanoukville, in exchange, his military received shipments of weapons to develop Cambodian military defenses, while his family received gold, jewels, and drugs. The extent of a growing dissident population, oppressed by the increasing number of

⁷⁰ Sorley, *Thunderbolt*, 299.

⁷¹ Graham A. Cosmas, *MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Withdrawal, 1968-1973* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, US Army, 2007), 282.

⁷² Shaw, *The Cambodian Campaign*, 12.

communist NVA and VC fighters seeking safe-haven in Cambodia, would be demonstrated nearly two years later.⁷³

When General Abrams assumed command of MACV, conflicting opinions emerged surrounding a change in strategy. The role of US forces was to combat the external threat of North Vietnamese aggression, while the South Vietnamese countered the internal guerrilla threat—a focus towards pacification. Lieutenant General Fred Weyand, one of Abram’s staff officers, commented that “‘tactics changed within fifteen minutes’ concentrating on protecting the civilian population, downgraded emphasis on body-count, and devised tactics that preempted enemy offensives” by targeting logistic elements and lines of communication.⁷⁴ Contrarily, the author Lewis Sorley demonstrated in his work *Thunderbolt* that nothing changed upon his assumption of command with respect toward current large unit maneuver and battalion tactics.⁷⁵ Abrams’ effort was, in current day context, a counterinsurgency effort that aimed to transfer unity of effort into the hands of the South Vietnamese enabling their self-defense and self-government. While the ARVN would combat the Viet Cong, US forces would focus on and counter the NVA, halting the spread of communism, and working in concert towards pacification.

At the beginning of October 1968, Abrams was recalled to Washington to discuss with the President a halt to the bombing in North Vietnam. President Johnson informed Abrams of his political desires to seek negotiations in Paris and inquired if Abrams would support this aim by halting the strikes. Abrams replied, “to stop the bombing would get the talks off dead center and I believe the war ought to be ended at the conference table.”⁷⁶ At the conclusion of Abrams’ visit to Washington, he left with a written note from Johnson that expressed his desire for Abrams to

⁷³ Shaw, *The Cambodian Campaign*, 8.

⁷⁴ Sorley, *Thunderbolt*, 188.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 254-256.

⁷⁶ Henry Brandon, *Anatomy of Error: The Inside Story of the Asian War on the Potomac, 1954-1969* (Boston, MA: Gambit, 1969), 150.

press upon the enemy with all available resources, assets, and strength he could muster. The discourse that occurred between the two entities, military and political, allowed Abrams to say, “I got what I wanted.”⁷⁷ The Paris peace negotiations, initiated mid October 1968, and conducted against the backdrop of a temporary halt to American bombing in an effort to provide leverage for dialogue, did not bring peace. The respite in bombings, however, resulted in increasingly fortified NVA positions in the demilitarized zone and increased NVA troop and supply movements towards the south through Laos and Cambodia. As the year 1968 ended with elections for a new administration, President-elect Nixon won the election with a campaign pledging to end the war, seeking a ‘peace with honor’ in Vietnam.

Vietnam, The Election of President Richard Nixon, and Implementing Policy—1969

On January 20, 1969, President Nixon entered office eager to achieve his winning campaign objective. On the same day he quickly formed a team to assess the operations of the National Security Council (NSC) titled the National Security Council Review Group. The overarching intent of the review group was a reformation of the NSC’s formal channel for advising the President. The review moved towards improving the “policy-making apparatus” to include representatives from both Secretaries of State and Defense, as well as the Director of Central Intelligence and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.⁷⁸ Directives formed mandating all Department of Defense matters proceed through the Secretary of Defense and on the following day, President Nixon directed a complete review of all Vietnam matters. Questions posed for the Secretaries of State and Defense, the Director of Central Intelligence, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the

⁷⁷ Sorley, *Thunderbolt*, 253.

⁷⁸ Willard J. Webb, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the War in Vietnam: 1969-1970* (Washington, DC: Office of Joint History, Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2002), 4.

Ambassador for Saigon, and the COMUSMACV sought the opinions and perspectives framing future policy decisions for Vietnam.⁷⁹

In February 1969, General Abrams received intelligence from the II Field commander pinpointing the location of the senior enemy headquarters for South Vietnam, the Vietnamese Central Office for South Vietnam (COSVN), in an area of Cambodia known as the 'Fishhook'.⁸⁰ While US policy supported Cambodian sovereignty, Abrams sought confidential assistance through both the US Ambassador to Vietnam to the State Department, and through his military chain of command, for a modification of policy allowing air strikes within Cambodia. President Nixon, first aware via the military channels, became aware that the State Department also relayed Abrams' requests for striking within Cambodia through the ambassadorial chain. Fearful of a leak of classified information within the State Department, Nixon directed the Department of State to cease developmental planning of cross-border attacks. Conversely, he directed General Abrams through Department of Defense channels to *continue* planning options and ordered Abrams to dispatch a team to Washington to brief those options directly to the administration. On 19 February, President Nixon authorized Abrams to conduct air strikes near the Cambodian border, but not within. This set the stage for future actions in Cambodia "if a suitable local action" was identified, but only based on self-defense.⁸¹ On 23 February, Nixon authorized the COSVN headquarters to attack only to cancel it three days later in fear of public opinion and Cambodian governmental reprisal.⁸²

While Nixon was anxious for retaliatory opportunities against North Vietnamese forces for the Tet Offensive, and was open to military proposals outside Vietnam borders capable to

⁷⁹ Webb, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the War in Vietnam*, 7.

⁸⁰ Graham A. Cosmas, *MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Withdrawal, 1968-1973*, (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, US Army, 2007), 284.

⁸¹ Cosmas, *MACV*, 285.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 286.

achieve both retaliation and positional advantage for negotiations for peace, he was cognizant of his political position with respect to the sovereign nations of Laos and Cambodia, and aware of the US public opinion. In support of policy reform, Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird, visited Vietnam 5 March 1969. During his visit, he relayed to the COMUSMACV and RVN officials that the future aims were to bring the Vietnam War to conclusion and withdraw US troops. Additionally, it was General Abrams' responsibility to "find the means to shift the combat burden 'promptly and methodically' to the South Vietnamese."⁸³ With Laird's message delivered to the authorities in Vietnam, he in turn carried their message to the US administration reporting increased use of border sanctuaries, and recommendations for adjustment to rules of engagement permitting greater effect against the mounting threat.⁸⁴

In March 1969, following the Secretary of Defense's visit, MACV published the Objectives Plan oriented towards the evolving emergent strategy. The Plan considered previous courses of action, current operations, and the way ahead for applying future efforts. In this plan, General Abrams outlined the US policy objective for South Vietnam as "a free independent and viable nation which is not hostile to the United States, functioning in secure environment both internally and regionally."⁸⁵ Abrams acknowledged that the amount of time necessary to achieve the objective likely exceeded the acceptable time limit given US public opinion. Abrams then further identified an intermediate objective with several key points of achieving reasonable security for the South Vietnamese government to build a free and independent nation. This reasonable security placed the emphasis on securing the people of an area rather than an area itself.⁸⁶ While Abrams remained concerned with achieving security despite reduced US combat

⁸³ Webb, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the War in Vietnam*, 10.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 12.

⁸⁵ Sorley, *Thunderbolt*, 235.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

power through troop reductions, the strategy focused on the new aim requiring fewer troops, and most importantly supported Nixon's policy of troop withdrawal for an honorable peace.

Supporting troop withdrawals while maintaining pressure on enemy forces, both conventional and guerrilla, required General Abrams to establish new offensive operations, the ways, for conducting the strategically defensive conflict, while ultimately shifting the means of those operations to the South Vietnamese. Abrams had to simultaneously conduct combat operations with US and ARVN forces against the NVA, but also build additional ARVN combat forces in line with US troop withdrawals, and support ARVN-only pacification operations.

Intelligence reports previously identified the COSVN headquarters element in Cambodia which provided command and control to the forward logistical elements and basing operations in Cambodia. After a month of deliberation and discourse, President Nixon approved the request by Abrams and delegated authority to COMUSMACV to strike six regions in Cambodia under the code name MENU on 18 March 1969.⁸⁷ MENU remained a classified endeavor and for each of the 3,875 sorties flown delivering 108,823 tons of munitions in 14 months, a simultaneous strike packet was presented and approved within South Vietnam to cover for the clandestine bombing of Cambodia.⁸⁸ This is a powerful example of Abrams' negotiation with the policymaker that achieved a major policy change for the application of tactical forces within a new emergent strategy achieving the new aim. While authority was delegated from the political administration to the operational artist, it remained Abrams' responsibility to request approval for each strike through CINCPAC, to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, ultimately receiving approval from the Secretary of Defense.⁸⁹

On 6 June 1969, COMUSMACV attempted to capitalize on the progress of his strategy and proposed additional ways of achieving effects on the safe-havens of Cambodia. MACV

⁸⁷ Webb, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the War in Vietnam*, 136-137.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

proposed platoon sized, US-led patrols and raids along the southern border of Vietnam and Cambodia up to 20 kilometers within Cambodia. The request was denied due to pending diplomatic negotiations with Cambodia's government leaders over their concern of VC/NVA forces already within their borders.⁹⁰

In line with President Nixon's policy to end the war with honor, on 8 June 1969, the MACV mission statement formally shifted from defeating the enemy to supporting pacification, improving ARVN capability, and focusing on enemy logistic abilities and lines of communication for support.⁹¹ Abrams' responsibility as COMUSMACV interpreted this formal policy change with a new emergent strategy document expressed with his publication of the Free World Forces' 1970 Combined Campaign Plan. Abrams issued the formally partnered plan with RVN diplomatic and military leadership at the end of October 1969. The campaign plan outlined eight military objectives, four of which focused on supplies and support networks "in Vietnam and 'authorized contiguous areas.'"⁹² While the term 'contiguous areas' left room for interpretation, Abrams' previous guidance to his staff demonstrated his understanding of this authority, and the limitations imposed on him as COMUSMACV.⁹³

Changing Conditions, Abrams and Nixon, Emergent Strategy—1970

With military objectives clearly stated and policy accurately understood, General Abrams developed a strategy that achieved stipulated troop reductions. However, Abrams sought additional policy adjustment to support his desired strategy of military ways and means. While an

⁹⁰ Webb, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the War in Vietnam*, 140.

⁹¹ Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, 1979), 276.

⁹² MACV/ Joint General Staff (JGS), "Combined Campaign Plan, 1970," 31 October 1969, 2, U.S. MHI Vietnam Collection, printed in Shaw, *The Cambodian Campaign*, 18.

⁹³ Sorley, *Vietnam Chronicles*, 233. Abrams maintained awareness of authority and as exhibited by his directions to his staff, he cautioned planning efforts based on lack of approval for assumed troop reduction numbers. Abrams acknowledged the lack of approval by CINCPAC, the JCS, SECDEF, nor the President for initiation of actions and plans. This situation is an example of GEN Abrams' recognition of authority consistent throughout his time in Vietnam.

air campaign extending beyond the limits of Vietnam borders garnered positive effects by reducing cross-border attacks, the NLF, VC, the NVA continued to operate in Cambodia and South Vietnam, placing ever more pressure on the Cambodian government, and its populace, and on US/ARVN operations in South Vietnam.

Dissention among Cambodian government leaders, specifically against President Sihanouk as Chief of State, grew as 1969 ended, amid turmoil from the border clashes with both ARVN and NVA forces. In January 1970, General Abrams directed his staff to conduct unilateral planning efforts for a cross-border incursion of ARVN regimental size elements supported by US artillery and air if political situations permitted policy adjustment.⁹⁴ Abrams knew the United States would not be authorized, under current diplomatic conditions, to lead attacks into Cambodia. With planning efforts evolving, the intelligence reported Cambodian launched attacks into southern RVN territories. In February, the COMUSMACV provided a detailed assessment of the Cambodian situation which included substantial reporting of logistical supplies flowing through the Sihanoukville port and village, enabled by Cambodian officials.⁹⁵ Requests for authorization to conduct operations in Cambodia were denied that month and again in March as General Abrams attempted to align military objectives with political aims.

Tensions rose through March in the Cambodian capital of Phnom Penh as communist forces increased their harassment of the civilian population, forcing Cambodian governmental action. With Sihanouk out of country, demonstrations occurred across Cambodia protesting the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese presence that had vastly grown within the supposedly 'neutral' state. The Cambodian National Assembly held a secret session on 18 March 1970, to address the conditions within their country, and shortly after officially notifying North Vietnam of their

⁹⁴ Webb, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the War in Vietnam*, 143.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 142.

requirement to withdraw all Viet Cong and NVA forces from Cambodia, unanimously voted Sihanouk out of power.⁹⁶

The Cambodian leadership changed to two individuals named Lon Nol and Sirik Matak, while the former Chairman, Cheng Heng, served as the figurehead for power. By the end of March, Cambodia shifted its policy to align with pro-Western leaders, causing an adjustment to US policy, and an opportunity for another emergent strategy. The Commander-in-Chief Pacific forces requested authority at the end of March 1970 for COMUSMACV to plan for cross-border operations led by US forces. The President, concerned about the status of Cambodia, delegated the responsibility to conduct detailed planning efforts to COMUSMACV on 25 March 1970.⁹⁷ With the possibility of developing a new emergent strategy in support of new policy, Abrams faced both the constraints and necessity to engage in negotiations with policy over the military aims and the means.

Because General Abrams previously identified the potential for cross-border operations, conceptual plans and an operational framework already existed. MACV conducted a short turn-around and presented options to the Secretary of Defense the day after being authorized to conduct planning. Discourse ensued between COMUSMACV and policy concerning the size of force, the duration, the cost of operations, as well as the extent of US involvement ultimately leading to the direction of two courses of action for the area of Cambodia known as the Fishhook and the Parrot's Beak.⁹⁸ General Abrams worked closely with the Department of State representative, Ambassador Bunker, to ensure military efforts were in concert with political aims. Up until now, however, Bunker was not apprised of the plans efforts for Cambodian incursion operations. After the Secretary of Defense authorized Abrams on 27 March 1970 to disclose

⁹⁶ Webb, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the War in Vietnam*, 143.

⁹⁷ Msg, SecDef to CJCS, "Ground Strikes Against Base Camps in Cambodia," 25 Mar 70, JMF 880 (25 Mar 70). Printed in Webb, *History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff*, 144.

⁹⁸ Webb, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the War in Vietnam*, 145.

information on the ongoing planning, General Abrams included the Ambassador through the month of April 1970.

When the MACV mission statement changed months prior, Abrams interpreted this policy revision and instructed his staff to conduct planning efforts for a Cambodian incursion should the US foreign and international policies adjust. His foresight stemmed from his responsibility to capitalize on momentum and continue efforts for achieving policy success through the achievement of his military objectives. Abrams believed in the potential of the Cambodia incursion due to previous successful airstrikes in accordance with the MENU operations. These strikes achieved extensive damage to enemy facilities and materiel, a visible reduction in enemy activity in immediate strike areas, and potentially a role in recent Cambodia political reform.⁹⁹

One discrepancy remained requiring adjustment of policy for execution of Abrams' emergent strategy. Abrams asked for the rate of troop reductions to be suspended for 75 to 90 days to support the incursion.¹⁰⁰ Throughout April, the NVA aggression in Cambodia created multiple requests from the sovereign state of Cambodia for US support. United States diplomatic negotiations continued through Department of State representatives with North Vietnam and conditions within Cambodia worsened as the NVA and VC pressured the government of Cambodia. The Nixon Administration recognized the growing violence within Cambodia and maintained discourse with military representatives of the JCS, CINCPAC, MACV, and the Secretary of Defense to develop strategy for combating the threat. Repeated submissions through the month of April culminated on 27 April, when MACV sent the proposed courses of action to the President. Nixon, in turn, directed adjustments concerning the size of ARVN forces and the number of US troops participating in cross-border operations. The Army Chief of Staff finally

⁹⁹ Edward C. Keefer and Carolyn Yee, *Foreign Relations of the United States: Vietnam, January 1969- July 1970*, vol. VI (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 2006), 741.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 745.

notified Abrams that the Cambodia incursion would be authorized on 29 April at 0800, with the requirement that all US troops would be withdrawn by 30 June 1970.¹⁰¹

In line with policy, with authority from President Nixon and responsibility for design by COMUSMACV, the ARVN assault into the Parrot's Beak initiated on time supported by American attack aviation and medical evacuation assets. Two days later a combined ARVN/US attack initiated into the Fishhook region with a one-to-one ratio of Vietnamese to US ground troops.¹⁰²

Outcomes

Creighton Abrams disagreed with the 1968 strategy he inherited, but he reinforced it while assigned as the deputy COMUSMACV. While Abrams did not necessarily agree with the strategy, he supported the policies the strategy aimed to achieve. When General Abrams assumed responsibility as the Commander for US Military Assistance Command Vietnam, by virtue of his assignment, he demonstrated the effect of authority, responsibility, and location of the operational artist to negotiate with policy for the military objectives and means achieving a new emergent strategy, expressed as a new campaign plan, to achieve the aims of the new policy. He worked in concert with the Department of State and appropriate military channels to maintain positive communication with civilian diplomatic representatives in an effort to achieve positive outcomes of military action buying time and space for a political settlement.

The Cambodian incursion provided time and space in part to achieve the political aims. Militarily, the North Vietnamese Army was unable to conduct another large-scale attack launched from Cambodian safe havens until the Easter Offensive of 1972. Politically, the military action oriented on NVA forces in Cambodia withdrew some of the NVA pressure away from the relatively young Cambodian government. In whole, Abrams' ability to negotiate for his emergent

¹⁰¹ Webb, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the War in Vietnam*, 159, 178.

¹⁰² Ibid., 159.

strategy supported the policy of Vietnamization by creating time and space for training ARVN forces, improving the security of the people in rural South Vietnam, and facilitating future troop reductions. When Nixon authorized Abrams' proposed strategy, Nixon did so aware of the domestic distress residing within the US public. Anticipating the turmoil and political backlash that ultimately ensued, Nixon approved the proposal of his theater commander.

General Abrams' ability to maintain positive discourse with the policy maker and other policy officials resulted in an adjustment of US policy in 1969 and 1970 that enabled development of the emergent strategy to conduct cross-border attacks into Cambodia. General Abrams received authorization to plan and execute the Cambodia incursion; as the commander of the Military Assistance Command Vietnam, it was his responsibility to develop a strategy that set forth military objectives to support the political aims.

Section IV: Where the Two Shall Meet

The two case studies presented contrast in the application of operational art, tactics employed, and personalities involved. While operational art and tactics are not the focal point for assessing emergent strategies' ability to achieve political aims, the operational artists—their ability to engage in discourse, is the center for evaluation.

What are the implications for an operational artist negotiating for a strategy that includes military objectives to achieve political aims? Understanding the role of the operational artist in the development of emergent strategy through military negotiation with policy shows that successful discourse enables matching the military objective to the political aim in limited war. By reviewing the inherent authority of each operational artist to develop strategy, the responsibility given to develop an emergent strategy in which political aims are achieved, and lastly the location of that artist, those implications for the operational artist are seen.

General MacArthur enjoyed a long and successful career that shaped his understanding of war, the means that should be employed, the ways it should be conducted, and the ends that should be achieved by the alignment of tactical actions. As the Commander-in-Chief United

Nations Command responsible for the actions in Korea, he demonstrated his understanding of the responsibility his position entailed. However, given the operational artist's location as CINUNC, and the display and misuse of his authority, GEN MacArthur failed to interpret policy, engage in discourse to develop appropriate strategy, or leverage his position to achieve the policy that could be attained by application of military means. MacArthur believed one type of victory, total victory, should be the objective in war. The Truman Administration's policy during the Korean conflict did not seek the same type of victory, and therefore the political and military entities did not agree on strategy, the ways, for winning the war in Korea. When MacArthur attempted to circumvent the military chain of command and backdoor the political circuit, he was removed from position and lost the authority to develop strategy; additionally, he lost the responsibility to influence policy.

General Abrams inherited a strategy upon his entrance to the Vietnam conflict. He observed that strategy for a period in the position of Deputy COMUSMACV without the responsibility or authority of command. When Abrams assumed the command role, he gained both the requisite traits to affect policy and develop an emergent strategy befitting the evolving conditions of the environment and the policy that inevitably changed.

As the Commander of US Military Assistance Command Vietnam, General Abrams maintained the authority to determine the best strategy for achieving political aims. Although neither the Johnson nor Nixon Administrations authorized Abrams to initially enter Cambodia, he was authorized to adjust strategy in line with policy from 'search and destroy' towards 'Vietnamization'. In doing so, he focused ARVN forces towards pacification—countering the Viet Cong threat. Meanwhile, US forces engaged the greater NVA threat buying time and space for Vietnamization.

The United States' recognition of Cambodian sovereignty, while North Vietnam capitalized on safe-haven opportunities within Cambodian borders, presented the Nixon Administration with an extremely painful decision. Abrams engaged in discourse achieving a

change in policy. That change in policy enabled Abrams to fulfill his responsibility as the operational artist developing an emergent strategy in line with the new policy. Abrams created time and space for the Administration by allowing a two-year respite for Vietnamization and US withdrawal to occur through the Easter Offensive of 1972.

The two case studies contrast a failed and a successful example of civil and military discourse to affect policy and strategy. Evident in these two examples is that the responsibility, authority, and location of the operational artist to effect policy change and effective military application of strategy reside with the operational artist. While the governing body or political institution that seeks to achieve a national policy delegates the authority for achieving military objectives, it is the responsibility of the operational artist to engage in discourse with that political institution ensuring accurate interpretation of policy and achievable political aims. When military force is deemed the element of power for achieving that policy, the operational artist is granted authority for employing military means based on the belief that the artist understands and has accurately interpreted policy; for on a national level, “strategy and policy coalesce.”¹⁰³

¹⁰³ Clausewitz. *On War*, 111.

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