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The Linkage of the Strategic and Operational Levels of War

by

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Innovations in military technology and organization have changed strategic and tactical methods of fighting wars. The U.S. Army AirLand Battle doctrine has revived the operational level to link strategic and tactical levels of war. The concept of operational level is not yet understood completely by other branches of the military or statesmen. A lack of common understanding about doctrine has caused conflicts about the preparation and conduct of war. The likely result of a misunderstood doctrine is the poor development of military strategy and poor execution at tactical levels.

This paper examines linkages between strategic and operational levels of war using
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This paper concludes that the linkage of the strategic and operational levels is
possible only through the development of the general's art. The general's art, the
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that contribute to the political end.

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ABSTRACT

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The general's art, the operational art, is the knowledgeable application
of resources to accomplish goals that contribute to the political end.

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INTRODUCTION:

The <u>nature</u> of war has changed little since Clausewitz described war as a "continuation of policy," however; <u>methods</u> used to conduct war have changed significantly. Innovations in military technology and organization have changed strategic and tactical methods used to fight wars. Changes in methods used to conduct war are a source of internal conflict for governments as they develop policy and strategy. In the United States, this conflict is evident in current defense reform issues and the continuing evolution of service doctrines.

The U.S. Army serves as an example of how intra - service doctrine evolves, having changed its operational doctrine twice in ten years. The 1976 doctrine of Active Defense was replaced by the 1982 AirLand Battle doctrine which is now being refined. Associated with the AirLand Battle doctrine is the revived operational level of war which links strategic and tactical levels of war. The operational level, "the design and conduct of campaigns and major operations," is distinguished from the tactical level which "deals with battles and engagements."[1] Moreover, U.S. Army Field Manual 100-5 <u>Operations</u>, describes the following broad divisions of activity for the preparation and conduct of war:

Strategy... derived from policy... establishes goals in theaters of war and in theaters of operations... and is the sole authoritative basis for all operations.

Operational art... the employment of military forces to attain strategic goals involves fundamental decisions about when and where to fight.

Tactics... translate combat power into victorious battles and engagements.[2]

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Although AirLand Battle doctrine is taught in Army service schools and is manifesting itself in all levels of Army exercises, it is not yet understood completely by other branches of the military. The existence of an operational level of war is becoming increasingly evident but the linkage of the national or military strategic level to the operational level is not so clear. A lack of understanding about what the operational level is has caused inter - service conflicts about how war is to be prepared for and conducted. The likely result of a misunderstood doctrine is the poor development of military strategy and poor execution at tactical levels.

Assuming Clausewitz's assertion that war is a continuation of policy is still valid, the following questions bear asking:

o Is it necessary to have a linkage of the operational and the strategic levels of war; what should the linkage look like?

o Is it possible for political ends to be attained by military means in war if there is not a linkage between military strategy and the operational level of war?

Purpose and Scope. The intent of this paper is to examine ideal and actual linkages between strategic and operational levels of war using selected principles of war as guides for analysis. To that end, this paper examines the effects of changes in methods used to conduct war, theory, military strategy, and the operational art. The Korean War is analyzed using selected principles of war to determine the linkage of the strategic and operational levels of war.

THE THEORETICAL NATURE OF WAR:

Clausewitz's work On War is dedicated to the proposition that war is a political function. War, Clausewitz states, "arises from a political condition," is called forth by "political motives," and is therefore "a political act." Clausewitz implies that war ought to be politically purposeful as it is conducted to cause the "enemy to do our will"; or, stated in contemporary terminology, to "restore peace on favorable terms."[3]

The compulsion to use war as a coercive political instrument to resolve conflict is determined by the magnitude of political will of both belligerents. However, will must be guided by what Clausewitz describes as superior intellect when he warns:

> No one starts a war — or rather, no one in his senses ought to do so — without first being clear in his mind what he intends to achieve by that war and how he intends to conduct it. The former is its political purpose, the later its operational objective. This is the guiding principle which will set its course, prescribe the scale of the means and effort which is required, and make its influence felt down to the smallest operational detail.[4]

Implied within this admonition is the idea that parameters for favorable conclusion of war are defined by policy and are required of strategy. Strategy governs the economic commitment of available means in war, places an enemy at a disadvantage, and causes him to "do our will" — the political end.

As the means to political ends are considered, it is necessary to note that it is possible for political ends to be gained in war without the outright defeat of an enemy military force. Sometimes political ends can be gained without threat or actual commitment of military force. However, it is unreasonable to assume a threatened

government will easily be coerced; it will continue to resist as long as it has the will and means to do so. Political ends will be pursued by rational governments as long as the ends are within the realm of the possible. The momentum of a conflict placed into motion by such strong opposing wills may increase until it approaches the level of absolute war. As the probability of absolute war increases, it becomes imperative that war should not be used as a political instrument without considering what Clausewitz refers to as the "last step." The "last step" in absolute war suggests a series of purposeful, sequenced actions taken toward a desired end. Clausewitz described the desired end of absolute war as the "final victory." Logically it follows that the final victory causes war termination; war termination results in peace. Clausewitz continues:

> Until then, nothing is decided, nothing won, and nothing lost. In this form of war we must always keep in mind that it is the end that crowns the work. Within the concept of absolute war, then war is indivisible, and its component parts [the individual victories] are of value only in relation to the whole.[5]

Having made the point about final victory in absolute war, Clausewitz notes that if war is to remain an instrument of policy, it is necessary to stop short of the absolute. It makes no sense to pursue war to its absolute level if the annihilation of an opposing political body makes it impossible to terminate war by making the "enemy do our will." "The last military step" in absolute war is successful termination of that war — the final victory.

THE EFFECTS OF SOCIAL AND TECHNICAL INNOVATION ON THE CONDUCT OF WAR:

The conduct of war has largely been affected during the past

two hundred years by three military revolutions[6]: the concept of a

"nation in arms" credited to the French Revolutionary period; the

mechanical revolution during the late nineteenth through mid - twentieth

century; and, more recently, the nuclear revolution. Proliferation of

nuclear weapons has made it possible for nations to conduct war at the

absolute level without having to commit forces in conventional battle.

An effect of nuclear weapons proliferation is the potential for several

nations to annihilate each other simultaneously. The net effect of

nuclear weapons proliferation may be a stalemate. These effects have

caused substantial shifts in the way that war is viewed by the U.S..

According to Bernard Brodie, the primary U.S. policy for war should be

one of "avoidance."[7] The policy of avoidance attempts to achieve "the

last step" in war (final victory, termination, peace) without having to

secure intermediate victories. The policy of avoidance is a logical

extension of the proposition that war is essentially terminated if

success is demonstrated to be improbable or its cost excessive. The

policy of making the cost of war prohibitive by the threat of

annihilation has been criticized by J.F.C. Fuller as similar to "using

the devil to cast out the devil: it doesn't even have the merit of being

practical politics."[8]

The United States has successfully avoided a high intensity war

since 1945. However, in his book The Real War, former President Richard

Nixon contends that the United States has been involved in a war with the

Soviet Union since the early 1940s. Nixon describes this war as a

function of Soviet and proxy attempts to gain political ends without the

outright defeat of a major U.S. force. Consider Nixon's comments:

In war the fact that a surrounded garrison surrenders without any shots makes its capture no less a military victory for one side and defeat for the other. When the Soviet Union advances by using proxy troops, its conquests are still Soviet victories and western defeats.[9]

Nixon suggests that Soviet advances are due to the lack of a credible policy for the employment of military power. Nixon would agree with the following paraphrase of J.F.C. Fuller: to threaten nuclear force in a low - to mid - intensity conflict is not "practical politics." Possession of power alone does not make a nation powerful. The possession of power and the requisite skill to employ power well is the combination required. This combination is evident in Nixon's analysis of the Vietnam war:

Unless we learn to use power to defend our interests, the tables of history will be turned against us and all that we believe in. More nuclear power in our arsenal would not have saved Vietnam. More conventional forces would not have saved Vietnam. Vietnam was lost, not because of a lack of power, but because of a failure of skill and determination at using power.[10]

The NATO policy of "flexible response" was developed because of a need for a credible policy for the employment of military power. Flexible response assures numerous conventional options to attain intermediate, contributing victories while maintaining a strong nuclear reserve capability. As a policy change, flexible response has posed questions yet to be resolved. For example, how do conventional military forces contribute to the attainment of political ends in a nuclear environment? On the surface the question is simple, however, each U.S. military service considers war differently and plans accordingly. There is no central theory that coalesces the U.S. military services into a truly unified joint body. For example, Robert Komer asserts that the Navy subscribes to Mahan's theories and focuses on command of seas; the

Air Force subscribes to Douhet's theories and focuses on victory through air power; while the Army subscribes to the theories of Clausewitz and focuses on the mobilization of large land forces for commitment overseas.[11] Methods of conducting war have changed, and changes are being applied according to different theories. To the casual observer it appears that military branch parochialism is at the heart of inter - service conflict. Inter - service conflict has caused many statesmen to agree with Clemenceau's view that "war is too important to be left to the generals."

WHAT ROLE FOR THE MILITARY IN
THE FORMULATION OF STRATEGY?

In 1936, the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College taught the following concept:

> Politics and strategy are radically and fundamentally things apart. Strategy begins where politics end. All that soldiers ask is that once the policy is settled, strategy and command shall be regarded as being in a sphere apart from politics... the line of demarcation must be drawn between politics and strategy, supply, and operations. Having found this line, all sides must abstain from trespassing... Conflict between the statesman and the soldier will always be present in one form or another and a commander must make provision therefor. He must not allow himself to be paralyzed by such interference.[12]

Samuel Huntington's 1957 work The Soldier and the State identified a shift back to the Clausewitzian relationship of politics to war and implied a hierarchical relationship of statesman to soldier when Huntington stated:

> The military man has no concern with the desirability or undesirability of political goals as such... The statesman furnishes the dynamic, purposeful element to state policy. The military man represents the passive, instrumental means. It is his responsibility to warn the statesman when his purposes are beyond his means.[13]

Huntington further described the military man's

responsibilities as follows:

[First] Keep the authorities of the state informed as to what
he considers necessary for the minimum military security of the
state.

[Second] The military officer has an advisory function, to
analyze and to report on the implications of alternative causes of
state action from the military point of view.

[Third] The military officer has an executive function, to
implement state decisions with respect to military security even if
it is a decision which runs violently counter to his military
judgment.[14]

A common thread evident in Huntington's writings, the 1936

USACGSC instruction, and U.S. history is the concept that the formulation

of policy is outside the purview of the military. It is clear that the

establishment of national goals and the allocation of means to attain

these goals is the domain of the statesmen. It is the military's

responsibility to sequence actions economically and adapt available means

to attain objectives that contribute to national goals. This simplistic

description of responsibilities has been complicated by tremendous

changes in the means to conduct war. A dilemma exists for the U.S.. It

must reconcile the need for extensive military power to prevent

aggression, while placing that power in the hands of very few and not

threatening the values the military exists to protect.

As an outspoken critic of military involvement in the

development of strategy, Bernard Brodie admonishes the military for being

preoccupied with "winning" wars. The following passage from Sir William

Slim's book Defeat into Victory confirms Brodie's view.

Defeat is bitter. Bitter to the common soldier, but terribly
bitter to his general. The soldier may comfort himself with the
thought that, whatever the result, he has done his duty faithfully

and steadfastly. But the commander has failed in his duty if he has not won victory — for that is his duty [emphasis added].[15]

A recurring theme in most of Brodie's works on strategic thought is that the general has been "conditioned to want desperately to win, and is willing to pay any price possible to do so." He warns that winning becomes the object for the military in war while in some circumstances it is better to seek a termination of war short of victory, "even if military victory is attainable."[16] Brodie criticizes military judgment by asserting that soldiers are trained throughout their careers to "drill" units and are not prepared academically to provide effective advice on strategic issues. Brodie is particularly critical of the lack of preparation officers receive for their role as Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff:

> ...the man who has risen to the top finds himself with new concerns, political and diplomatic. He is not simply directing the Army, Navy, or Air Force. He is consulting with his colleagues and advising his civilian superiors, the Secretary of Defense and the President. He is advising them on matters having to do with the goals and the ends of peace and war. For this he has certainly not been trained — unless a nine month survey course in international and other political affairs at one of the war colleges can be considered such training. However, he has absorbed ideas and convictions and biases all along the way, and these are a large part of his working capital.[17]

In 1946 Brodie expressed concern about soldiers "moving in where they do not belong." He indicated that soldierly advice would reflect "imperfections not as diplomats but as soldiers" because soldiers lack a fundamental skill — "a genuine understanding of military strategy."[18] Brodie asserted that the military lacks experience, or only has the benefit of inappropriate experience for providing correct military advice. Therefore, when called to provide advice, Brodie contends that the military will always recommend military action. He

substantiated this point by citing Robert Kennedy's work Thirteen Days:
A Memoir of The Cuban Missile Crisis, in which Kennedy states:

> President Kennedy was disturbed by this inability to look
> beyond the limited military field. When we talked... he said we had
> to remember that they were trained to fight and wage war -- that was
> their life. Perhaps we would feel even more concerned if they were
> always opposed to using arms or military means -- for if they would
> not be willing who would be? But this experience pointed out for us
> all the importance of civilian direction and control and the
> importance of raising probing questions to military
> recommendations.[19]

Brodie's influence on U.S. military strategic thought has been
extensive during the last forty years and will likely be felt for several
years to come. Consider the effect of Brodie's 1946 recommendation that
during peacetime, we should be more interested in "avoiding" war than
winning one when it comes.[20]

Colin Gray recently challenged the U.S. civilian "strategic
culture" that Bernard Brodie helped to develop. In a 1984 Parameters
article, Gray chastised American strategists for "not preparing seriously
for the actual conduct of war." He asserted that "U.S. policy thinking,
by and large, terminates abruptly with a breakdown in pre - war
deterrence. American strategic thinking leaves the field precisely when
it would be most needed."[21] Gray implies that attempts to control
military power have overlooked the basic purpose of a military force --
preparedness for commitment as a coercive force to cause favorable
resolution of a political issue.

Edward Luttwak's article "Why We Need More Waste, Fraud, and
Mismanagement in the Pentagon" describes a similar view but faults the
defense establishment for being concerned excessively with civilian
efficiency rather than military effectiveness. Luttwak opines that civil

efficiency and military effectiveness are opposing concepts. He cites

scientific mismanagement in the military, beginning with the McNamara

era, as an attempt to assure national security by means of defense

budgets alone. Assumptions underlying the McNamara budget - based

strategy system have become invalid because of changes in the military

balance of power. Luttwak contends that new strategic solutions are

required, but solutions can only be suggested when change to operational

and tactical methods are acknowledged, understood, and accepted by both

statesmen and soldiers.[22]

In a similar article "Military Strategy: The Forgotten Art,"

William Rudd contends that the military as a group has failed

unconsciously to develop a coherent national military strategy. Without

a coherent strategy, doctrine and force structure are developed in

isolation of each other and are likely to be ineffective. For example,

Rudd states that "on analysis nuclear and conventional forces are not

designed and planned to cooperate in a continuum of war." Rudd develops

this point further by noting that the lack of coordination between

national and military strategies causes gaps between national security

objectives and the military's capability to attain them. Rudd identifies

the reason for the disparity between military commitments and

capabilities as a lack of communication between soldiers and statesmen.[23]

There is no good reason why soldiers and statesmen do not

maintain continuous dialogue. War no longer has a language and means all

its own. Henry Kissinger makes this point as he states:

> The traditional mode of military analysis which saw in war a
> continuation of politics but with its own appropriate means, is no
> longer applicable. Policy and strategy merge at every point. No
> statesman can overlook the cataclysmic alternatives before him. No

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problem can be left solely to the arbitrament of arms.
Communication in the nuclear age is particularly important among
adversaries.[24]

Furthermore, Kissinger made the following convincing plea for

continuous dialogue, not only among adversaries, but between political

and military minds:

> A separation of strategy and policy can only be achieved to the
> detriment of both. It causes military power to become identified
> with the most absolute applications of power and it tempts diplomacy
> into an over concern with finesse. Since the difficult problems of
> military strategy are in the area where political, economic,
> psychological, and military factors overlap we should give up the
> fiction that there is such a thing as purely military advice.[25]

Kissinger implies that poor communications between soldiers and

statesmen has confused the intent of war. Fighting for political purpose

and fighting to win have become seemingly separate goals. The military

role has not changed; the military still must assure national security.

The military can do this only if it is embraced by statesmen and military

alike for its operational and tactical expertise. Because military

strategy is subordinate to a "grander" national strategy, military

strategy reflects and is constrained by policies developed by statesmen.

The purpose of military strategy is to link a "grander" national strategy

to the military means available.

THE ART OF THE GENERAL:

Strategy literally means the "art of the general", however;

hundreds of years of change have altered military roles, causing Colin

Gray to argue that uniformed men who devise and apply strategy are in

reality tacticians and not strategists.[26] If war is to pursue a

political purpose then it is the statesmen's responsibility to harness

military power to serve national interests. At the highest levels, statesmen and strategists are one. The general, we have already concluded, advises statesmen and then conducts the war with means allocated to him. The concept of the "general's art" has to be adapted to suit peculiarities of contemporary democratic systems and civilian control. To identify what the contemporary art of the general is, accepted definitions of strategy need to be examined for suitability.

Strategy. Clausewitz describes strategy as a process that forms a plan of war, maps out proposed courses of different campaigns which compose the war, and then regulates battles to be fought in each campaign. Strategy as Clausewitz describes it is the plan that comprehends an entire military operation as a single act in pursuit of a single objective.[27]

Edward M. Earle supplements Clausewitz's definition by describing strategy as dealing with war — both in preparation and conduct. Earle continues by stating that strategy is "the art of controlling and utilizing the resources of a nation — or a coalition of nations — including its armed forces, to the end that its vital interests shall be effectively promoted and secured against enemies, actual, potential, or merely presumed."[28]

With regard to resources, Basil Liddell Hart describes strategy as "the art of distributing and applying military means to fulfill the ends of policy." Liddell Hart further stipulates that strategy requires "sound calculation and coordination of the ends and the means."[29]

Colin Gray describes strategy simply as the art of employing or threatening to employ coercion for political ends.[30]

The following general points are synthesized from definitions of strategy:

o   Strategy pursues a single goal (although there may be a series of intermediate or sub - goals).

o   Strategy encompasses both the preparation and conduct of war.

o   Strategy employs all available resources economically to achieve the desired political ends.

o   Strategy is the process that assures linkage of means to ends.

o   Strategy manipulates the coercive potential of policy.

o   Strategy itself may assume a coercive power and contribute to the attainment of political ends if it is realistic and credible.

Implied in all definitions of strategy is the requirement to establish realistic priorities based upon knowledge of distant and immediate threats, capabilities and limitations of both friendly and enemy forces, means required and available from finite resources, and ultimately, a determination of acceptable costs.

As previously stated, military strategy is subordinate to national strategy and, therefore, has the same general definition. It can be generalized that the primary distinction drawn between national and military strategies are the constraints imposed. Consider Wylie's thoughts:

> There is more truth than jest in the statement that to any
> soldier, what he does is tactical and what his next senior does is
> strategic. This is generally expressive from the private all the
> way up to the theater commander.[31]

The formulation of military strategy has been an issue since

governments assumed control of armed forces to assure execution of political intent and the attainment of desired ends. Having defined briefly what strategy is, it is necessary to examine how military strategies are formulated, how they have failed, and how they may fail.

Formulation of military strategy. The basic problem of military strategy is identifying the enemy center of gravity. Once identified, all efforts are then directed to cause tactical effects to result in a strategic victory. With the center of gravity identified as the focus of effort, it is possible to employ several sub - strategies to achieve the political end.

Colonel William Staudenmaier examined two theoretical approaches to military strategy formulation. In the first, the President allocates a share of the national budget for national defense. The strategy is finalized after resources are allocated and is therefore subordinate to a dominant budgeting system. The second approach — although "admittedly never fully implemented" — requires national goals or objectives to be established, from which national and military strategies are developed together with necessary force structure requirements. The requirements are then budgeted. This process subordinates the budget process to strategy. The current strategic system (described first) is budget dependent and places the budget cart before the strategic horse. This causes the budget, rather than strategic requirements to become the final arbiter for force structure requirements.[32] Brodie criticizes the current strategic process by indicating that military services promote parochial interests in the budgeting process without regard to "grander" strategic requirements.[33]

low can such a process be effective in attaining the desired politnd? A possible answer is provided by Wylie who argues that theressentially two methods strategy can emulate. The first is a "sequ" execution of a series of steps or actions. Each step is depenin and grows out of the preceding steps. If steps change at any stf war, the remaining sequence of steps is altered accordingly. The seis a "cumulative" process with lesser actions not being interdient. Each action then is regarded as a statistic that contril to a final total effect; skill is of little or no consequ.[34]

he first strategic method suggests maneuver while the second suggeststrition.* This cumulative strategic process appears to be the essence cte U.S. strategic method.

.hcumulative attrition style strategy has been criticized by MG Dave Palm as not being a strategy at all. Palmer states that attrition isirrefutable proof of the absence of any strategy. A commander whresorts to attrition admits his failure to conceive of an alternative.[5]

Prdems with Strategy. By failing to recognize the changing relationship f strength between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, we may no longer hav the strategic initiative. Colin Gray states that in the event of a wa between NATO and the Warsaw Pact:

> The '.S. and NATO Europe, in accordance with their peace time strategicculture, will be striving to limit the war, control

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* Mneuver is defined generally as skillful procedures or shrewd steps tward some objective according to a plan. Attrition is defined as a process which is not as dependent on skill or plans. Attrition is an attempt of a numerically superior force to wear or grind away at an opposing force to cause its exhaustion and collapse.

escalation, identify 'firebreaks' and the like. Meanwhile the Soviet Union, with its military machine firmly in military hands 'for the duration' will be waging the war to win, governed in its operational decisions only by considerations of military efficiency.[36]

The current strategy of flexible response purports to maintain a spectrum of realistic alternatives before and during war. However, current strategy seems to stop at the decision to employ nuclear weapons. In the final analysis, flexible response is as dependent on the threat of nuclear war as was the policy of massive retaliation.*

The question of whether or not we are willing to become committed to a nuclear war of attrition keeps our potential enemies guessing and makes them reluctant to start a war. Unfortunately, the same point also has caused our allies to wonder the same about U.S. resolve to support coalition aims. The U.S. demonstrates nuclear resolve by maintaining relatively weak conventional forces in Europe thereby requiring a strong nuclear deterrent. Moreover, we subscribe to the NATO strategy of linear forward defense that disperses forces along the entire front to retain territory. The likelihood of success for a conventional forward defense strategy against a Warsaw Pact attack is questionable. Tactical nuclear weapons may be the only means by which deficiencies in a conventional forward defensive strategy can be remedied.[37]

Deterrence policy is central to current NATO military strategy although it is a strategy for peace, not war. The need for peace is

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* Massive retaliation is a term used to describe the 1950s nuclear policy designed to assure potential enemies that the U.S. was willing to use nuclear weapons in immediate retaliation for attack on its interests. Critics of the policy envisioned immediate escalation to strategic nuclear war involving the mutual annihilation of cities within the Warsaw Pact and NATO.

unarguable given the proliferation of nuclear weapons. However, NATO

strategy should recognize the possibility that deterrence may fail.

In the event of war, NATO strategy must be capable of restoring peace on

politically favorable terms and at an acceptable cost.[38]

Is it correct to assume that "deterrence may fail, therefore

nuclear policy, therefore nuclear strategy, therefore conventional

strategy, therefore the fighting of a nuclear war?"[39] If we do become

involved in a nuclear war, will the political aim be attainable? If the

political ends of the U.S. do not coincide with NATO's, will we get

involved in a NATO war? Each question represents a conflict that has not

yet been resolved. To paraphrase Henry Kissinger, one thing is certain,

by opting for a military victory in NATO through a strategy of nuclear or

conventional attrition, military successes cannot be translated into

permanent political advantage.[40]

Changes caused by the nuclear revolution have resulted in

numerous internal conflicts about what the art of the general is.

Furthermore, the imposition of so many essential constraints have

confused military purpose in war. Richard Betts provides a succinct

problem summary in his book Conventional Strategy when he states:

> The problem lies in the juncture between the American political
> system and the ambiguity of conventional and military requirements
> for a superpower in a world of both nuclear risks and changing
> commitments. Ambiguity fosters diverse notions of deterrence and
> defensive options, while democratic politics makes the dominance of
> any view ebb and flow. Only if U.S. administrations had the
> duration and consistency of the Soviet Politburo, or if Americans
> really saw their survival as being tenuous, could there be much more
> persistent congruence between U.S. strategy and force structure, and
> thus more room for subtle tuning of doctrine and tactics to
> strategic guidance.[41]

Operations. Operations are subordinate to strategy and
contribute to the fulfillment of strategic goals. The operational level
translates the intent and conditions of strategy to a plan (or plans) for
the defeat of an enemy force. Operational art adds direction to battle
confusion, reconciles the effects of battle against strategic aims, and
directs ensuing tactical activity toward the attainment of strategic
aims. Prioritizing of effort for a sequential and economic commitment of
force against an identified enemy center of gravity is essential to the
operational art. Determining who is employed, where, and when to achieve
tactical victories in support of strategic goals is integral to the
operational art. In the U.S. Army, the domain of the general has become
confined largely to the operational and tactical levels. The operational
art has become the general's art.

According to Colonel Trevor Dupuy, "the story of warfare is an
account of continual change. The alterations have been in technology,
which has changed weapons, which then have changed tactics." Colonel
Dupuy continues:

> ...despite this unceasing flux and change, there are certain
> constants in war... first is the objective of war: the employment of
> lethal implements for the purpose of imposing one's will upon an
> enemy. Second is the way in which wars are fought, commonly
> summarized in a handful of principles, usually called Principles of
> War. Third — and the essential constant in war — is the
> unchanging nature of man.[42]

In keeping with the third constant in war as described by
Dupuy, the statesman is the wielder of national power, while the general
is representative of the primary coercive instrument of national power.

The creative ability to adapt to change quickly is essential to
the art of the general. In his book Strategy in The Missile Age, Bernard

Brodie quotes Lord Wavell who states that the conduct of war is essentially analogous to the manner in which one plays contract bridge. To paraphrase Lord Wavell, strategy compares to "calling" or bidding, operations to the sequential play of the hand, and tactics to the play of each card. Bidding and the play of each card is somewhat mechanical and subject to conventions; but in the end, it is the result of the manner in which cards are sequentially played or the battle fought that counts. The creative general adapts quickly to the circumstances of battle and plays even the "bad cards" well.[43] The general's art is therefore making the best use of available means to achieve tactical victories and operational successes to attain a strategic goal.

CASE STUDY -- KOREAN CONFLICT:

Relevance. The Korean War offers numerous similarities to contemporary issues that both military and political leaders will have to resolve in event of future war. For example, a conventional solution was sought in the Korean War although nuclear options were available. The potential for escalation to nuclear war, hence absolute war, was always a concern of policy makers. The Korean War was limited to the confines of a specified territory implying a localized war using limited aims. The final result was not a military victory, per se, but rather restoration of the pre - conflict territorial boundaries of jurisdiction for both belligerent governments... a contemporary objective of NATO if war occurs in Europe.

The War Begins. In 1949, North Korea mobilized. By 1950 the North Koreans were equipped with Soviet materiel and the army strength

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was expanded to 135,000 men (30,000 of whom had been trained by the Chinese Communists). When the North Koreans invaded South Korea on 25 June 1950, the South Korean Army was outnumbered three to one, artillery and tanks six to one, and the ROK Air Force had only 36 liaison or training aircraft opposed to 180 North Korean fighters.

U.S. War Aims. On 27 June President Truman ordered American naval and air forces to assist the South Koreans. The intent of the assistance was to demonstrate to the Soviet Union that the U.S. would not tolerate acts of aggression. The purpose was to have the Kremlin "call off its puppets," to "give Russia an opportunity to retire gracefully from the chessboard in case it was sufficiently moved by the show of American determination."[44]

Unquestionably the United States was committed to the Korean War, the degree was a matter of question. A year after committing American forces and after considerable confusion about what course the war was to take, President Truman said: "We are trying to prevent a world war — not start one... our aim is to avoid the spread of conflict." President Truman then specified the military objective in Korea:

> We are fighting to resist an outrageous aggression in Korea. We are trying to keep the Korean conflict from spreading to other areas. But at the same time we must conduct our military activities so as to insure the security of our forces. This is essential if they are to continue to fight until the enemy abandons its ruthless attempt to destroy the republic of Korea. That is our military objective — to repel attack and to restore peace.[45]

The U.S. entered the Korean War in 1950 to contain communism and resist aggression — both slogans that did not translate easily to military objectives. General MacArthur translated the intent of the policy to mean military victory in its classic sense — defeat of the

enemy force. The lack of a clear national strategy for Korea resulted in MacArthur exercising extensive initiative.

As the administration vacillated on its aims, MacArthur planned for and realized success at Inchon. He was then given permission by the administration to cross the 38th parallel and "crush the North Korean Army" with the proviso that no major Soviet or Chinese Communist force appear ready to counter U.S. military operations in North Korea. The proviso was due to repeated threats made by Chinese Communist spokesman Chou En Lai that if the 38th parallel were violated, Chinese Communists would intervene. The U.N. offensive would be construed by the Chinese Communists as an attempt to defeat them and restore the Nationalist Chinese to Mainland China. The proviso under which permission was granted for crossing the 38th parallel was intended to restrict engagements to North Koreans and prevent lateral escalation. The Chinese Communist intent was not considered seriously and a U.N. resolution called for appropriate steps to "ensure conditions of stability throughout... a unified and sovereign Korea."[46] Secretary of Defense Marshall told MacArthur "we want you to feel unhampered tactically and strategically [emphasis added] to proceed north of the 38th parallel."[47] The next day U.N. troops crossed the 38th parallel in force.

The decision to limit engagements has to be a reciprocal process to be effective. The Chinese Communists intervened as U.N. forces approached the Yalu. The Chinese Communists were unafraid of a potential nuclear escalation and crossed the Yalu on bridges that remained intact because of U.S. restrictions imposed on bombing Communist Chinese territory. Soon the Chinese Communists outnumbered U.N. forces

and drove them back south. The political powers in the U.S. and the U.N. then seemed to take counsel of their fears and again changed strategic guidance to restoring the pre - war status quo and bring the war to an early end.

Terminating a war is difficult without initiative. The potential for a second front opened by the Chinese Nationalists would draw Chinese Communists away from Korea. This point was emphasized by MacArthur's "there is no substitute for victory" letter which was read to the House of Representatives on 5 April 1951. Military victory, however, was not the political intent. The problem of peace in Asia as expressed by President Truman to General MacArthur was far more than military. General MacArthur's insistence on military victory caused him to be relieved of command on 11 April 1951.

Thereafter, the war in Korea was fought by U.S. and U.N. forces to "defeat communism" for lack of a better rationale.[48] Battles were fought to retain terrain not to destroy the enemy force while peace was bargained. The precedent was set; causing the enemy "to do our will' had been transformed to "restore peace on favorable terms." Peace was no longer a prize, but rather a commodity.

PRINCIPLES AS GUIDES:

When Clausewitz resigned his commission in 1812 to fight with the Russians against the French, he left a list of principles for his student, the Prussian Crown Prince, to study in his absence. These principles were meant to "stimulate and serve as a guide" for reflection. Principles provide no dogmatic substitute for thinking, but rather serve

as aids to logical analysis.[49]

The American experience in the Korean War can be examined using principles as aids for logical analysis to determine the nature of the linkage between the strategic and the operational levels. Principles are used because of their unchanging nature. Principles used for analysis will be limited to the following:

o Military subordination to national policy and strategy.

o Objective.

o Unity of Command.

o Simplicity.

A brief statement is provided about the principles of maneuver, mass, offensive, economy of force, and surprise; however, these principles are not discussed in as great detail as the others.

Military Subordination to National Policy. Although not a principle of war per se, the concept of military subordination to a national policy can be regarded as such. Ideally, policy dictates the strategic aims of a nation before involvement in war. However, at the outbreak of the Korean War, the U.S. lacked a coherent national policy and strategy for the conduct of that war. The only firm position was avoidance of war with Communist China or the Soviet Union. Half – hearted politics were put to test: policy statements that resembled slogans rather than substantive policy proved to be difficult to translate and execute. Policy was not described until the administration was forced to do so when General MacArthur attempted to expand the war.

As the Supreme Commander, General MacArthur did more that just represent the coercive element of national power; he made political

appointments and established policy for the Pacific. For example, MacArthur decided that "if our allies would not stand by us in confrontation with Communist China or the Soviet Union, we should shoulder the whole burden ourselves."[50] MacArthur also criticized openly the numerous restrictions imposed by the administration. MacArthur admitted to be "pecking at political restrictions until he forced the U.S. into a necessary wider war."[51] MacArthur deliberately disobeyed JCS directives to use only Korean forces in provinces bordering the Soviet Union or Manchuria then justified his actions as being prompted by "military necessity." MacArthur's actions developed world opinion that the U.S. was speaking with two voices on foreign policy, one civilian and the other military.

The absence of a coherent policy combined with MacArthur's initiative to reverse the relationships of politics to war, means to ends, and statesmen to soldiers. The Truman administration demonstrated a disabling weakness in controlling MacArthur and military action in Korea. This weakness complicated the administration's efforts to make peace without escalating the war.

Had a U.S. policy and strategy for war in Korea been established before involvement in war, the opportunity for misdirected initiative would never have been available to MacArthur. Conversely, had MacArthur pressed the administration for clarification of policy, he would not have developed a military strategy that was inconsistent with the administration's intent. Of greater importance, MacArthur failed to realize that he was only an instrument of national power and not the wielder of power. In this capacity he was not to oppose the political

intent, albeit changing or inconclusive.

Objective. MacArthur's relief in Korea sparked a controversy
in the United States, the basis of which was a question of war aims: what
did we want to do in Korea? The factions settled in two camps —
military victory and negotiated settlement. This dispute is evidence of
the lack of national aims, policy, or strategy at the beginning of the
war. The U.S. was fighting in Korea, but it was unclear why or to what
end. The central principle of war, from which all others emanate, was
violated.

The United States policy of preventing North Korean aggression
without appearing to be the aggressor was a reasonable expectation. The
problem was the next step, determining what it would take to realize the
political end when constrained by other policies. The concept of a
limited war was alien to the U.S. military force that had only five years
earlier fought for nothing short of unconditional surrender of its
enemies. Major changes had come rapidly, the effects of which were not
studied, or if studied, not disseminated well. The structure for
communication of appropriate military advice and subsequent direction
failed because both the military and the administration did not adapt
properly to change.

When constraints replace objectives in primacy, the military
must be capable of assessing the potential for attainment of objectives
and advising accordingly. However, in the final analysis, the specified
objective should be pursued within constraints provided, even if the
objective appears to be less than best. Diverse and often contradictory
commitments of the body politic confound national aims and military

strategic objectives. However, it is not within the purview of the operational commander's responsibilities to determine and establish the strategic objective.

Unity of Command. Napoleon's maxim that it is better to have one bad general than two good ones needs little more explanation than the discussion about the controversy between President Truman and General MacArthur. The controversy between Truman and MacArthur placed the U.S. at the disadvantage of having to resolve major internal conflicts about how the war was to be conducted while attempting simultaneously to terminate the war favorably.

Simplicity. If not understood, change will confuse the simplest of intents. Difficulty in the conduct of the Korean War was not due to a lack of desire, but rather a lack of understanding about how to conduct it. The Korean War exhibited several competing and often confusing theories about how the war was to be conducted. To paraphrase Clausewitz: simple, well understood requirements are difficult to achieve in war, but poorly understood requirements are impossible. The military can execute political and strategic intent if it adapts known theoretical truths to contemporary problems. Adapting theoretical truths to simplify contemporary problems is the challenge of operational art.

Simplicity is integral to the support needed for the conduct of war. If the public is not capable of understanding theory, aims, or methods in war then it will not be supportive of that war. The American public is generally not willing to commit itself to a war it does not understand. In the Korean War, the public acquiesced partially as a result of the military rotation system that was implemented. According

to Huntington, the rotation scheme actually served to limit the soldier's will. He states:

> In World War II, soldiers were in for the duration: they could only achieve their personal goal of getting home when the government achieved its political goal of military victory. In Korea, however, rotation divorced the personal goals of the troops from the political goals of the government. The aim of the soldier was simply to endure his nine months at the front and then get out... For the first time in American history the common soldier fought a major war solely and simply because he was ordered to fight it and not because he shared any identification with the political goals for which the war is being fought.[52]

Maneuver, Mass, Offensive, Economy of Force, and Surprise. As negotiations to arrive at an armistice ground on, the Korean War became a war of attrition. Terrain was the key orientation rather than the enemy force and large quantities of munitions were used to reduce pockets of resistance rather than maneuver. The principles of mass, offensive, economy of force, and surprise were violated extensively.

IMPLICATIONS:

Change has affected the nature of war little in 200 years. The inevitability of technical and organizational changes will continue to affect the methods in which military force is applied. Even the slightest change affects other functions within political - military relationships; strategy and doctrine cannot be developed in isolation.

To be effective, change should be coordinated among statesmen and soldiers. Until a common understanding is attained, the potential for conflict within the political - military establishment is great. The budget - style strategy process will continue to limit critical resources and over - commit available military forces. Military objectives will be confused and potentially result in a wasteful attrition style approach to

war. According to Douglas Kinnard's book The War Managers, the body count may have evolved in Vietnam because "70 percent of the generals who managed the [Vietnam] war were uncertain of its objectives."[53] Kinnard's statement reflects a strategic failure of policy makers to frame tangible goals. This strategic failure was exacerbated by a composite military organization that did not adequately question missions assigned. A similar situation is possible in NATO with the potential failure of conventional deterrence. In the event of war, NATO strategy must be capable of restoring peace on favorable terms and at an acceptable cost. The need for NATO strategic guidance beyond deterrence is required to prevent a situation similar to that precipitated by a lack of policy and strategy in the Korean War.

Strategy, as a product of policy, places a military force where it can best coerce an enemy to do our will. Strategy has become the responsibility of the statesman. The general's art resides primarily within the operational and tactical levels of war. The general provides knowledgeable advice to statesmen, then applies allocated resources to accomplish goals that contribute to the political end. Only through a common understanding can the political - military process for war be developed to attain political ends.

The roles of statesmen and soldiers remain unchanged, the military remains an instrument of national policy. This concept remains inviolable: a soldier's disagreement with policy and strategy has its place in state rooms or briefing rooms before war, but once committed there is no room for disagreement in word or deed. The soldier is obligated to provide knowledgeable advice to statesmen as they develop

policy and strategy. Once strategy has been developed, the soldier is tasked to produce the prescribed military success through knowledgeable application of resources provided. The key word is knowledgeable. The general's art is developed through study, application, and observation. The business of preparing for war is study and training.

CONCLUSION:

Clausewitz's maxim that no one starts a war without being clear what he intends to achieve by that war and how he intends to conduct it implies a unified effort. This unified effort is only possible through a common understanding that links all levels of war throughout the conflict spectrum. The linkage of strategic and operational levels of war is only possible through the development of the general's art, the operational art. The operational art is developed through study, application, and observation of historical and contemporary trends. The operational art manifests itself in the skillful application of resources to accomplish goals that contribute to the political end.

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32. See William Staudenmaier, "Strategic Concepts for the 1980's: Part 1," Military Review, March 1982.

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38. See Jeffrey Record, "Jousting with Unreality: Reagan's Military Strategy," International Security, Winter 1983-84, p. 4.

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41. Richard Betts, "Conventional Strategy: New Critics Old Choices," International Security, Spring 1984, p. 152.

42. See Trevor Dupuy, The Evolution of Weapons and Warfare, (Fairfax, Va.: Hero, 1984), p. 287

43. See Bernard Brodie, Strategy in The Missile Age, (Princeton, Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1965), p. 12. The actual quote read as:
> I hold that tactics, the art of handling troops on the battlefield, is and always will be a more difficult and more important part of the general's task than strategy, the art of bringing forces to the battlefield in a favorable position. A homely analogy can be made from contract bridge. The calling is strategy, the play of the hand tactics. I imagine that all experienced card – players will agree that the latter is the more difficult part of the game, and gives more scope for the skill of the good player. Calling is to a certain degree mechanical and subject to conventions: so is strategy, the main principles of which are simple and easy to grasp... But in the end it is the result of the manner in which the cards are played or the battle is fought that is put down on the score sheets or in the pages of history. Therefore, I rate the skilful tactician above the skilful [sic] strategist, especially him who plays the bad cards well.

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