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Linking Ends and Means

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Volume 11, Issue 1, Spring 2026

Editorial

As with my last editorial concerning where Greenland really was on the earth's surface versus where people thought it was, I again have to take time to comment on the generally risible analysis of the Israeli and American air campaign against Iran, labelled Operation Epic Fury or Roaring Lion, depending on the actor, and notably both overly dramatic and silly names. Were Britain to be involved, one would hope for something a little more subtle, such as "Operation Helical," "Starfish," or even "Guinea Pig."

As of the time of writing, and in full knowledge that new air strikes could commence prior to publication, the general news commentary concerning the effectiveness of the campaign seems to be based on the thinnest of strands of evidence and comprehension.

Can you win a war from the air? It is certainly possible, but historically, air power in isolation has a mixed track record. Can military skill compensate for poor policy? No, and Clausewitz wrote a book about that. We are not in uncharted territory here.

Air power has considerable power. The problem is that many civilian academics are simply unaware of it. The almost complete absence of commentary on how the IAF closed down Iran's integrated air defence system in 2025 is proof that many in the international relations and security studies community struggle with the practical basics.

As Clausewitz noted, politics constrains violence from escalating; thus, incoherent or illogical politics constrain air power from reaching its actual potential, as does the law of armed conflict, albeit that is a source of opinion rather than fact. Degrading a nation's oil industry from the air is well within reach of what effective air power can achieve, as is power generation and national transport infrastructure. Basing your campaign on the second-order effects of such action, such as a national uprising against the government, is negligent.

Breaking or degrading something that your enemy sees as valuable is always good, but regime change of behaviour is something very different from regime change. All of this is blindingly obvious even to the casual student of military strategy. Yet media commentators insist on preaching about "boots on the ground" and on citing T.R. Fehrenbach completely out of context. Control is not the objective.

None of this should excuse what seems to be both the media's and the US Government's very limited knowledge of how international maritime insurance works, or, in much the same way as failing to note where Greenland was, why the Strait of Hormuz, along with five to seven straits or archipelagos, are somewhat critical to international trade.

The real point here is that politics is the womb of War. Politics is neither reason nor logic, so do not assume that War is conducted using either.

William F. Owen
Editor-in-Chief, *Military Strategy Magazine*
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On Defense and Offense: Revisiting Clausewitz, Mao Zedong and Thucydides

Julio Klauss - Hanoi, Vietnam

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About the authors

Julio Klauss is a software developer for a private company in Hanoi, Vietnam, with a keen interest in military history and strategic studies.

"No bastard ever won a war by dying for his country. He won it by making the other poor dumb bastard die for his country." Patton's remark, while it had not advanced the study of war by any measure, stated what had been the objectives of military commanders of history: to defeat the enemy and preserve their own forces. Clausewitz, in order to elaborate the importance of attack and defense to the theory of war, said it longer and more philosophically: "as I have not overthrown my opponent I am bound to fear he may overthrow me" [and one third of his first chapter of the first book of On War].[1]

This article delves into the theory of the dynamic relationship between offense and defense. It aims to answer the question: how commanders and leaders in history have made their decisions to defend or attack and switch between the two postures on a strategic level. What reasons have influenced their doing so? In order to do so, the author will track the development of the theories of defense and offense from the age of Clausewitz to the mid-20th century guerrilla warfare theorist Mao Zedong. These theories will then be applied in a case study from the Peloponnesian War to further deduce the relationship between offense and defense. The article will provide readers with not a prescriptive guide of how

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commanders should switch between offense and defense, but a descriptive analysis of how commanders would do so.

The basis of defense and offense theory: Clausewitz versus Jomini

Clausewitz argues that the decision to attack or defend depends on the unique circumstances a commander faces. As early as 1808, when he saw Jomini's critique of Frederick the Great for not being aggressive enough, he came to defend the king. Clausewitz objected that Jomini had not accounted for the political, social, and technological differences between earlier centuries and the Napoleonic era, or the differences in the commanders' personalities. If Frederick had remained on the defensive in the latter half of the war, it was not only because of Prussia's limited strength but also because Frederick was reacting to his experiences in earlier campaigns. Jomini's evaluation of Frederick and Napoleon was flawed because it passed over their respective situations and ignored the manner in which two different individuals responded to their differing experiences.[2]

Another notable is Clausewitz's attention to defense. In his model, the paradox between defense and offense constituted the interaction that made up one of three extremes that defined war.[3] He tried to explain several seemingly contradictory observations he made during his career: defense is a stronger form of war than offense,[4] yet Napoleon's aggressive way of war was superior to the old 18th-century methods. In his earlier attempts, he tried to define defense as consisting of a stage of waiting[5] but then admitted that an attack could also involve a stage of waiting. [6] At that time, the first proposition could be explained rather successfully. Defense itself offers no reward, so why would someone adopt this posture if it were not a stronger form of war?[7] However, his other arguments fell apart: the superiority of defense is tied to external factors such as time, geography, and numerical superiority.[8] Or, the habit of halting an attack through siege, maneuver, and fortification is bad because defense in this case is "spoiled by the virus of the attack!"[9]

Later, after Clausewitz discovered the political purpose of war, he developed a sound theoretical model of defense and offense. By then, he defined an attack as an act of war with a positive aim and defense as an act of war with a negative aim. [10] Now all propositions can be explained as such. Defense is a stronger form of war because its negative aim, which is pure self-preservation, demands less effort to succeed. [11] Napoleon and his system could pursue war with more political will than his opponents, hence his superiority. Defense is a negative action, hence cannot increase the chance of success in an aggressive war, a war with a positive aim; yet the counter-offensive can do the inverse: achieve victory in a defensive war.

Thus, in Clausewitz's view, an act of defense or offense is not only affected by the commander's psyche but also by the political objective of the operation. Always permeating throughout the war, it was the political objective that defined an operation's aggressiveness at its conception[12]. The question of a leader's decision to attack or to defend can be understood as whether he is pursuing a positive or negative course of action. Whether he is seeking a reward or conserving the status quo?

Another factor that makes the commanders switch their stance is the concept Clausewitz called the culminating point of attack/victory (CPA/CPV), which are usually associated with operational and strategic levels respectively [13]. On the strategic level, the effects of CPV can be described with these scenarios:

- If he conducts an aggressive war aimed at disarming the enemy, the CPV does not appear. While his offensive power decreases as usual, he has no choice but to expend it, because his advantage gained by victory is but a means to an end [14]. Modern scholars may have different views, as Bassford argues that ambitious political leaders can cross the CPV when trying to overthrow the balance of power and get others united against them [15].

- If he conducts an aggressive war but does not aim to disarm the enemy, a timid one may end the campaign prematurely while an enterprising one may overshoot it. His enemy may capitulate early, or he has to push his last strength to achieve it [16]. Of course, it is in his best interest to stop right at CPV and switch to defense, but it's also in the enemy's interest to prevent him from doing so [17]. The commander may decide to launch a preemptive attack or wait to deflect his enemy's blow.

- In a defensive war, objectives identified by Clausewitz range from launching a temporary invasion, increasing the enemy suffering, to wearing down the enemy [18]. The causes of the invading army's loss of strength [19] do not apply to those objectives. Therefore, there is no CPV mentioned in this case.

Summarily, while the CPV may act as a signal for commanders to change their posture from offensive to defensive, the final decision also depends on the war objective and the commander's psyche. Clausewitz did not provide a recipe to identify this point but delegated it to the commander's genius. To him, it was actually more usual for a commander to miss it than to hit the mark. It is even more complicated to know if another commander can correctly apply it, and his action in one war does not guarantee that he will hit the CPV in others. It can be mitigated by studying each side's objectives and the commanders' patterns of action in war.

From definition to model: from Clausewitz to Mao

While Clausewitz divides one side's war into two phases: a defense phase followed by an attack phase, Mao divides the war into three phases: a pure defense phase, possibly

a strategic retreat or pure self-preservation phase, followed by an equilibrium phase with back-and-forth attacks in which neither side claims superiority over the other, before finally turning into a strategic offensive.[20] It is worth noting the context here: Clausewitz mainly experienced the seasonal campaigns of his time, while Mao's writings served as guidance for his long war against the Nationalists and the Japanese.

Both theorists shared a similar view about the role of the balance of power in dictating the course of war. Clausewitz explicitly stated that when the balance of power tips in favor of one side of the war, that side goes to the attack phase, and vice versa.[21] Mao implicitly acknowledged the same thing: the evaluation of the balance of power pushed one commander from organizing a local offensive into a strategic, all-theaters offensive.[22] A revolutionist commander, in pursuit of victory, would need to push the balance of power into the phase in which he or she is dominant over his or her enemies. Here we make the connection with Clausewitz's definition of attack and defense: an action aimed at tipping the balance of power in our favor is an action with a positive aim. Thus, in Mao's model, it is the attack alone that causes the transition between phases of war: if it fails, it tips the balance in favor of the defending side; if it succeeds, it augments the superiority of the attacking side.

In detail, while the revolution's objective is offensive in nature [23], it did not exclude the Chinese Communists from initiating the Long March. This strategic retreat, in Mao's view, was part of the strategic defensive phase[24], before being followed by a counter offensive[25] or positional defense[26]. The process in which this retreat phase ends shares the same mechanics as how Clausewitz's defense phase ends: as the attacker (in Mao's context, Imperial Japan) advances deep into the territory, his strength decreases and eventually he needs to stop to consolidate his gain[27]. On the other hand, to transition from the second phase to the last, strategic offensive phase, commanders will need to actively improve their position: raise their own quality and quantity of troops[28], organize regional offensive, before a nationwide offensive can happen.[29]

From these, we have our first observation:

> In war, it's the current balance of power and the desired balance of power (military aim) that dictate the commander's decision to go on the attack or the defense.

Similarly, they agree on how the role of the commander's personality would affect his decision to switch phases in war. Clausewitz actually paid more attention to the transition from attack to defense: he warned that a cautious commander might stop the attack too soon before it bears fruit; while an overconfident commander might overshoot the culminating point of the attack.[30] Mao, on the other hand, paid more attention to the "terminal point of retreat", the transition point from pure defense into partial offense.[31] A too conservative commander, who exhibits "retreatism" psyche, might overestimate the enemy's superiority and stay in retreat and defense for too long; while a too confident commander, who is "leftist opportunistic" would go on the offense prematurely.[32]

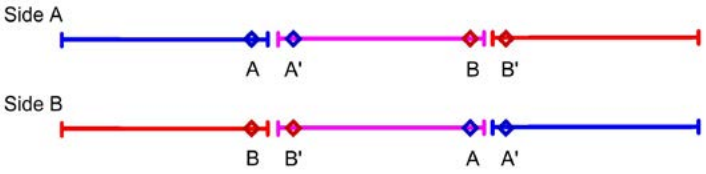

Fig 1. Representation of Mao's three-phased war model. War then can be seen as a pushing contest with each side trying to push the other to the capitulation point. At each terminal point, the cautious commander underestimates the balance of power, while the overconfident commander overestimates it.

Our second observation:

> A commander evaluates the balance of power and military aim subjectively and thus, makes the decision to switch phase in war subjectively.

Case study: the Peloponnesian War by Thucydides

In the final section, Mao's model which has been covered in the above section will be applied to investigate several situations in the 2nd Peloponnesian War. Spanning over 20 years, this long conflict contained multiple phases during which the balance of power shifted several times. The Napoleonic Wars and The Chinese Civil War had been characterized by extreme political and military objectives, and thus, both theorists had treated the objective as constant. The Peloponnesian War, meanwhile, had seen both Athenian and Lacedaemonian[33] military objectives fluctuate, caused by differing political objectives, over the range from rendering the opponent defenseless to a pure defense or keeping the status quo. We can now track how these fluctuating objectives, coupled with the shifting balance of power, affect the strategy of both sides' commanders.

The initial balance at the beginning of the war

In 435 BC, the conflict between Corinth and Corcyra

escalated and dragged the two hegemonic alliances, one led by Athens and the other by Sparta, into direct conflict. For Athens, the reason they sided with Corcyra was the fear that the third largest navy in the Hellenic world would fall into Sparta's hands.[34] For Sparta, it was because Corinth, and later Megara, Potidaea, the cities which had been harmed by Athens' policies, were key members of their hegemony alliance.[35]

Initially, the Athenians followed Pericles's defensive strategy to avoid battle with Sparta's hoplites, evacuate their citizens and belongings into their walled city, and perform naval raids against the Peloponnesian coast.[36] Sparta, compelled by Thebes' attack on Plataea, made inland raids into the Attic countryside.[37]

Both Sparta and Athens were dragged into this war, not primarily for their own interests, but for the interests of their allies. *Yet why had they chosen different courses of action, with one side staying on the defensive and the other on the offensive?*

The differing strategies were caused by differences in security situations. In a modern view, Sparta, while a land power, was actually surrounded by her helot subjects who readied to rebel against them,[38] several powerful allies such as Corinth and Thebes who were ready to ignore Sparta's wishes or join hands with her enemy,[39] resurgent old rivals like Argos and new rivals like Elis.[40] Athens, a sea power, was protected by the Long Walls and supplied through her overseas empire. While she was not invulnerable, since her grain supply route from the Black Sea could still be cut,[41] and the Persians or her own allies might seek to dismantle her empire, these weaknesses could not be seriously targeted unless by an equal naval power.

The ancient views of Archidamus and Pericles are mostly similar: Athens was superior in resources, financial readiness, ships, sailors and naval experience; Sparta could only hope to match this with help from barbarians and religious money. The Peloponnesian army was superior and could ravage Athens' land, but Athens could survive through imports. Archidamus had feared most that Sparta's reputation could be ruined by inactivity and thus had to launch an attack.[42] Meanwhile, Pericles was satisfied with the current balance of power. His only fear was that Athenians might attempt overly ambitious and risky expeditions due to frustration as the war dragged on.[43]

Our third observation:

> When belligerents in war are in an equal balance of power: if one side aims for an equal balance of power, it has a tendency to stay on the defensive and preserve what it has gained. If it aims for a more advantageous balance of power, it has a tendency to go on the offensive to achieve its aim.

The plague's effect

Pericles' vision was not common among Athenian politicians. Many war hawks, led by Cleon, demanded a more aggressive stance against Sparta. In hindsight, we know that Cleon's faction demanded the restoration of the border during the height of the First Peloponnesian War, with strategic territory acting as buffers against Sparta's hostility.[44] That pitted him against Pericles and his policy of preserving the status quo. The developments during 431–429 BC would strengthen the war faction's position in Athens' internal politics. Having already suffered the second ravaging of Attica, the draining of her treasury caused by the continuing siege of Potidaea, the catastrophic plague of 430/429 BC,[45] Spartan rejection of Athens' peace offer in 429 BC[46] would seriously discredit the peace faction's standing and strengthen Athens' resolution. Even Pericles, reflecting upon the new situation, began to include a more imperialistic tone in his speech.[47]

After deflecting Lacedaemon's new effort in naval warfare,[48] Athens would go on the offensive in 426 BC. Having already suppressed the revolt in Lesbos and the coup at Corcyra, Athens sent raids against Melos and Boeotia — the first time they went on the offensive against Lacedaemon's allies. By 425 BC, the Athenian generals already had designs for action in Sicily, Corcyra or Peloponnesian coast. However, it was Demosthenes' plan at Pylos that would eventually lead to victory at Sphacteria and change the course of the war.[49] Here, we can conclude that under internal pressure, Athens shifted from a defensive strategy to a counter-offensive.

For Sparta, a similar response occurred after their defeat at Sphacteria and again, when Argos's force captured Orchomenus in 419 BC and threatened to cut off Sparta from her northern allies. Each time, faced with a crisis, Sparta would find the political will to test out unorthodox methods. In the first case, she finally approved Brasidas's expedition into Thrace[50] and in the second time, her entire army would march against the Argives, leaving Sparta undefended.[51]

The Sicilian Expedition

In 416/415 BC, two Sicilian *poleis*, Segesta and Leontini, successfully persuaded Athens to intervene in the situation in Sicily. While their arguments at first resembled those of Corcyra at the start of the war: if Athens left Syracuse's power unchecked, that city would conquer entire Sicily and channel the island's resources to Sparta's aid, we need not believe Athens had the same defensive aims as when they came to aid Corcyra. At that time, two dominant Athenian politicians had different visions about what Athens should do next: Alcibiades wanted to support Argos's coalition and go directly against Sparta, while Nicias wanted to recover Thrace and Chalcidice.[52] The act of intervention in Sicily itself and the plan employed to do it clearly showed a great surge in confidence among the Athenians, which had never

been seen during the war. At first, only a small force would be sent to Sicily; Athens' effort would rely entirely upon their local allies. Later, the force grew to a gigantic size with 134 ships and 5000 hoplites, not counting later reinforcements. [53]

Our fourth observation is thus:

> When the balance of power has tipped in favor of one side:
>
> The weaker side's reaction:
>
> - If their aim is limited only to survive as an independent force, the situation does not press them to change strategy.
> - If their aim is to achieve at least an equilibrium in the balance of power and they judge that the disparity of power is not so great that they still have the ability to conduct offensive, they have greater pressure to conduct offensives to restore the balance of power.
> - If the disparity of power is so great that their survival is threatened (like the first case), they have to stay on the defensive.
>
> The stronger side's reaction:
>
> - If they have not gained the desired balance of power (their military aim), they will continue to attack to achieve it.
> - If they have gained the desired balance of power, they will have less pressure to push on attack. However, as their opponent's power grows weaker and their power grows stronger, they have less pressure to stay on the defensive to preserve what they gained. They might conduct offensives if they wish to quicken the end of the war, or to achieve additional gains.

Analysis

Except for the brief period from 405 to 404 BC, when Athens was clearly defeated and put under siege, the war saw both sides having roughly equal shares of ups and downs. The observations from the war validate Clausewitz's theory: Athens' initial defense strategy aligns with his description of an awaiting enemy's offensive strategy, and Athens' and Lacedaemons' strong reaction against losses proves his notion that the defending side stiffens his commitment when in real danger. The progress of the war also matches the description of the second phase of Mao's model, in which both sides conduct alternating local offensives.

Demosthenes's action in the capture of Pylos

In the campaign season of 425 BC, an Athenian fleet set sail, with three objectives in mind: to provide aid to Athens's forces in Sicily, to provide aid to allies in Corcyra, and to raid the Peloponnesian coast[54]. The two former objectives were continuations of Athens's previous activities in Sicily and Corcyra, but the last was entirely Demosthenes's idea. As mentioned above, it was his idea that led to the victory at Sphacteria. However, it required a string of lucky coincidences for the battle to happen[55]. At the beginning, he simply thought of Pylos as an advantageous position from which Athens's force could make incursions into Spartan territory[56]. His fellow commanders objected to this plan twice, even when they were already stranded at Pylos by chance. The urgent need to reinforce Corcyra played a role, but mainly the idea was dismissed as reckless and a waste of "state expense"[57]. This case is distinct from the above examples in that it did not stem from the differences in political objectives. There was no debate about whether Athens should preserve the status quo or knock out Sparta for good. Demosthenes, who last year had broken from Athens's strategy to attempt a flanking movement into Boeotia[58] (and suffered a heavy defeat), had toned down his ambition and become aligned with current strategy. Rather, it was an example of how the commander's psyche was at play in his switch to the offensive. His deviating from Periclean strategy was only an escalation from previous actions: instead of temporary landings on enemies' territory, it was a permanent fortified place[59]. Always a bold and daring commander, Demosthenes's eagerness to mount a counterattack against Sparta was earlier than that of his fellows. As it would unfold during the Pylos campaign, the situation would eventually make the other Athenian commanders relent and follow Demosthenes's lead, to the conclusion at Sphacteria.

From the Spartan side, this phenomenon was clearer. After the Athenian Sicily disaster, except for several lulls after suffering great naval defeats, Sparta's objective was unchanged: to dismantle the Athenian empire and make her unable to perform hostile acts against Sparta and her allies[60]. For this end, multiple officers were sent to Asia Minor. The difference in their performance could not be explained by the difference in their objectives, but only by the difference in their character[61]. However, those officers mostly operate on the operational level because the strategy had been decided in Sparta. Thus, Demosthenes is our closest example of a commander in Mao's theory, who, while following an objective that had been set out, initiated a shift in the phase of war through actions influenced by his character.

Conclusion

The article began with the question: what factors compelled historical commanders to decide whether to attack or defend and switch between them on a strategic level? Throughout its sections, the article first examined Clausewitz's views on attack and defense to establish the two fundamental factors that Clausewitz identified as the answer to that

question: commander's psyche and the balance of power (more specifically, the difference between current balance of power and the desired balance of power). Mao's theory, in essence, agrees with Clausewitz's two mentioned factors but expands upon them and provides a different model. As two theorists' writings had focused on total war, a kind of war with extreme political and military objectives, the article studied the Peloponnesian War to see how Mao's model would apply to a war with limited objectives.

In studying the Peloponnesian War, several examples were examined for the role of political objectives in affecting commanders' decisions in choosing offensive or defensive postures. One last example was reserved for studying the role of the commanders' psyche in their decisions to switch to the offensive. As this article concludes, the author hoped that it would provide useful arguments for the discussion of the topic.

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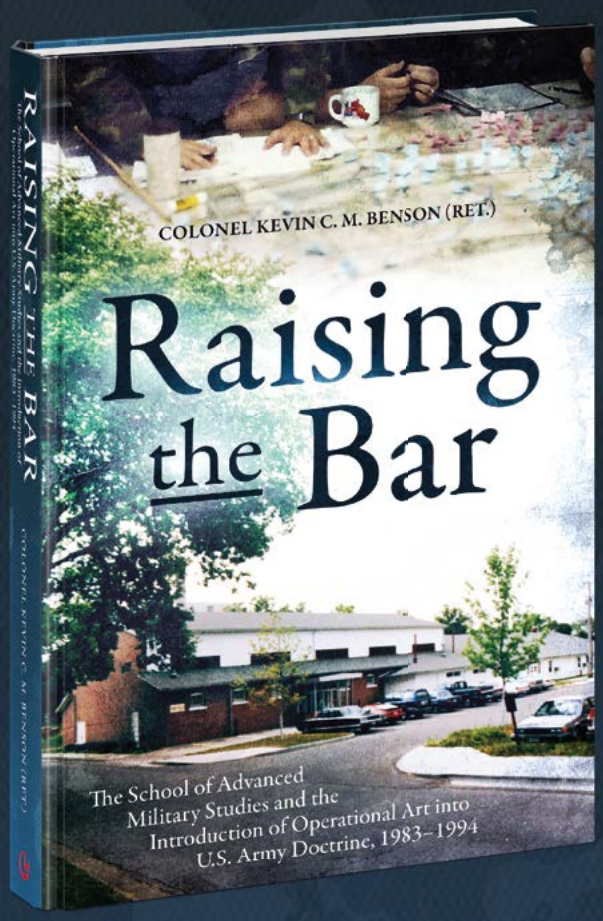

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Beyond Random Acts of Touching: Six Core Pillars on How to Think About Security Cooperation

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A sign hangs in the workspaces of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Multinational Special Operations Forces Advisory Team that simply states: "No RATS."[1] This commandment is not a pest control advisory, but a blunt reminder against “Random Acts of Touching”—the all-too-common practice of providing military assistance without a coherent strategic framework, a phrase first popularized by former commander Lt. Gen. Charles T. Cleveland in 2011.[2] In our experience interacting and interviewing security cooperation (SC) professionals over the last decade, this frustration is endemic; most are frustrated by senior leaders not giving them the authorities, resources, or a clear strategy to avoid the RATS trap.[3]

Since 2000, about $780 billion has been spent on military assistance activities by Western governments, yet these efforts have consistently struggled to link tactical activity with strategic effect.[4] Combat operations since 2001 in countries like Afghanistan, Iraq, Mali, Niger, and Somalia that were viewed as corrupt, failing, and/or fragile and others led to a focus on foreign internal defense (FID) and security force assistance (SFA). While both are approaches to developing security forces, the former is oriented against an internal threat, whereas the latter was oriented on forces capable of fighting external and/or regional threats.[5] In many cases, Western SFA built *Fabergé Egg* armies that were shiny and expensive but easily broken by less-trained and underequipped insurgents when advisors were no longer around to babysit.[6]

The problem stems from a fundamental inability to discern clear objectives amid competing desires for national security, regional stability, and partner self-sufficiency. This creates cascading deficiencies and reveals a lack of a comprehensive theory to guide the enterprise. Anytime a country commits to SC, the first question must be “What are we doing this for?” However, policymakers often retort with “because that’s what the partner wants” or “that’s what we’ve always done,” rather than justifications grounded in enduring national interests or strategic direction. In other cases, the bureaucracy defaults to a checklist approach, treating a complex political activity as a tactical drill or technical game to be won.[7] These behaviors breed strategic disconnects in SC, where tactical considerations overshadow strategic objectives, resulting in a fragmented and ultimately ineffective approach.[8] These behaviors are not unique to SC; they are characteristic of what M.L.R. Smith termed the "roots of bad strategy," where bureaucratic processes and tactical activity substitute for coherent logic in the use of force.[9] Hence, this article applies the principles of good strategy directly to the SC enterprise.

Surprisingly, despite SC being a major feature of warfare from the Peloponnesian War to modern great power competition, it remains a strategic footnote.[10] This article addresses that gap by providing foundations for a theory for the advising, educating, equipping, and training foreign security forces. First, we define the scope and limits of SC as a distinct instrument of statecraft. Second, we propose six core pillars to guide this enterprise, offering a durable framework to ensure that SC is strategically aligned with national interests, regionally focused, and culturally attuned. By adopting these pillars, policymakers and practitioners can finally move beyond "random acts of touching" and forge a purposeful, effective approach to building partners.

Defining Security Assistance and Cooperation

For the purposes of this article, the definition of SC is derived from the American doctrinal definition, which covers any military-related activity by a donor country that provides assistance to build relationships that promote specific national security interests, develop allied and partner military and security capabilities for self-defense and multinational operations, and provide the donor country’s forces with access to allies and partners in peacetime or wartime. This definition deliberately focuses on the strategic logic of the enterprise itself rather than starting with SC activities that are elements of that larger

enterprise.[11] The tools of SC are diverse, spanning a spectrum from hardware to human capital.[12] They include government-to-government Foreign Military Sales (FMS) and Direct Commercial Sales (DCS) of weaponry; professional development through International Military Education and Training (IMET); strengthening partner institutions via Institutional Capacity Building (ICB)[13]; training and equipping efforts through Building Partner Capacity (BPC), and direct transfers through Presidential Drawdown Authority (PDA), which has been used extensively to arm Ukraine since 2014.[14]

Crucially, understanding SC requires defining it by its boundaries—by what it is *not*. It is not a panacea or a substitute for sound strategy, but a means to a political end. It is not an act of charity driven solely by partner requests, but an instrument of national interest. Most importantly, providing assistance is not a guarantee of unconditional allyship. The donor's interests remain paramount, creating inherent political tensions. This is perfectly illustrated by the West's "Anti-Strategy" in Ukraine: Providing enough aid for Kyiv to not lose, but withholding capabilities that could strike deep into Russia, thus subordinating Ukraine's victory to the West's fear of escalation.[15] It reflects a competing strategic objective of trying to manage escalation with a nuclear-armed Russia. This highlights a core challenge in which a partner's immediate war aims are balanced against a donor's broader strategic risk calculations. Ultimately, SC is inherently a political act.

Finally, SC is not humanitarian or development aid. While the lines can blur – providing Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) or non-lethal aid (i.e., medical equipment and training) has the dual benefit of improving disaster response and enhancing a military's logistical and command-and-control capabilities – the primary objective of SC remains squarely focused on enhancing security capacity to achieve shared security goals. Without this clarity of purpose, SC efforts risk becoming unfocused, inefficient, and ineffectual.

Six Core Pillars for a General Theory of Security Assistance and Cooperation

To move SC from "random acts of touching" to a coherent instrument of statecraft, its practitioners must be guided by a general theory grounded in core pillars. These are not a checklist but a reasoning framework, ensuring every SC activity is deliberate, purposeful, and tethered to national interest. These core pillars are necessary but insufficient for a general theory, which is beyond the immediate scope of this proposal. Nonetheless, without these six pillars, a general theory of SC is infeasible.

1. National Interest Primacy

SC must be an expression of the sending nation's strategic interests. It is not an act of charity, but a tool of enduring national interests intended to enhance national security, project influence, and achieve specific foreign policy goals. However, a harsh reality often intervenes in the form of domestic inertia, whose effects may conflict with those enduring national interests. While the traditional view of inertia is to preclude new efforts, it also applies to the continuation of existing ones. Over time, SC relationships can become detached from their original strategic calculus, perpetuated by bureaucratic habit, powerful domestic lobby groups, and political path dependency. The "Bureaucratic Politics Model" is instructive here, reminding us that state actions are often the result of internal bargaining and compromise, not a singular rational choice.[16] This inertia creates a principal-agent problem, where the SC enterprise (the agent) continues activities based on historical precedent rather than the current strategic needs of the state (the principal).[17] The U.S. relationship with Israel, for example, is sustained by powerful domestic constituencies and historical momentum, creating a dynamic where the provision of assistance can sometimes appear to operate on its own logic, partially insulated from shifting regional dynamics and global political costs, as seen with international consternation towards Israel for its actions against Palestinians in Gaza after the Hamas 7 October 2023 terrorist attacks.[18] Acknowledging this inertial force is the first step toward consciously re-aligning SC with contemporary strategic imperatives, rather than allowing it to run on autopilot where it seems like the United States is just trying to "Train the World."[19]

2. Historical, Political, and Cultural Context

Fundamentally, SC cannot be a one-size-fits-all endeavor. The recipient nation's specific historical, political, and cultural context can and should inform the development of SC programs. Imposing Western models of military organization or societal norms without adaptation is a common point of failure. For example, promoting gender integration, while laudable, may encounter significant cultural resistance that, if not navigated with skill and patience, can undermine the entire relationship. Similarly, training a partner in combined arms maneuver warfare may be irrelevant if their primary threat is a low-tech insurgency in dense jungle terrain. This requires advisors who are not just technical experts, but also possess deep regional knowledge, linguistic skills, and cultural empathy. It means listening to the partner and co-developing solutions, rather than imposing them. Without this adaptability, SC becomes an exercise in forcing a square peg into a round hole, resulting in what in the SC community is known as low absorption rate, and a frustrating and fruitless endeavor for all involved.

3. Competitive Strategic Advantage

Short of crisis, SC is a primary tool for shaping geopolitical outcomes. This was true during the Cold War and remains

so in great power competition. This pillar posits that assistance should be used proactively to bolster allies, creating resilient regional security architectures that favor donor interests and deter aggression. It is an instrument of strategic competition, not just a reactive measure. The most potent contemporary example is the massive security assistance funneled to Ukraine following Russia's 2022 invasion. This effort is a clear application of the pillar: Degrade a primary adversary's military and economic capacity, bleed its resources, and signal resolve, all without committing your own forces into direct combat. This echoes Cold War-era strategies, such as U.S. support for the *Mujahideen* against the Soviets in Afghanistan.[20] In the Indo-Pacific, SC with partners like the Philippines, Japan, and Taiwan is explicitly designed to build a credible counterweight to Chinese expansionism, reinforcing a "first island chain" defense. This pillar requires a long-term chess-player's mindset, using SC to build advantageous positions on the global map and posture the United States and its allies for strategies of denial of adversaries and cost imposition on competitors.

4. Coalition Combat Capability

If a country intends to fight alongside its allies and partners, it must ensure they can operate as a cohesive force. This pillar holds that a key objective of SC is to foster technical, procedural, and human interoperability, which is the bedrock of effective coalition warfare.[21] NATO is the gold standard, with its Standardization Agreements (STANAGs) dictating everything from ammunition calibers to communication protocols. Modern SC extends this concept globally. The sale of F-35 fighter jets to a dozen allies, for instance, is more than just FMS; it creates a shared, high-tech tactical network, enhancing data-sharing and combined operational effectiveness. This pillar extends beyond hardware. Programs like exchanges and IMET are crucial for building human interoperability, creating a global network of foreign officers favorably inclined towards American policy and objectives from their education in American military doctrine, strategic thought, and ideally, democratic values. This can be thought of as shared "software" among allies: Common understanding of command, doctrine, and planning that becomes far more valuable than shared "hardware" in a crisis.

5. Policy-Strategy Alignment

Every SC activity must be inextricably linked to a clear political objective. A bottom-up "bag of tactics" approach is a recipe for strategic failure. The central question must always be: "To what political end are we conducting this training?" The answer to that question will come through a unified strategic approach implemented through a comprehensive campaign plan.[22] The decades-long effort in Afghanistan is a tragic lesson in this pillar's neglect. The U.S. and its allies became exceptionally skilled at the tactical tasks of training and equipping the Afghan National Security Forces, yet these activities were untethered from the fundamental political realities of the country, such as endemic corruption and weak central governance. The result was a technically proficient but politically hollow force that collapsed without advisors. In some cases, this pillar also means honestly accepting a limited political goal: if a partner is simply a short-term proxy to fight a terrorist group, acknowledging this "By-With-Through" (BWT) approach up-front will drive a better, more realistic strategy.[23]

6. Long-Term Sustainability

Providing equipment that a partner cannot maintain and training soldiers for an institution that cannot pay or manage them is a strategic dead end. SC efforts absent long-term sustainability of a partner's defense enterprise through Institutional Capacity Building (ICB) are likely to be inconclusive. The goal is not to create a permanent dependency, but to graduate partners into self-sufficiency. This is arguably the most difficult aspect of SC, as it moves beyond the comfortable realm of tactical training and into the complex political work of reforming defense ministries, enterprise logistics, and embedding civilian oversight, often within historical and cultural contexts that vary considerably from American ones. The experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan are cautionary tales, where the focus on generating combat units far outstripped the unglamorous but essential work of building their necessary institutional backbone. A sustainable security partner requires more than just skilled soldiers; it requires a functioning bureaucracy, a non-corrupt procurement process, and a professional officer corps: all outcomes of successful ICB.

Contextualizing the Six Pillars

Planners and strategists must understand the design of other actors in any SC context. For instance, Russia has turned private military companies into expeditionary tools that trade regime protection for resources, especially across Africa.[24] China fuses military and economic statecraft: pairing training and equipment with infrastructure finance, all under a formal military-civil fusion strategy.[25] Planners that ignore these competitive logics risk optimizing for the wrong thing. Good SC design must therefore anticipate how Moscow and Beijing will counter these efforts, so that resilient programs can be set under more favorable conditions.

Conclusion: From Theory to Practice

Translating these six pillars from theory into practice requires a fundamental shift in how Western governments conceive of, organize for, and execute missions to arm, train, and assist foreign security forces. The ad hoc, tactically-focused, and often inertial approach that defines so many current efforts must be replaced by a culture of

strategic purpose. This means asking the right questions before committing resources, a process we have distilled into a "Design Logic Test" for any SC plan (see Table 1).

Pillar	Question(s)
1. National Interest Primacy	What specific political effect do we seek? How will this assistance advance it?
2. Historical, Political, and Cultural Context	Does this effort fit within the partner's unique threat, culture, and operational environment? What contextual adaptability is needed to overcome challenges?
3. Competitive Strategic Advantage	How does this program alter the regional balance of power or impose costs on adversaries?
4. Coalition Combat Capability	What standards, systems, and human linkages will make this partner interoperable with us and our allies?
5. Policy-Strategy Alignment	Does this assistance reinforce or undermine the political settlement we aim to sustain?
6. Long-Term Sustainability	Can the partner's institutions sustain these capabilities without external support and funding?

Table 1. The Design Logic Test for any SC Plan.

Moving forward, policymakers and practitioners must not only adopt this principled framework but also enact institutional reforms to support it. We offer four recommendations to encourage this transformation.

First, it is advisable that strategic planning for SC be revitalized and elevated. Any initiative must begin with a clear, written statement of the specific national interest at stake and the precise political objective it is designed to achieve, directly addressing Pillars 1 (National Interest Primacy) and 5 (Policy-Strategy Alignment). This process cannot be a military-only exercise; it requires interagency collaboration, with the ministry of foreign affairs (or State Department) leading the definition of political goals. Diplomacy is crucial, as use of the military often follows the core pillars well, while other governmental efforts can sometimes contribute to 'random acts of touching' due to a differing planning culture or a failure to appreciate the complexities of security cooperation. Success must be defined at the outset not by the number of soldiers trained, but by the desired change in the environment.

Second, the SC enterprise needs a re-evaluation of long-term value. Referring back to Pillar 6 (Long-Term Sustainability), sustainable partners are the only ones of lasting strategic value. Achieving this depends on a cultural shift that rewards the unglamorous, long-term work of building foreign ministries of defense, logistics systems, and professional military education programs so that the host-nation military *actually buys into owning the process so that a virtuous cycle of defense institutional growth occurs after advisors leave*. A key remedy would be Western militaries creating dedicated career paths for SC specialists, ensuring a cadre of dedicated experts – that can inculcate a T.E. Lawrence-like passion for advising – rather than it being a temporary broadening assignment outside of combat arms.

Third, there must be greater investment in the human dimension of SC. To effectively implement Pillar 2 (Historical, Political, and Cultural Context), a generation of strategic-thinking advisors must be created who are more than just technical experts. This means prioritizing and funding advanced education in language, regional studies, and culture for the SC workforce. It involves selecting personnel based on their capacity for empathy, creative problem-solving, and political acumen. The goal should be to field advisors who can embed and listen as well as they instruct – sort of like an anthropologist or sociologist – and who can co-develop solutions with partners rather than imposing Western templates. It also means providing them adequate administrative support for documenting and processing SC requests and the delivery of SC, since a major complaint of most SC practitioners is the time wasted trying to figure out what titles and authorities they are using when providing training and equipment. Absent this context, SC may be a fool's errand, with little if any hope of attaining the strategic objectives that are essential to SC as an instrument of statecraft.

Finally, assessment, monitoring, and evaluation (AM&E) should be reformed to measure strategic effects, not just tactical outputs. Developing a new AM&E framework should assess progress toward the political objectives established during the planning phase. Are our efforts actually reducing corruption? Is adversary influence receding? Answering these questions requires qualitative analysis, not just quantitative data. One gap in existing assessments of strategy such as the Annual Joint Assessment survey or the Chairman's Risk Assessment is that they do not adequately capture SC contributions. True assessment of SC progress toward strategic ends therefore requires strategic humility by acknowledging when an approach is failing and having the institutional courage to adapt, curtail, or even terminate assistance when it no longer serves the national interest. It also requires recognizing that effective SC is more than just incentives or resources. It is about calibrated political leverage through knowing when to employ the appropriate mix of reassurance, conditionality, pressure, and support when partner behavior diverges from shared objectives. In practice, this translates into applying the right SC "carrots and sticks" to encourage host-nation compliance and realignment with shared interests.[26]

The choice is clear: The West can continue its "random acts of touching," spending vast sums on disjointed efforts that produce ambiguous results and risk strategic failure. Or, it can embrace a more disciplined, strategic, and effective

approach. By grounding Security Cooperation in a general theory guided by these core pillars, we can transform this tool of statecraft from a source of frustration into a source of enduring strength. While the pillars are a start, they are not a substitute for a general theory of security cooperation. Only then can we replace the "No RATS" sign with one that signifies a new era of deliberate, purposeful, and strategically coherent approaches to military assistance and advising.

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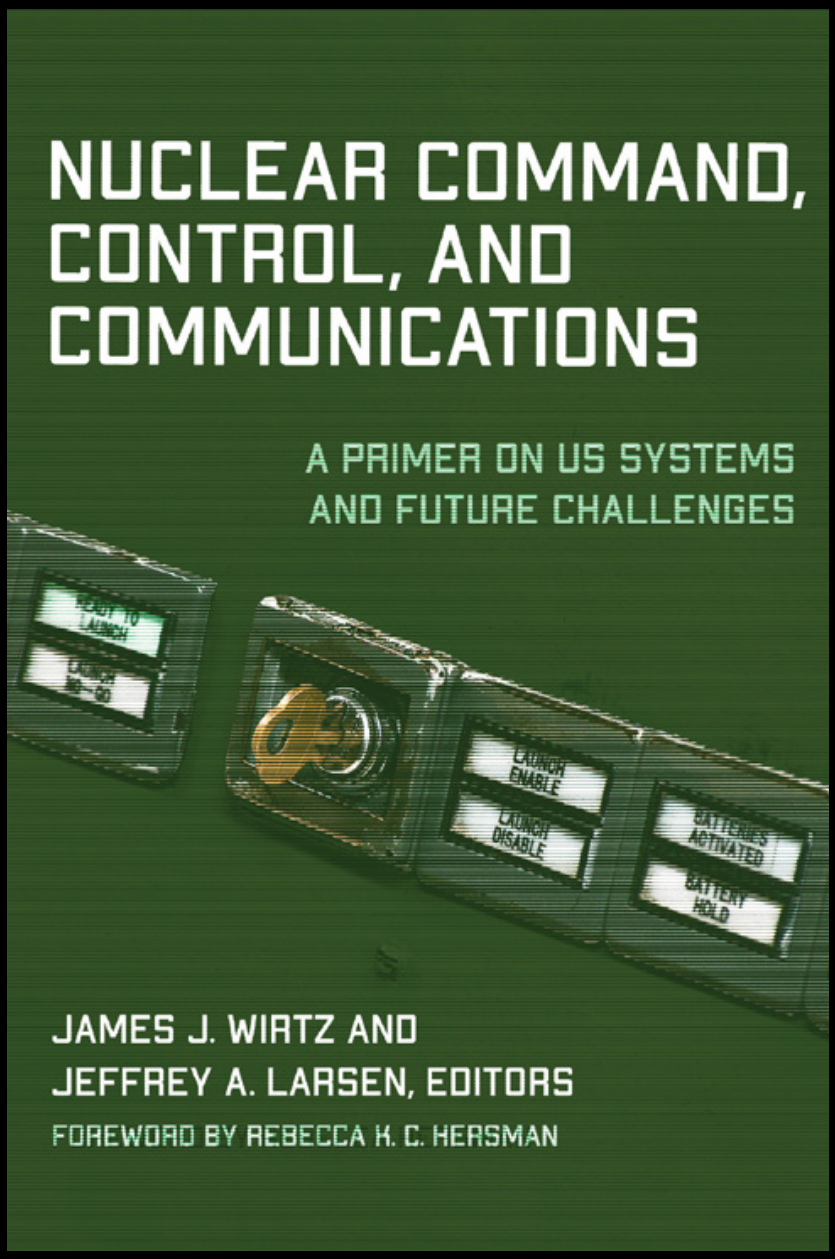

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Can Clausewitz's "Center of Gravity" Survive the Digital Age?

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Introduction

Of all the martial concepts that Carl von Clausewitz discussed in *On War*, his treatise on military strategy, perhaps the most widely adopted was his model for depicting an enemy's primary source of strength: the *center of gravity* (COG). To this day, the COG model remains enshrined in the doctrine of many Western militaries, to include the United States,[1] the United Kingdom,[2] Australia,[3] France,[4] Israel,[5] and even NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization).[6] In Western planning doctrine (in accordance with Clausewitz's concept), the enemy's COG is essentially that element which must be defeated in order to achieve military victory.[7] COG *analysis* is the method of determining the enemy's COG—the implicit next step in the planning

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process being to figure out how to decisively defeat it.

For decades, military planners have debated the efficacy of using COG analysis as a method of analyzing enemy strengths. Some argue that the model is impractical, while others argue that it is timeless and universally applicable. Because COG debates typically revolve around definitions and methods for applying a now-controversial model, they have achieved little in the way of influencing doctrine to adapt to present-day reality, relegating the debates to the realm of academic repartee. What is lacking in the debate is a meaningful discussion on whether the COG is a useful model *given the character of war and the complexity of the operational environment in the 21st century*. While academics theorize and theorists debate, practitioners are applying what many believe to be an obsolete model in the real world, and their work may well mean the difference between life and death—between martial success and failure.

To answer the question of whether the COG model remains useful to military planners in the 21st century, we should examine the reasons for the current frustration with the COG model, then compare the model to the operational environment as it evolved over time—from Clausewitz's era of professionalized warfare, to the 20th-century era of industrialized warfare, to today's era of digitized warfare. Should we find that the COG's relevance has diminished over time, we can perhaps deduce a better method of analyzing an enemy's strengths.

Current Frustration with the COG Model

Clausewitz never offered a technical definition of the COG, preferring instead to employ numerous examples to explain the COG concept. Over recent years, Western militaries have struggled to assign a useful doctrinal definition to the Center of Gravity.[8] For instance, recent U.S. planning doctrine, in trying to describe the COG, assigned twelve characteristics to the Center of Gravity. Some of the vaguer characteristics are as follows:

The Center of Gravity…

- Exists at each level of warfare
- Contains many intangible elements at a strategic level
- [Is] mostly physical at operational and tactical levels
- May be transitory in nature
- Can shift over time or between phases[9]

NATO planning doctrine provides another example of the vague definitions, stating that there could be numerous COGs—moral, physical, strategic, and operational,[10] and devoting fourteen pages to explaining how to conduct a COG analysis. The nebulous language has almost certainly been employed because a precisely defined model could not accurately represent modern militaries. The vague definitions allowed doctrinaires to salvage the model, despite its increasing disconnect from reality.

As one would expect, the vague definitions only made the model more opaque and its applicability to real-world planning more tenuous. The disconnect between the model and the operational environment leaves military planners struggling to identify enemy COGs, failing to arrive at a consensus on a specific COG, and eventually settling on a COG which they proceed to ignore in their plans. With planning doctrine built on such a precarious foundation, there should be little wonder that putting doctrine into practice is so difficult.

The practical difficulties of applying the COG model to today's operational environment, compounded by the dissatisfaction of numerous practitioners, indicate that the model has outlived its usefulness as a universally applicable tool for analyzing an enemy's strengths. If the model is not obvious enough to be of practical value to the average planner, it should not be enshrined in planning doctrine. Eikmeier articulated this problem by stating that the "debate [among military planners] alone is sufficient evidence that doctrine is putting planners in an unusual position of not really knowing what something is, but agreeing that it has tremendous value."[11] Eikmeier's solution was to craft an explicit definition of a COG, which he refined over the years. His definition from 2016, "the primary entity that inherently possesses the critical capabilities to achieve the objective,"[12] is possibly the most precise ever proposed; but even a precise definition cannot make the model adaptable to changes in the character of war or to an extraordinarily complex operational environment.

The COG in the Age of Professionalized Warfare

Clausewitz wrote his seminal work in the 1820s when the industrial revolution was gaining momentum but had not yet fully blossomed into the explosion in mechanical innovation which would characterize the Industrial Age. Clausewitz largely based his observations on European wars of the 18th and early 19th centuries—wars which, due to the range, accuracy, and maneuverability of the weaponry available to the belligerents of the day, were generally similar in character to most other wars going back to the Bronze Age.

Applied to the realm of physics, a simplified, layman's definition of *center of gravity* could be "the point in an entity with the highest concentration of mass."[13] As a model for a nation's military strength, this definition makes sense when applied to pre-twentieth-century warfare in which the most advanced military force structures of the day were relatively simple compared to today's advanced militaries.

Professionalized militaries until Clausewitz's time fought in two domains—land and sea. The most advanced weaponry was muskets and rudimentary cannons, while logistics moved at the pace of horse-drawn wagons. War presented a series of tactical challenges to generals but was hardly a sophisticated affair.

A century after Clausewitz wrote *On War*, Soviet Brigade Commander Georgii Isserson contrasted Clausewitz's observations of the Napoleonic wars to his own observations of World War I in his insightful work, *The Evolution of Operational Art*. Isserson observed that, in the Napoleonic era, "the range of human vision… far exceeded the range of shoulder weapons… and artillery." The implications were that, while an army might field multiple corps or fight on multiple fronts, the limited reach of the weapons of the day and slow transportation meant that good generals were essentially master tacticians who skillfully linked tactics to strategy. These limitations forced generals to set up tactical engagements, endeavoring to maneuver their forces into an advantageous position before engaging an enemy force.[14] Such conditions would typically make one military entity (or group of mutually reinforcing units) easily identifiable as their nation's primary source of strength.

By Clausewitz's day, warfare had been professionalized for thousands of years, but the technological limits on maneuverability, weapons range, and munitions accuracy ensured that the character of war remained largely unchanged. The *center of gravity* model was accurate and applicable to most conflicts between the Bronze Age and the Napoleonic era. Shortly after Clausewitz's death, however, a new era of industrialized warfare would emerge, World War I being the first stark example. Technological advances in weapons and their delivery platforms would make the operational environment dramatically more complex, straining the COG model's applicability.

The COG in the Age of Industrialized Warfare

The discovery of petroleum as a new energy source fostered the development of new technologies; and the new technologies boosted the maneuverability of weapons delivery platforms, increased weapons range and accuracy, and opened a new domain of conflict—the air domain. At the beginning of the 20th century, weapons with high rates of fire forced armies to form extended battle lines, as they could now be engaged prior to assuming traditional tactical formations.[15] By the middle of the 20th century, weapons range had significantly increased, as long-range artillery, aircraft carriers, bomber aircraft, and ballistic missiles were developed. These innovations expanded war from a series of battlefields into regional "theaters" of conflict.

Nations fielded larger armies with widely dispersed units which allowed them to fight in multiple theaters and shift reserves to reinforce whichever battlefront was most beleaguered. They fielded formidable navies and air forces. Advanced logistics, facilitated by trains, automobiles, diesel-powered ships, and cargo aircraft, permitted battle lines to be stretched further than ever; and the radio made possible the command and control of widely distributed forces. These innovations substantially expanded—and complicated the operational environment.

The operational level of war emerged, in which military operations consisted of battles linked in time, space, and purpose to achieve operational objectives; and operations were linked to achieve strategic objectives. Good generals in the age of industrialized warfare expanded their scope, linking operations to strategy and devolving tactical control to lower echelons.

Advanced militaries now fielded long-range offensive capabilities and intricately layered defenses in multiple domains. No longer was there a military entity (or group of mutually reinforcing units) that could be easily identified as a primary source of strength. The COG model, as Clausewitz described it, became less intuitive. The vastly more complex militaries of the Industrial Age conceptually possessed multiple centers of gravity in various domains and at different levels of war.

Endeavoring to identify a single COG became an exercise in futility, as war planners had to devise methods to defeat the enemy in multiple domains and across many geographically dispersed battlefronts. Perhaps in the case of specific, limited objectives, the single-COG model remained useful; but as operational complexity evolved, it became less applicable to strategies and theater-wide plans.

As the Industrial Age advanced, the character of war changed at a pace that must have been unimaginable to preindustrial-era strategists. The increased range, maneuverability, and accuracy of technologically advanced weapons had markedly expanded the battlespace. To remain relevant, the COG model had to be applied to either multiple domains, various levels of war (strategic and operational), or both. Near the end of the 20th century, newer technologies would be developed which would accelerate the evolution of the character of war and again, exponentially increase the complexity of the operational environment. As complexity increased, the COG model's applicability decreased.

The COG in the Age of Digitized Warfare

Even as the mechanical innovation of the Industrial Age continued to surge, a revolutionary technology emerged which would further complicate the operational environment. The semiconductor gave birth to the microchip, thrusting the world into the Digital Age. Like the Industrial Age before it, the Digital Age has ushered in a new era of warfare, and with it, new domains of conflict: the electromagnetic spectrum (EMS),[16] space, and

cyberspace.

Warfare has expanded beyond the theater, making instantaneous global war a distinct possibility. Modern militaries possess weapons with global reach, and they combine unprecedented maneuverability with unprecedented accuracy. Perhaps just as significantly, they have built redundant reconnaissance, surveillance, and communication systems which enable rapid global power projection; and they have woven these new capabilities into intricately layered offensive and defensive architectures.

A world has unfolded before us that Clausewitz could never have envisioned—a world of satellites, of intercontinental ballistic missiles with maneuvering reentry vehicles, of hypersonic cruise missiles, of orbital bombardment systems, of drone swarms—all of which threaten to make traditional air defense systems obsolete. We live in the computer-powered, interconnected world of the internet which makes cyberspace a global domain that is interwoven through all the other domains. Artificial intelligence systems can make complex decisions faster than any human; and autonomous weapons platforms make old strategic paradigms obsolete. Today's operational environment is characterized by new weapons capable of being employed on a multitude of attack vectors. Psychological operations seem to be ubiquitous; and virtually any piece of infrastructure, communication network, or population center could become an instant battlefield.

While the term "campaign" has been a part of the military lexicon for centuries, campaigning is emerging as a distinct level of war. Multiple campaigns, linked in time, space, and purpose, will almost certainly be needed to achieve strategic objectives. Today's generals will need to broaden their scope even further and become experts at integrating multi-domain campaigns and operations.

Belligerents in the age of digitized warfare must contend with enemy forces in all domains and on numerous battlefields around the globe. The multiple centers of gravity, for which Industrial-Age planners had to account, have multiplied exponentially as domains and levels of war have increased and the battlespace has gone global. For militaries that have kept pace with technology, a *center of gravity*, as Clausewitz conceptualized it, has become nearly impossible to discern.

A Better Method of Analyzing an Enemy's Strengths

The point of a doctrinal COG analysis is to identify an enemy's primary source of strength—that which must be defeated in order to obtain victory. Because the COG seems to no longer be an accurate model for today's operational environment, attempting to identify enemy strengths and weaknesses through the lens of a single COG (or even multiple COGs) has become so cumbersome as to be ineffectual. Today's militaries need a model of the operational environment that better represents present reality. They need updated planning doctrine that prescribes an accurate and intuitive method for analyzing an enemy's strengths (and weaknesses). Failing to do so will continue to entrench planners in an archaic way of thinking that produces flawed enemy capability analyses and, consequently, flawed plans. Multiple methods are available which could be easily integrated into Western military doctrine, two potential methods being offered as examples.

The first potential method is the business-oriented SWOT Analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats). A SWOT analysis could be performed at each echelon of planning (strategic, campaign, operational, tactical) for each domain. The resulting list of enemy strengths and weaknesses would intuitively lead planners to consider the linkages between the strengths and to exploit the identified vulnerabilities. Of course, the SWOT analysis could also be applied to friendly forces. Planners could easily base their plans on the SWOT analyses to capitalize on friendly strengths and target enemy weaknesses.

The second potential method would be to retain Western planning doctrine's familiar Critical Factors Analysis—a component of COG analysis. The purpose of the critical factors analysis is to identify critical capabilities—things the COG does to accomplish the mission, critical requirements—things upon which the COG depends in order to function, and critical vulnerabilities—things which can be exploited to degrade critical capabilities. Ultimately, sufficient attacks on critical vulnerabilities should reduce the COG's strength to such an extent that the enemy capitulates.[17], [18] Conducting a Critical Factors Analysis, without requiring planners to identify a single COG (or a single COG per level of war), intuitively guides planners towards identifying all critical strengths and weaknesses. Like the SWOT analysis, the Critical Factors Analysis could be performed at each echelon and for every domain. For each critical capability, planners could continue to identify critical requirements and critical vulnerabilities, and design plans to exploit those vulnerabilities.

Perhaps the biggest benefit of the two suggested methods is that they would make planners consider the enemy's capabilities, strengths, and weaknesses in all domains rather than try to identify a single COG. As planners explore linkages among the capabilities in each domain, they will naturally identify dependencies, choke points, and vulnerabilities to exploit. Because the proposed methods provide frameworks for more accurately modeling the operational environment, the resulting strategies and plans would be more executable, being built upon a logical, intuitive foundation.

Updating planning doctrine as suggested would not prohibit planners from employing the COG model if they thought

it appropriate. In response to those who remain wedded to the COG concept and who believe that it is improperly applied by poorly trained planners, the proposed analytic methods would still result in plans that would logically lead to the collapse of the COG (if one exists)—even if it is not explicitly identified. Either of the proposed methods enables military commanders to affect layered enemy capabilities as appropriate and does not subconsciously limit their thinking by imposing the outdated COG paradigm on them.

Conclusion

The efficacy of the COG model has been the subject of vigorous academic debate for several decades, with little meaningful discussion on whether it provides today's planners with an accurate map of the operational environment, given the extent to which the character of war has evolved. Modern technology has given us weapons with global reach, opened new domains of conflict, and created a virtually unlimited battlespace—all of which adds up to an operational environment that is vastly more complex than that which existed in Clausewitz's day. The analogy of the *center of gravity* simply does not accurately model advanced, 21st-century militaries.

The age of digitized warfare is upon us. As conflicts among technologically advanced militaries proliferate, the need for a more intuitive, accurate, and easily applicable method of analyzing enemy strengths and weaknesses becomes more apparent. By updating planning doctrine with analytic methods that more effectively model the operational environment, military leaders have an opportunity to disabuse their planners of the obsolete COG concept before the next war occurs. While the debate would undoubtedly be fierce, updating doctrine would be worth the effort so that planners can base their plans on a more logical and intuitive foundation that is better suited to this new age of warfare.

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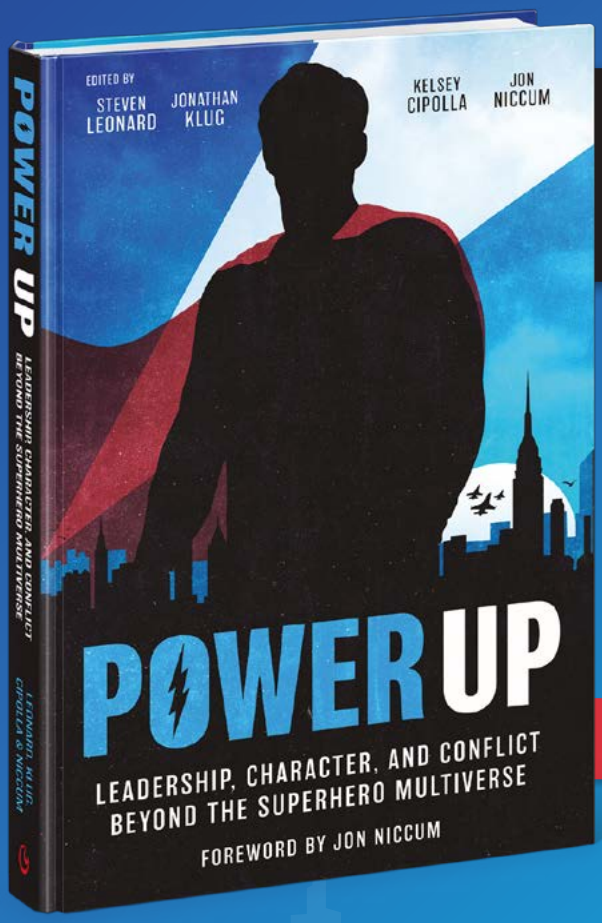

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The Trafalgar Imperative: Why the USAF Must Innovate or Stagnate

J. William "Bill" DeMarco - Air University, Maxwell Air Force Base

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Part I: The Grandeur and Decline of Naval Supremacy

The Trafalgar Moment (1805): A Blueprint for Disruptive Strategy

The Battle of Trafalgar, fought on October 21, 1805, stands as a seminal event in military history, not merely for its decisive outcome but for the strategic genius that enabled it.[1] Facing a combined Franco-Spanish fleet of 33 ships, Vice-Admiral Horatio Nelson commanded a smaller force of 27 British ships.[2] Naval orthodoxy of the era dictated a line-of-battle tactic, where opposing fleets would sail in parallel lines, exchanging broadsides in grinding, often inconclusive engagements.[3] Nelson, however, abandoned this convention entirely. He split his fleet into two columns and drove them perpendicularly into the enemy line, an audacious maneuver designed to cut the Franco-Spanish formation into fragments and force a chaotic, close-quarters melee.[4],[5] This tactical approach was fraught with risk, leaving Nelson's lead ships—including his flagship, HMS *Victory*—vulnerable to concentrated enemy fire for a prolonged period as they approached the line.[6]

Nelson's unconventional strategy was not a reckless gamble; it was a calibrated risk based on a deep understanding of his force's core strengths and his adversary's weaknesses. The Royal Navy's crews were rigorously trained, particularly their gunners, who could fire and reload their cannons twice as fast as their French and Spanish counterparts.[7] Nelson knew that his lead ships could endure the initial pounding and that once the battle was joined in a close-quarters brawl, the superior British seamanship and gunnery would be decisive.[8] He created a new pattern of advantage by intentionally forcing a friction-rich environment that maximized the value of his crews' discipline and training.[9] This reframing of the competitive situation shattered the enemy's coherence and secured a near-total victory, with the British losing zero ships while the Franco-Spanish fleet lost 22.[10] The outcome of Trafalgar was therefore not an inevitability of material advantage but a direct result of a leader's willingness to break from orthodoxy and create a strategy that leveraged existing strengths in a fundamentally new way.[11]

This success was enabled by a command culture that cultivated disciplined initiative before battle was joined. Nelson's famous pre-battle signal—"No Captain can do very wrong if he places his ship alongside that of an enemy"—was less a grant of tactical improvisation once combat commenced than a declaration of intent already internalized. Once fleets closed, smoke, wind, and the physics of sail severely constrained real-time maneuver and communication. What distinguished Nelson's captains was not freedom from constraint, but shared understanding. They had trained together, absorbed his operational philosophy, and understood the objective before the first shot was fired. When the enemy line fractured and confusion followed, they acted within that shared intent rather than waiting for further direction. [12] Trafalgar was a victory of innovation over orthodoxy—a triumph of strategic design rooted in preparation, cohesion, and calibrated risk that secured British naval supremacy for over a century.[13]

The Century of Stasis (1805-1916): From Pax Britannica to Institutional Entropy

The century following Trafalgar was a period of unparalleled naval dominance for the Royal Navy. With the French and Spanish fleets effectively neutralized, Britain was able to enforce the Pax Britannica, a period of relative global stability underpinned by maritime control.[14] [15] Over time, this sustained supremacy reshaped institutional priorities. The Royal Navy transitioned from insurgent challenger to guardian of an established global order. Trafalgar reinforced a dominant operational paradigm, and the expectation that future wars would be decided by a climactic fleet engagement became deeply embedded in professional thought.

The 19th century witnessed the transition from wooden sailing ships to steam-powered, screw-propelled ironclads, exemplified by HMS Warrior in 1860. This was followed by the launch of HMS Dreadnought in 1906, whose all-big-gun armament and turbine propulsion rendered previous battleships obsolete and accelerated a global naval arms race.[16] [17] Britain maintained industrial and technological leadership throughout this transition. Yet technological superiority did not automatically produce doctrinal flexibility. The emphasis on building and preserving capital ships such as the dreadnought reinforced the prevailing assumption that future conflict would culminate in a decisive fleet engagement dominated by heavy guns and armor.[18]

The intellectual framework underpinning this paradigm was reinforced by the writings of Alfred Thayer Mahan, whose theories emphasized that control of the seas depended upon decisive fleet engagement.[19] [20] His ideas were widely studied within the Admiralty and further solidified the focus on preserving the battle fleet as the ultimate guarantor of victory.[21] By the eve of World War I, the Royal Navy had evolved into a large, complex institution responsible for safeguarding a global empire. Preservation of the battle fleet became a strategic imperative, and formation integrity, signal discipline, and capital ship survivability were emphasized accordingly.[22]

The operational environment and Britain's geopolitical responsibilities in 1916 were markedly different from those of 1805. Where Nelson commanded a force seeking decisive advantage, Jellicoe commanded one tasked with preserving strategic equilibrium. That shift in institutional posture would prove consequential at Jutland.[23]

The Jutland Moment (1916): A Cautionary Tale of Command and Culture

The Battle of Jutland, fought from May 31 to June 1, 1916, was the largest naval clash of World War I and the only full-scale engagement of dreadnought-era battleships.[24] [25] On paper, the British Grand Fleet held a decisive advantage in both numbers and tonnage over the German High Seas Fleet.[26] Contemporary strategic thinking assumed that a major fleet engagement could produce a decisive outcome—if not another Trafalgar, then at least a strategically conclusive clash. While Britain inflicted heavier losses in ships and personnel, it failed to destroy the German fleet, which managed to retreat to port and never again seriously challenged the Royal Navy in a full fleet engagement.[27] [28]

While the tactical balance favored Britain, the strategic outcome proved more ambiguous. The inability to translate material superiority into decisive destruction must be understood within the political and strategic constraints facing Admiral John Jellicoe. He commanded the only fleet capable of sustaining Britain's maritime lifelines. The loss of even a portion of that force could have altered the war's strategic balance. As Churchill later observed, Jellicoe was "the only man on either side who could lose the war in an afternoon."[29] His caution therefore reflected not personal timidity, but strategic burden—an illustration of how dominance reshapes institutional risk tolerance.

At the same time, institutional conditioning shaped the engagement. Decades of preparing for a climactic fleet battle had reinforced adherence to formation discipline, signal control, and capital ship preservation. When visibility deteriorated and fleeting opportunities emerged—particularly during the confused night phases—the imperative to safeguard the Grand Fleet constrained risk tolerance. Tactical factors compounded this dynamic. British armor-piercing shells proved unreliable; signaling friction and communication breakdowns limited operational coherence. The result was not defeat, but stalemate—numerical superiority without strategic closure.

The most consequential lesson of Jutland lay not in the battle's immediate outcome, but in its strategic aftermath. By surviving the engagement, the German fleet preserved strategic optionality. It demonstrated that a direct surface contest favored British superiority. Concluding that decisive victory at sea was unlikely, German leaders increasingly embraced unrestricted submarine warfare—an asymmetric approach designed to bypass the Grand Fleet and target Britain's economic arteries.[30]

The Royal Navy, having spent a century preparing for a climactic fleet engagement, now confronted a dispersed and elusive threat for which its traditional assumptions offered limited guidance. Jutland was not a defeat. It was something subtler and strategically consequential: a demonstration that institutional dominance in one form of warfare can narrow anticipation of another.

Military institutions rarely falter because of incompetence; more often, they are shaped—and sometimes constrained—by the very success that once secured their dominance. Success recalibrates risk tolerance, institutional incentives, and professional assumptions.

Part II: The Air Force Analogue: A Modern Strategic Arc

America's Trafalgar in the Sky: The Air Corps Tactical School (ACTS)

Just as Trafalgar represented a fundamental redefinition of naval warfare, the Air Corps Tactical School (ACTS) of the 1930s serves as the foundational "Trafalgar moment" for the United States Air Force. During a period when airpower was widely viewed as a subordinate arm of the Army, a small group of officers at Maxwell Field, Alabama, began to question prevailing assumptions about airpower's role.[31] Known later as the "bomber mafia," figures such as Harold George, Haywood Hansell, Donald Wilson, and Laurence Kuter operated within an institution still defining itself. The school's motto—Proficimus More Irretenti ("We make progress unhindered by custom")—captured both their ambition and the relative conceptual freedom of a young service seeking intellectual footing.[32]

ACTS's most consequential contribution was the articulation of what became known as the "Industrial Web Theory," an effort to conceptualize war as an interconnected economic system rather than a series of discrete battlefield engagements.[33] [34] The theory argued that precision strikes against critical nodes—transportation networks, electrical grids, steel production—could disrupt systemic coherence and undermine an adversary's war-making capacity.[35] This represented a significant departure from prevailing emphasis on battlefield attrition. The theorists posited that a long-range bomber force, such as the emerging B-17, could penetrate deep into enemy territory at high altitude to strike critical industrial targets.[36]

ACTS was not merely a school; it was an incubator of strategic thought that gave the fledgling Air Corps a coherent rationale for its existence.[37] This vision, more than technology alone, helped define the service's emerging identity and provided a strategic justification for an independent air arm. While the effectiveness and morality of strategic bombing in World War II remain debated, the doctrinal influence of ACTS on American airpower development is undeniable. Like Nelson's fleet in 1805, the Air Corps of the 1930s was a challenger institution seeking decisive relevance rather than preserving established dominance.

The Search for a "Jutland Moment": Historical and Future Case Studies

The historical arc of the Royal Navy prompts a critical, and urgent, question for the United States Air Force: has it already experienced its "Jutland moment," or is that day still to come? A "Jutland moment" for airpower is not a single, catastrophic battle but a prolonged, frustrating engagement where a dominant force's core doctrines prove ill-suited to the nature of the conflict. It is a failure to translate material and technological superiority into decisive political effect.

The Vietnam War and the Global War on Terror (GWOT) can be analyzed as potential "Jutland" equivalents. In Vietnam, the USAF, built on the legacy of decisive strategic bombing, confronted a conflict shaped as much by political constraint as by military resistance. Target selection and escalation thresholds were often determined at the highest civilian levels, with campaigns such as Operation Rolling Thunder calibrated as instruments of coercive signaling rather than unrestricted destruction.[38] [39] Within those constraints, airpower struggled to produce decisive political outcomes against an adaptive, decentralized adversary. The war exposed not simply the limits of bombing, but the difficulty of aligning doctrinal expectations with politically bounded strategy in a complex conflict.

Similarly, during the Global War on Terror, the USAF demonstrated extraordinary tactical precision and operational reach. Yet in campaigns centered on counterinsurgency and state-building, airpower often functioned as an enabler of ground-centric political objectives rather than as an independent strategic instrument.[40] [41] The force remained tactically dominant, but the translation of that dominance into durable political outcomes proved elusive. In both cases, tactical excellence did not automatically yield strategic closure. The tension lay not in capability shortfalls alone, but in the friction between inherited doctrinal assumptions and the political character of the wars being fought.

The most pressing "Jutland moment" for the USAF, however, is likely yet to come. The analysis suggests that a future conflict with a near-peer competitor in the Pacific could be the ultimate test. Adversaries have studied American air dominance and are consciously developing "Odyssean" asymmetric counters to bypass traditional U.S. strengths. This includes strategies like anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) that target the large, fixed bases that have been the historical foundation of American power projection.[42] It also includes a suite of disruptive technologies, such as AI-enabled swarms, hypersonics, and advanced cyber and space denial capabilities, that are designed to offset U.S. advantages.[43] In such a scenario, the risk is not a single catastrophic defeat, but a prolonged contest in which highly advanced, capital-intensive systems and established operational concepts are stressed by adversaries deliberately seeking to bypass rather than confront U.S. strengths directly.

In this scenario, the risk is not of a single tactical defeat but of an extended, frustrating conflict where the USAF's exquisite, high-cost platforms and procedural doctrine are unable to achieve a decisive victory against a more agile and innovative adversary that fights on its own terms.

Part III: The Lessons for Today and the Path Forward

A Modern Assessment: Warning Signs of Stasis

The parallels between the Royal Navy's experience and the USAF's current trajectory are not merely historical curiosities; they illustrate recurring patterns in the lifecycle of military dominance. Periods of sustained strategic overmatch, while initially advantageous, can gradually reshape institutional incentives, risk calculus, and professional assumptions in ways that complicate adaptation. Under such conditions, the risk of a "Jutland moment" increases—not as an inevitability, but as a structural possibility. The following comparison highlights how similar dynamics have emerged across eras.

(See Appendix for "Table 1. Comparative Strategic Trajectory: From Trafalgar to USAF 2035")

Just as the Royal Navy's long dominance reinforced confidence in prevailing methods, the USAF's history of sustained air superiority has shaped deeply embedded assumptions about how airpower achieves effect. The Royal Navy's emphasis on preservation and formation discipline at Jutland finds a contemporary parallel in the challenges large institutions face when attempting to revise established concepts of operations (CONOPS) and force design.[44] The concentration of capability in highly advanced, capital-intensive platforms—whether dreadnoughts in 1906 or fifth-generation aircraft and large satellites today—can generate extraordinary power while simultaneously creating operational vulnerabilities in highly contested, distributed environments.

The ultimate threat is the enemy's post-battle adaptation. The Germans, by surviving Jutland, demonstrated that they could not be defeated on British terms and consequently pioneered unrestricted submarine warfare, an asymmetric approach that bypassed Britain's strengths.[45] Today, near-peer adversaries are developing disruptive counters—swarms of autonomous drones, hypersonics, and AI-enabled targeting—that are designed specifically to offset the USAF's traditional advantages.[46] The core problem is that a force that has grown accustomed to fighting and winning in a certain way risks being strategically exposed when an adversary refuses to play by those rules. The Jutland moment is not a single point of failure but the inevitable culmination of a culture that has grown too comfortable with its past successes.

Avoiding the Pitfall: Cultivating the Next Trafalgar Moment

The historical arc from Trafalgar to Jutland offers both caution and direction. The central lesson is that dominant military institutions must deliberately cultivate adaptation. Without sustained intellectual renewal, success can harden into assumption, and assumption into constraint.[47] The USAF has initiated several efforts intended to address this dynamic and reduce the risk of strategic surprise.

The concept of Agile Combat Employment (ACE) is a prime example of this deliberate effort.[48] [49] ACE is defined as a “proactive and reactive operational scheme of maneuver” intended to increase survivability while sustaining combat generation in contested environments.[50] [51] By dispersing forces across multiple locations, ACE seeks to complicate adversary targeting and reduce dependence on a small number of highly vulnerable bases.[52]

This approach reflects a broader shift toward operational dispersion, redundancy, and resilience under conditions of persistent threat.[53] This strategic shift is enabled by the USAF's initiative to train "multi-capable airmen" (MCAs), small, cross-functional teams that can operate with a high degree of autonomy in austere environments.[54] The concept of Multi-Capable Airmen (MCAs)—small, cross-functional teams capable of operating with relative autonomy in austere environments—supports this dispersed model.[55] In principle, such initiatives emphasize preparation, cohesion, and distributed execution rather than centralized control. Whether these initiatives can be institutionalized at scale remains an open question, particularly given the structural inertia inherent in large defense organizations.

A similarly crucial initiative is the push for a more resilient and decentralized command and control (C2).[56] The concept of Joint All-Domain Command and Control (JADC2) seeks to transition the force from "stovepiped solutions to a highly connected, agile, and resilient system."[57] JADC2, a concept developed by the Department of Defense, is designed to connect sensors from all military branches into a unified network powered by artificial intelligence.[58] [59] In conceptual terms, JADC2 seeks to mitigate the kinds of communication friction and decision latency that constrained naval operations in 1916. By enhancing redundancy, connectivity, and shared awareness, such initiatives aim to compress decision cycles and distribute execution authority in contested environments.

To institutionalize these changes and make them permanent, the USAF is focused on reforming its foundational doctrine through initiatives like the Air Force Doctrine 2035 (AFD35) project.[60] This is a formal effort by the LeMay Center for Doctrine Development and Education to "scout emerging technologies and assess their impact on airpower doctrine."[61] The explicit goal of AFD35 is to prevent doctrinal surprises, avoid doctrinal stagnation, and catalyze doctrinal evolution to keep pace with the accelerated rate of technological change. This project is not focused on current capabilities but rather on the potential future uses of technology that could "disrupt doctrine in the next decade," and involves wargames to test and evolve these concepts.[62]

Efforts such as AFD35 represent an institutional attempt to formalize anticipatory thinking within doctrine development. By deliberately examining emerging technologies and stress-testing assumptions through wargaming, the project seeks to reduce the gap between technological change and doctrinal adaptation. By deliberately examining emerging technologies and stress-testing assumptions through wargaming, the project seeks to reduce the gap between technological change and doctrinal adaptation.

This is a conscious injection of new strategic energy and diverse perspectives into the bureaucracy, a vital measure to combat the cultural and doctrinal entropy that so often follows a period of dominance.[63] The very act of having this strategic discussion is the first step toward avoiding the cultural blind spots that led to Jutland and consciously shaping the future of airpower.[64]

Conclusion: The Simple and Urgent Question

The strategic arc of naval power from Trafalgar to Jutland provides a powerful and urgent parable for the United States Air Force. Trafalgar teaches that bold, unconventional thinking, enabled by superior training and decentralized command, can create strategic overmatch and secure decades of dominance. Jutland warns that this very dominance, if left unchecked, can lead to institutional stasis, bureaucratic rigidity, and a dangerous over-reliance on a single, proven model of warfare. When a peer adversary emerges and refuses to fight by those established rules, material superiority can be squandered by a force’s own strategic and cultural inflexibility.

The USAF today faces a similar inflection point. While it retains unmatched capabilities in many domains, it confronts a rising peer competitor that has studied its strengths and is actively developing asymmetric counters to bypass them. The question before the force is not whether it has enough technology or funding, but whether it possesses the cultural agility and strategic imagination to avoid its own "Jutland moment". The path forward requires a continuous, conscious effort to cultivate "Trafalgar moments"—a willingness to reframe the competitive situation, to empower decentralized decision-making, and to invest in the agility of a force that can thrive in a world of complex, multi-domain conflict. The final and urgent question remains: Have we already fought our Jutland, or is it yet to come? And when it comes, will we see it for what it is—or will we be too busy fighting yesterday’s war?[65]

Appendix

Era / Event	Context	Strategic Posture	Outcome	Adversary's Adaptation	Lessons for USAF 2035
Trafalgar (1805)	Royal Navy faces combined Franco-Spanish fleet during Napoleonic Wars.	Innovative, risk-tolerant—Nelson abandons rigid line-ahead battle doctrine, breaking enemy line to achieve local superiority.	Decisive victory; over a century of uncontested naval dominance.	Napoleon turns to continental strategy; Britain maintains maritime supremacy.	Innovation in doctrine at the right moment can create strategic overmatch that lasts decades.
Royal Navy 19th Century	"Pax Britannica," technological revolution (steam, ironclads, dreadnoughts).	Industrial + global supremacy leads to confidence in decisive fleet action.	Maintains dominance but grows bureaucratic; peacetime habits harden into orthodoxy.	Other navies adopt new tech; Germany builds High Seas Fleet.	Long dominance can calcify thinking; "victory habits" may become vulnerabilities.
Jutland (1916)	WWI clash between Grand Fleet and High Seas Fleet. Britain holds material advantage.	Rigid formations, centralized control, risk aversion to preserve capital ships.	Tactical superiority but no decisive kill; Germany preserves fleet.	Germany shifts to U-boat warfare, bypassing British strength.	Failure to adapt quickly to disruptive asymmetric threats can squander strategic advantage.
USAF Today (2025)	Post–Cold War air dominance, global precision strike, space and cyber capabilities.	Heavy investment in exquisite platforms, centralized acquisition, procedural doctrine.	Maintains unmatched capability in many areas, but faces rising peer competitors (China, Russia) and disruptive tech race (AI, hypersonics, swarming drones).	Adversaries seek bypass strategies: cyber, space denial, low-cost attrition systems.	Without doctrinal agility and cultural willingness to take calculated risks, material superiority may not translate into strategic wins.
USAF 2035 Risk	AFD2035 warns of contested air/space domains and disruptive tech proliferation.	Current culture may overvalue legacy methods; acquisition timelines slow vs tech cycles.	Possible "Jutland moment" if caught fighting the wrong fight at the wrong tempo.	Adversaries could exploit agility gaps through autonomy, AI, info ops, and space disruption.	Must consciously cultivate "Trafalgar moments"—bold, doctrine-breaking innovation—to avoid strategic stagnation.

Table 1. Comparative Strategic Trajectory: From Trafalgar to USAF 2035

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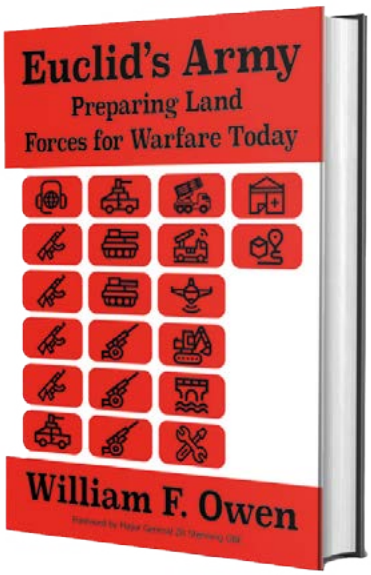

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Through thoughtful and careful design, postwar Japanese security policy has cleverly but not cynically adopted and protected the utility of nuclear deterrence – including reserving Japan's right ultimately to possess nuclear weapons -- while maintaining respect for its postwar Constitution that forever renounces war as a sovereign right and the threat or use of force as a means of settling international disputes.

Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi is considering revising one of Japan's longstanding cabinet decisions of not possessing, producing or permitting the introduction of nuclear weapons.[1] Takaichi, it is reported, is eager to bolster Japan's defense capabilities, including strengthening the extended nuclear deterrence the United States affords Japan. A decision to become a nuclear power may sound cynical, if not unconstitutional. But postwar Japanese security policy has carefully and thoughtfully protected this right, consistent with principles of international law. Becoming a nuclear power is not only possible for Japan, consistent with its Constitution, but maybe even inevitable, as the totalitarian states of the People's Republic of China and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea continue to build substantial stockpiles of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles, placing Japan well in range of hundreds of such weapons.

Though many cite Japan's alleged aversion to nuclear weapons, having suffered two atomic bombings in 1945, it is important to note that postwar Japanese leadership has never renounced the logic or utility of nuclear weapons or deterrence. In fact, the opposite is more true: Japanese leadership has consistently remained concerned over its vulnerability first to Soviet and now Chinese and North Korean nuclear weapons and their related political influence. It is understandable, then, that the Prime Minister has increasing concerns toward the Chinese and North Korean nuclear programs, as they continue to modernize and expand with no discernable check.

Japan's Current Policy is Not a Significant Change

Although Japan maintains its extended nuclear deterrent without stationing nuclear weapons inside its territory, Japan maintains a level of nuclear deterrence through a rather Japanese approach. The Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security, signed in Washington, DC on January 19, 1960, commits the United States to defend Japan and recognizes the defense of Japan as a matter of common interest. The Treaty also addressed procedural concerns the Japanese developed over U.S. consultations. The United States notifies Japan of upcoming visits of nuclear-powered ships, although not required to do so, and has not attempted to introduce tactical nuclear weapons or nuclear-capable field missiles explicitly into Japan since the new treaty was promulgated.

The 1960 Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security and related notes of clarification codified for both the United States and Japan a security arrangement acceptable to both parties. The United States was formally committed to the defense of Japan against external attack. The substantial and continuing American presence in and around the four major Japanese islands gave credibility to this commitment. The Japanese government committed itself to the defense of Japanese territory but did not assume any responsibility outside of Japan. It also had established a consultative arrangement for the arming and deployment of U.S. forces in Japan.

American forward military strategy in East Asia and in the Pacific from the 1950s until 1991 included the presence of theater nuclear weapons first deployed in the Republic of Korea and on American naval ships. U.S. President Richard Nixon, in his 1970 Report to Congress, asserted that "the nuclear capability of our strategic theater nuclear forces serves as a deterrent to full-scale Soviet attack on NATO Europe or Chinese attack on our Asian allies."[2]

The explicit obligation to maintain a nuclear as well as conventional umbrella for Japan was first undertaken by President Lyndon Johnson in January 1965. During their summit meeting in Washington, President Johnson assured his summit guest, Prime Minister Eisaku Sato, that the United States was determined to abide by its commitment under the 1960 Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security to defend Japan against any armed attack from outside.[3] U.S. President George H.W. Bush unilaterally withdrew all tactical nuclear weapons from all U.S. surface ships in 1991. Although his decision may have been driven more by a desire to free surface ship magazines from space-wasting nuclear weapons, and less of a change in deterrence strategy, this posture has continued since 1991. Changing such posture on U.S. surface ships would be costly, involve additional communication capabilities, and re-introduce a series of C3I requirements for such weapons.

Nixon's Secretary of Defense, Melvin Laird, in 1972, extended the president's implicit guarantee for the defense of Japan, "coupling" Japan's conventional defense with the threat of escalation by the United States to the strategic nuclear level:

> Our theater nuclear forces add to the deterrence of theater, conventional wars in Europe and Asia; potential opponents cannot be sure that major conventional aggression would not be met with the use of nuclear weapons. The threat of escalation to strategic nuclear war remains a part of successful deterrence at this level.[4]

Potential aggressors had to consider the possibility that regional conventional or nuclear war against Japan would be met with U.S. retaliation, including the use of nuclear weapons. Japan's security, like Europe's, was explicitly coupled with the threat of U.S. strategic war as national

policy. Deterrence was formally "extended" to Japan and Western Europe by the United States.

Article IX of the postwar Japanese Constitution states,

> ...the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes... land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained. The right of belligerency of the state will not be recognized...

There is No Right of War

But soon after the Constitution was adopted, the Japanese Supreme Court ruled that the article does not prohibit Japan from maintaining military forces for the purposes of self-defense. And since any weapon can be deemed defensive, it is important to note that no Japanese government has ever declared the possession of nuclear weapons unconstitutional.

Although he had stated previously Japan had no intention of possessing nuclear weapons, in 1958, in the House of Councilors, Prime Minister Kishi declared, "Depending on future developments in nuclear weaponry, I do not think that the Constitution bans nuclear weapons if they are of a defensive character..."[5] In 1959, Kishi declared as legal the possession of "the minimum amount of nuclear weapons for the purpose of self-defense."[6]

The first postwar *White Paper on Defense*, published under the Minister of State for Defense, Yasuhiro Nakasone, in 1970, reaffirmed Kishi's statement: "... if small-size nuclear weapons are within the scale of real power needed for the minimum necessary limit for self-defense, and if they are such as will not be a threat of aggression toward other nations, it is possible to say that possession thereof is possible, in legal theory."[7]

In 1970, Masami Takatsuji, director of the Cabinet Legislation Bureau, extended the scope of defensive capabilities to include "defensive nuclear weapons." When Prime Minister Sato was questioned about Takatsuji's suggestion that nuclear weapons could be considered defensive weapons, Sato stated that he found nothing in Takatsuji's statement that he needed to correct.

During a *Mainichi Shimbun* interview, on May 9, 1981, former U.S. Ambassador to Japan, Edwin O. Reischauer, revealed that he was informed an oral agreement had been reached during the U.S.-Japan security treaty negotiations of 1960, defining "introduction" of nuclear weapons as "putting them ashore and storing them." It was Reischauer's understanding that this agreement did not prevent the United States from moving the weapons through Japanese straits or into Japanese waters as long as they were not unloaded ashore.[8] His interview seemed to confirm a *New York Times* article of October 27, 1974, which reported on a 1960 United States-Japan agreement "permitting U.S. warships to carry nuclear weapons into Japan during port calls and American aircraft to bring them during landing."[9]

Under customary international law, warships have been entitled to those privileges the right of sovereign immunity accords them. Sovereign immunity is the legal principle which ensures that the subjects and property of one sovereign power are treated on the basis of complete equality by another sovereign power and are therefore immune to search, seizure, interference or any other type of enforcement jurisdiction. The applicable law regulating the internal discipline of a warship's crew, as well as its design characteristics and equipment, are all regulated by the flag state of the warship.

The 1982 Law of the Sea Convention, in fact, codifies these legal rights. Article 94 protects the rights of ships and reads:

> . . . (E)very State shall . . . assume jurisdiction under its internal law over each ship flying its flag and its master, officers and crew in respect of administrative, technical and social matters concerning the ship.[10]

As an extension of the rights guaranteed by the doctrine of sovereign immunity, and consistent with this customary international law, U.S. government policy neither confirms nor denies ('NCND') the presence or absence of nuclear weapons at any general or specific location -- including aboard any particular warship. Presumably, the introduction issue was purposefully or accidentally left ambiguous in Japan to allow the United States to maintain its neither confirm nor deny policy while remaining sensitive to antinuclear sentiment in Japan.

Foreign Minister Shintaro Abe testified before the House of Representatives Budget Committee on February 23, 1983, that U.S. ships carrying nuclear weapons would constitute "introduction" into Japan and the issue would therefore be subject to prior consultation between the two governments and would not be approved by Tokyo. The United States, for its part, understands and respects the three nonnuclear principles but does not confirm or deny the presence or absence of nuclear weapons at any general or specific location.

Japan's Nonconfrontational Approach Enables Its Nuclear Deterrence Policy

Since the United States repeatedly assures Japan that it has abided and will abide by the commitments it assumed under the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security and by the prior consultation agreements, Japan is publicly satisfied that since Washington has not invoked the prior consultation provision, the United States has not introduced

nuclear weapons into Japan.

This clever, carefully constructed arrangement can continue, without Japan explicitly renouncing its third non-nuclear principle of not allowing the introduction of nuclear weapons onto its territory and is consistent with international law. The Japanese government purposefully maintains this public ambiguity between formal statements and underlying truth.

Hiromi Kurisu, Chairman of the Joint Staff Council of the Self-Defense Forces from October 1977 to July 1978, called for revision of the non-introduction principle to allow nuclear-capable ships and aircraft to utilize Japanese facilities during military operations in support of U.S.-Japan mutual interests.[11]

While he was Director General of the Defense Agency, Yasuhiro Nakasone, in 1970, argued against nuclear weapons in Japan on the grounds that they would undermine the popular consensus in support of the three nonnuclear principles while contributing little, if anything, to deterrence.[12] Nuclear weapons in Japan would not add appreciably to the deterrence of conflict but might only serve to undermine crisis stability by deploying vulnerable Japanese weapons easily targeted for preemption.

The U.S. extended nuclear deterrent for Japan consists of U.S. central strategic systems and air and sea-based theater systems but no land-based missiles inside Japanese territory. Japanese soil has escaped the import of nuclear weapons. Further, unlike the European allies, Japan is not involved in joint planning with the United States over the deployment and employment of nuclear weapons in its theater. There is no Nuclear Planning Group for the U.S.-Japan alliance to discuss joint nuclear strategy. Japanese and American officials may meet in various joint defense planning committees to discuss the role of nuclear weapons for the security of Japan[13] but they have no analogous forum to the NATO Nuclear Planning Group. In addition, unlike the European allies, Japan is not involved in the development of operational guidelines over the use of nuclear weapons should deterrence fail. The Japanese approach is one of total reliance on American strategy.

In contrast with NATO allies, in the April 2023 Washington Declaration, the United States merely pledged to make "every effort to consult" with the Republic of Korea on any possible nuclear weapons employment.[14] And, in a quick follow-up, the August 2023 Camp David Trilateral Pact, among the United States, the Republic of Korea, and Japan, commits the United States merely to consult its East Asian allies over defense issues.

In contrast to Europe, the United States need not consult with Japan before using nuclear weapons in a conflict around Japan. NATO contains a multi-lateral framework to (ostensibly) discuss use of nuclear weapons for NATO's defense. The U.S.-Japan alliance has no such consultation procedure beyond the prior consultation notes which apply only to the introduction of nuclear weapons into Japan.

Since Japan enjoys a geostrategic environment different from the more land-oriented European theater, Tokyo has been able to maintain the American nuclear guarantee at sea and in the United States. Extended nuclear deterrence for Japan has not required the stationing of land-based missiles inside Japan. In fact, the United States may maintain greater crisis stability by keeping them offshore and at sea and essentially invulnerable to attack. The U.S. nuclear guarantee is made credible by its strong declaratory policy to defend Japan from attack, its commitment to survivable central strategic nuclear systems and its conventional theater options on Guam, on aircraft carriers, on submarines and on surface ships. Deterrence does not necessarily require the presence of nuclear weapons inside Japan; nor do Japan's three nonnuclear principles threaten the credibility of the U.S. extended nuclear guarantee to Japan.

Since the 1991 withdrawal of U.S. nuclear weapons from U.S. surface ships, the United States has reaffirmed its policy of no nuclear weapons on surface ships in DoD statements and in Congressional testimony on the implementation of the 1991 Presidential Nuclear Initiative (PNI). The United States later reaffirmed such a posture in the 2010, 2018, and 2022 Nuclear Posture Reviews (NPR), noting that all tactical naval nuclear weapons had been removed and retired and that the U.S. Navy only deploys nuclear weapons of any kind on SSBNs.[15]

In the *2022 Nuclear Posture Review*, the United States pledged to cancel the nuclear-armed Sea-Launched Cruise Missile (SLCM-N) program.

> "The 2018 NPR introduced SLCM-N and the W76-2 to supplement the existing nuclear program of record in order to strengthen deterrence of limited nuclear use in a regional conflict. We … concluded that the W76-2 currently provides an important means to deter limited nuclear use … (and that the) SLCM-N was no longer necessary given the deterrence contribution of the W76-2, uncertainty regarding whether SLCM-N on its own would provide leverage to negotiate arms control limits on Russia's NSNW, and the estimated cost of SLCM-N…"[16] [17]

But more recently, U.S. lawmakers have debated the merits of a proposed "nuclear-armed sea-launched cruise missile (SLCM-N)," a weapon that was first proposed during the first Trump Administration. "A United States Navy official told lawmakers that the SLCM-N would be one of the service's top three warfighting priorities. The missile could be launched from the service's Virginia-class fast attack submarines (SSNs)."[18] If approved, the SLCM-N would be the first such nuclear weapon deployed on U.S.

SSNs since the end of the Cold War. Should the SLCM-N be deployed, the 'NCND' policy would become more relevant internationally but, until then, the United States will likely not amend its current posture that the surface fleet is free of nuclear weapons.

Japan's Nuclear Weapons Policy is Evolutionary, Not Revolutionary

Prime Minister Takaichi's statement that Japan might allow the introduction of nuclear weapons involves little change to U.S. or Japanese military posture. U.S. SSBNs do not visit Japanese ports. And although U.S. policy will continue to defend its 'NCND' policy regarding its surface fleet, grounded in international customary law, U.S. surface vessels are unlikely to include tactical nuclear weapons anytime soon. Japan's clever acceptance of U.S. NCND policy will likely continue, therefore, without precipitating much internal Japanese friction. Therefore, Takaichi's statement likely changes little currently and involves no change in U.S. or Japanese military posture for the immediate future. It is more of a public affirmation of U.S. extended nuclear weapons policy but lays the intellectual groundwork for stationing U.S. nuclear weapons on Japanese territory sometime in the more distant future, should the situation in East Asia worsen.

While adhering to three nonnuclear principles and calling for nuclear disarmament, Japan has not renounced the utility of nuclear deterrence. Neither has Japan renounced a right to build Japanese nuclear forces. Japan sought an extended nuclear deterrent from the United States and supports U.S. global and theater nuclear strategy. The objective, as in Europe, is to prevent war, deter conventional and nuclear attack and check Chinese and North Korean political-military intimidation. Currently, Japan keeps the U.S. deterrent offshore and relies on U.S. strategy while approving of the presence of U.S. nuclear-capable assets in the region.

Japan's Rather Japanese Nuclear Strategy

Through clever design, Japanese "nuclear strategy" includes the following:

1. Maintain the three nonnuclear principles of Japan, call for nuclear disarmament, but note the worsening situation surrounding Japan.

2. Maintain the U.S. extended nuclear guarantee and support the presence of U.S. nuclear assets in the region (but keep them offshore currently).

3. Maintain the credibility of the U.S. nuclear guarantee through defense cooperation, support of U.S. theater strategy, host nation support, coordinated conventional defense planning, an American serviceman presence and political-economic interdependence.

4. Construct a useful ambiguity over the introduction of nuclear weapons 'into' Japan and do not press the United States over this issue.

5. Build capable conventional defenses to raise the nuclear and conventional threshold.

6. Preserve the legal and intellectual option in Japan for development of "defensive nuclear weapons".

7. Maintain the nuclear fuel, engineering, and technical capability to build nuclear weapons and mate them to a version of their three-stage space launch vehicles.

Even though Japan does not explicitly associate itself with U.S. nuclear strategy, it does accept the utility of deterrence and does not want to see its security separated from the American nuclear umbrella. Japanese "existential deterrence" and conventional defense rest on maintaining a close strategic relationship with the United States and on a continuing commitment from Washington to the East Asian region.

Japan's strategy is carefully constructed, consistent with international principles of self-defense, moving in concert with the evolving attitudes of the Japanese people, and sadly likely to be perceived by the Japanese people as inevitable and just, given the increasing nuclear belligerence of the PRC and DPRK. Japan going nuclear may be the inevitable future of the United States' inability to restrain the never-ending truculence of the now totalitarian states of China and North Korea, both of which have decided unambiguously to become global nuclear powers.

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Strategic Thought and the American Way of War

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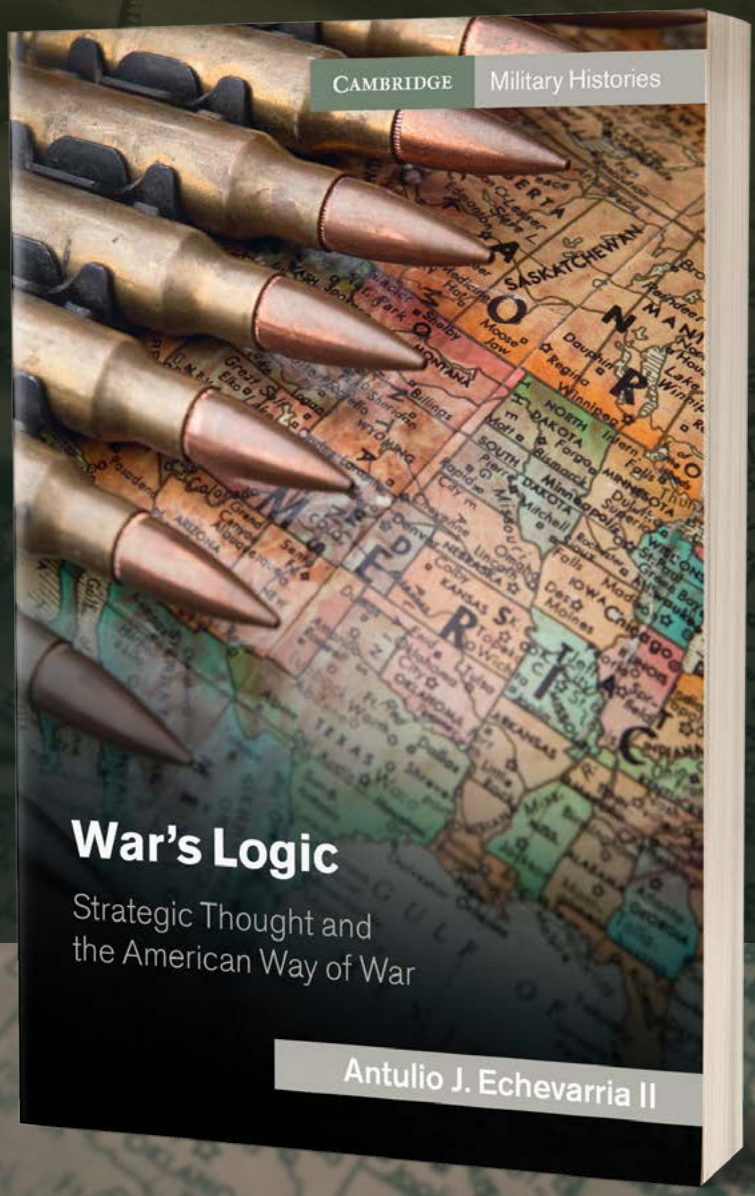

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Military Leadership In the 18th Century: Lessons for Strategic Leadership, Strategy, and Statesmanship Today

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Disclaimer: The views expressed in this article reflect the personal opinions of the author alone and do not necessarily reflect the official views of the U.S. Department of the Army, Department of War, or any other U.S. government entity.

Introduction

Twenty-first century leaders in a variety of military profession specialties require a purposeful and deliberate leadership framework to be effective in this era of geopolitical, technological complexity, and limited peace. Leadership is the enduring ability to align means with strategic ends by motivating subordinates and adapting to changing political, technological, and operational conditions, while deliberately adapting one's leadership style and skills to meet the shifting character of war. In this article the author argues that the nature and character of war are inextricably linked to the nature and character of leadership. The nature of war remains constant—rooted in violence, friction, and uncertainty—and the character of warfare evolves as these external factors shift. The nature of leadership, enduring in its principles, like the nature of war, is just the same as it was over 250 years ago. While the nature of leadership is the ability to effectively link means to strategic goals by motivating subordinates and remain adaptable to political and operational changes, the character of war is a manifestation of war's conduct in a specific historical context, influenced by technological innovations, political dynamics, social values, economic conditions, and cultural norms. This article argues that as the character of war evolves, the character of leadership, consisting of leadership style and skills, must also be deliberately developed and changed in response. Using a historical case study, this article demonstrates how leadership style, strategy-making, and statesmanship can deliberately shape the outcome of war.

This author advances three core assertions for leadership during the American Revolution which are just as relevant today: 1) Leadership style must align with organizational goals and the strategic context; 2) Intangible leadership skills remain central despite technological change; and 3) Leaders must remain flexible in pursuit of strategic goals.[1] This article first examines a historical case study of NY-NJ Campaign of 1776; second, it analyzes the leadership styles and strategies of American General George Washington and British General William Howe; third, it asserts why a leadership framework consisting of leadership style, strategy-making, statesmanship, and civil-military dialogue is well-suited for today's era of renewed major-power rivalry.

The main differences in leadership challenges between the 18th century and the 21st century are the proliferation of new technologies and exponentially greater variability of inputs, as well as increased demand for outputs for information and military decision-making today. This article provides a perspective on a sensible and adaptable leadership framework model for any defense professional. This author does not suggest that defense professionals should already possess particular fixed expectations of leadership style and skills but instead argues in favor of continuous development of leadership character using a leadership framework to best prepare for the complexity and uncertainty in military and global affairs to come.

The American Revolution[2] comprised both conventional and irregular warfare methods and provides perspective on how the nature of leadership remains constant, the style of leadership is recognizably distinct, and the importance of honing effective leadership skills. This article aims to not only replay a meaningful and interesting segment of Anglo-American history but also enlighten military leaders, strategists, and policymakers in today's renewed era of major-power rivalry.

The character of leadership has significantly changed between the American Revolution and today, just as the character of war has, in that all leadership levels within the military and defense consortium in the 21st century are expected to equip themselves with an understanding of constant leadership "renewal", technological innovation, rapid problem solving, and critical thinking to swiftly and effectively carry out the political objectives of civilian national leaders and policymakers.[3]

What are priorities for leadership style and skills necessary to lead military units in the current era of renewed major-power rivalry and in preparation for future large scale warfare? What is the future of large scale warfare? Today's major-power rivalry and battlefields consist of all sorts of threat vectors we need to consider, and the geopolitical world is not getting any more manageable. These questions are not only thought-provoking but essential to provide better understanding and clarity to enable the right military leader in the right context.

Historical Background of The Revolution

The turning point in the NY-NJ Campaign of 1776 hinged on the balance between preservation and perseverance. General George Washington was looking at a dismal end of the American Revolution (the Revolution) in the winter of 1776, until he was able to effectively change military strategy during the interlude between the Battles of Long Island and Trenton. British Commander-In-Chief General William Howe's indecisive leadership and flawed military strategy during the final phases of the Battle of Long Island resulted in a tactical win but strategic loss that in turn opened the door for General Washington's decisive leadership and effective pivot in military strategy. When the American cause was looking particularly grim, Washington led a desperate and strategically consequential attack at Trenton, NJ. These pivotal moments for General Howe, at the Battle of Long Island, and General Washington, at the Battle of Trenton, changed the direction of war in favor of the Americans during the NY-NJ Campaign of 1776.

The Revolution provides a case study for an atypical insurgency with elements of conventional and irregular warfare methods in the post-Westphalian age. American revolutionaries during the Revolution comprised bourgeoise-class separatists with a mixture of limited professional military arms experience and grassroots civilian enlisted militiamen. A key advantage the Americans held over the British in 1776 was that British experiences in centuries of war leading up to the Revolution were against "foreign states", not this hybrid-culture enemy of professional-guerrilla troops with a unique "Alien" appreciation for freedom, liberty, and happiness.[4] The British generals overall had more military command experience, but the American generals had gained some experience serving as auxiliary commanders in fighting wars with the British, most recently during French and Indian Wars. At the Battle of Long Island, the British initially demonstrated they were able to tactically overrun American colonists due to the disparity in manpower, resources, and military strategy.[5]

General Howe's leadership style was suitable for the military he led and for his strategy of annihilation. It resulted in tactical success but would lead to long-term strategy failure. General Washington and his army would prove themselves at the Battle of Trenton. British military style of warfare included a great appreciation and understanding of irregular warfare; however, the method of warfare at the time of the Revolution, "broke with European practice by placing greater reliance on mobility and the terror of bayonet charges."[6]

General Washington's leadership style fit the American separatist military. Although his initial tactical performance was poor, his strategic decision-making skills better aligned with American political and military objectives of the long war of attrition necessary to achieve American independence. General Howe's flawed strategic decision-making prevented the British from decisively ending the American uprising at the Battle of Long Island and during the NY-NJ Campaign of 1776. This contrast between Washington and Howe provides the basis for analyzing how leadership character, consisting of style and skills, were the differentiator of outcomes during an important segment of the Revolution.

Leadership Style Analysis

In the late 18th century, the British had a professional standing military while the Americans were "an officer corps struggling to survive a volatile social and political environment suspicious of military professionalism."[7] Both generals demonstrated the qualities of a successful leader, but their leadership styles were different. Leadership analysis for General Washington and General Howe is best understood through two well-established leadership styles—transformational and transactional leadership.[8] General Washington led with transformational leadership—"leader behaviors that transform and inspire followers to perform beyond expectations while transcending self-interest for the good of the organization."[9] General Howe's transactional leadership style involves "contingent reinforcement…followers are motivated by the leaders' promises, praise, and regards, or negative feedback, reproof, threats, or disciplinary actions correct them."[10] While General Washington and General Howe differed in leadership styles, their styles were well matched for the militaries they commanded.

Strategy Analysis

The Revolutionary War favored Washington's leadership style for the military that he commanded and strategy[11] he eventually adopted during the NY-NJ Campaign. British strategy led by General Howe is best characterized by Clausewitz, who described war of annihilation and positional warfare as effective military strategy based on the large armies he witnessed during the Napoleonic Wars of the early 19th Century. Alternatively, Clausewitz also described in his treatise, On War, four principles of a "Peoples War"[12] which clearly represents the Revolutionaries' method of waging war. General Howe and the British, with their organized larger force, employed a war of annihilation and positional warfare versus General Washington, who eventually changed course in strategy between the Battles of Long Island and the Battle of Trenton. Washington decided to use asymmetric advantage, a keystone to revolutionary and guerrilla warfare, focusing his combat, personnel, and logistics towards a strategy of attrition and mobile warfare. This strategy framework, depicted in Table 1 below, provides the basis for further analysis during the Battles of Long Island and Trenton.

Strategy *Operational Variables*	**General Washington (Guerilla/Mobile War-War of Attrition)**	**General Howe (Large Maneuver/ Positional War-War of Annihilation)**
1. Goal	Attrition	Annihilation
2. Combat	Indirect / Fabian tactics	Direct / Decisive tactics
3. Personnel	Less uniform and professionalized; limit losses and commit troops when there are overwhelming odds	Uniform and professionalized; mass mobilization and commitment of troops
4. Logistics	Battlefield recovery	Heavy reliance on large amounts of logistics and resources

Table 1 - American and British Strategy Framework During the NY-NJ Campaign of 1776

Key Decision Points

There are two key decisions made by General Howe at the Battle of Long Island and General Washington at the Battle of Trenton. The first key decision that resulted in British failure of annihilation strategy was when General Howe decided to not pursue and further inflict casualties on the colonists during General Washington's failed defensive stand at Brooklyn Heights on Long Island. Clausewitz would determine this was a failure of decisive action for Howe and in a more modern sense this would have been a failure to consolidate gains. The second key decision during the battles in the NY-NJ campaign was in Washington's plan to indirectly attack General Howe and the British by attacking Hessian-controlled Trenton, NJ. Washington, considering the British focus on winter quartering, mounted a three-pronged envelopment attack on Hessian forces in a combination of guerilla and mobile warfare strategy. This section on leadership and strategy analysis demonstrates that, while effective leadership style and tactical achievements are important, leadership skills in strategy-making, statesmanship, and civil-military dialogue are essential to successfully aligning military operations with political objectives.

Renewed Major-power Rivalry

What General Washington and General Howe remind us of today is the importance of aligning the right leadership style and skills with the situation. Leadership will always be a fundamental and necessary human endeavor. The character of leadership exhibited by Washington was a pivotal deciding factor for a successful American Revolution. The character of leadership is relevant today but requires an adjusted and calibrated framework for the culture and mission of any organization, just as during the American Revolution.

Renewed Major-power Rivalry Leadership Style

Presidential Medal of Freedom recipient Dr. John Gardner writes about the concept of leadership stating, "Leaders need not be renewers. They can lead people down old paths, using old slogans, toward old objectives. Sometimes that is appropriate. But the world changes with disconcerting swiftness. Too often the old paths are blocked and the old solutions no longer solve anything." One clear distinction between the two American revolution leaders was their leadership style. General Washington's transformational leadership style "renews" while General Howe's transactional leadership "accepts and works within the structure it is."[13]

A leader advances by building on a solid foundation of leadership principles. It is the style of leader and acquired leadership skills, unique to each leader, that determines the right leader for the right context. It is therefore now during this "lull" period between great wars when military professionals ought to experiment and hone their leadership style to deliver our national leaders and policymakers an unmatched capacity to win in future unforeseen conflict. How do we determine the right leader in the right context?[14] What leadership style and skills are required to lead in the 21st Century? What institutional knowledge and first-hand operational experience are required to lead effectively in the next major war? After setting a foundation of continuous military study in depth, width, and context, how do we best prepare for the future of war?[15]

Leadership in this era of renewed major-power rivalry requires problem solving skills and critical thinking. Such rapid problem solving and critical thinking skills begin with the study of military history and international relations through reading and writing about subject matter such as Strategic Studies, Military Innovation, and Grand Strategy that should be made available to all military professionals, but chiefly mid-level career military professionals. Reading and writing help to enhance a professional understanding of one's own profession.[16] Whether it be extemporaneous note taking or official publication writing, the utility in putting thoughts into words enhances problem solving and critical thinking.

Renewed Major-power Rivalry Leadership Skill 1: Strategy-making

American political scientist and international relations scholar Dr. Richard Betts provides clear strategy-making tenets that remain salient guideposts for military planners and strategists. Dr. Betts writes, "If a strategist's logic proves faulty in selecting means appropriate to ends, the fault can usually be attributed to imperfect information. If the problem is that the ends are wrong, we are in the realm of policy and values, not strategy."[17] For strategy-making today Dr. Betts also reminds us that, "Strategy fails when some link in the planned chain of cause and effect from low-level tactics to high-level political outcomes is broken, when military objectives come to be pursued for their own sake without reference to their political effect…" and "strategy is the essential ingredient for making war either politically effective or morally tenable."[18][19] Despite failing to destroy Washington's forces at Long Island, Howe's misaligned tactics toward annihilation underscore Betts' point that tactics divorced from political aims become futile. In comparison, Washington's "low-level" tactical failures early in the Revolution were redeemed by strategic adaptation to best align tactics necessary to achieve political aims. In today's increasingly interconnected and complex world, rapid pace and multiple political dilemmas occurring simultaneously, Dr. Betts' tenets on strategy-making are more important than ever for military practitioners to support and inform civilian national leadership.

Dr. Stephen Biddle argues that irregular warfare can exist in regular warfare, or traditional interstate conventional warfare, and elements of conventional warfare can exist in irregular warfare.[20] The fact is that interstate, state versus non-state actors, civil wars and revolutionary wars have and will continue to involve elements of the conflict continuum (regular through irregular warfare spectrum). Aside from active combat settings where opposite sides of any conflict or crisis engage in military activity resulting in casualties, there is another justification for irregular warfare: the non-kinetic realm of instruments of power being used for interstate competition.[21] In large part major powers' national resource consumption today are at the core of renewed major-power rivalry for conducting irregular warfare. Renewed major-power rivalry is not only a contest of will but also strategy and policy centered around deterrence, compellence, and strategic disruption.[22]

Just as Washington aligned his tactics and strategy of attrition under political aims, leaders today should ensure that military actions in never-before-seen locations and domains (e.g., the Arctic and space) contribute to strategic objectives and political aims rather than isolated tactical gains. Howe's persistent ineffective leadership failed to achieve political goals, while Washington succeeded by adapting his organization and strategy. During the Revolutionary War, Washington emerged as the more effective strategic leader not because of superior resources or experience, but because of his ability to adapt his leadership style, align strategy with political objectives, and exemplify statesmanship.

Renewed Major-power Rivalry Leadership Skill 2: Statesmanship & Civilian-Military Dialogue

In distinguishing between a statesman and a soldier, British historian General J.F.C. Fuller notes a perennial truth that "To direct major campaigns required great insight into the political objectives of the state."[23] Clausewitz goes further on this point, "…but he must not cease to be a general. On the one hand, he is aware of the entire political situation; on the other, he knows exactly how much he can achieve with the means at his disposal."[24] Although both military leaders possessed a leadership style well suited for the militaries they commanded, General Washington would prove to be a more effective statesman and strategist than the soldier and tactically competent General Howe—a key factor in the outcome of the NY-NJ Campaign.

More than ever before it is crucial that military practitioners understand national policies and that national policymakers stay attuned to developments at the operational and tactical levels of military activity. Dr. Betts again reminds us that following the "sequence of policy, strategy, and operations" in order does not need to be so and that feedback from lower levels can inform the higher as well.[25] This is an important connection, to enable lower-level military leaders to gain direct insights into what the nation, at the most executive levels of government, expects from them and also to allow for bottom-up feedback, including information on how policies are actually being implemented in practice or on the ground. Howe's strategic miscalculation in continuing to execute a campaign of annihilation and positional warfare against Washington's hybrid regular-militia Continental army, which had pivoted to a strategy of attrition and mobile warfare, changed the course of the Revolution in favor of the Americans. One of the main political objectives during The Revolution for Washington and Howe was to garner public support. Washington and the American War Council understood this point; however, Howe and the British monarchy were not in agreement that public support was to be valued as much as the strategy of annihilation of American revolutionary forces.[26]

Disseminated civilian-military dialogue and bottom-up feedback from information gathered on deployments, overseas training, and multinational exercises is essential, not just to capture and inform national policy and decision makers, but also to spur technological innovation, engender constant renewal, and foster rapid problem solving and critical thinking at all levels of government simultaneously. Civilian-military coordination and synchronization is more important than ever to reconcile the ever-present political-military issue of "lead times for change in military

capabilities are long, while political objectives can change quickly."[27]

Conclusion

During the Revolutionary War Congress chose General Washington to be the right leader to lead America towards self-determination because of his transformational leadership style, flexibility in devising sound strategy, and statesmanship competencies. General Washington did not have the professional training and experience that General Howe possessed at the start of the NY-NJ Campaign. However, Washington made up for this lack of experience by learning through failure and listening to his most trusted military advisors to ensure the technology of his time, limited resources at his disposal, and the right tactics were employed to leverage battlefield success for political objectives.

General Washington had the completely opposite problem when it came to resources and technological capabilities that highly resourced and modernized contemporary militaries possess. Major status quo powers during renewed major-power rivalry will need to deal with the challenge of being inundated with new technology and capability like never before. While career and aspiring strategists must understand the actual and potential contribution of technology to modern warfare, it is no less vital for them to study the environment in which this technology operates. In this age of advanced technology, there is a natural tendency to overestimate the role of weapons and, as a result, to undervalue the non-tangible dimensions of leadership, strategy, and makings of war.[28]

While the nature of leadership as well as institutional, political, and technological context of leadership today may differ from 18th-century warfare, the alignment of strategy to political aims and adaptability of leadership character endure. The 21st century leadership framework proposed provides a workable recommendation and point of departure for military and civilian leaders to help understand and act in accordance with the changes to the character of war as well as rapidly changing technology, shifting complex geopolitical environment, and limited peace for renewed major-power rivalry.

The NY-NJ Campaign of 1776 offers enduring lessons on the interplay between the character of war and the character of leadership. By applying an analytical framework focused on leadership style, strategy-making, statesmanship skills and civil-military relation skills, this article highlights three core insights relevant to both historical and modern military contexts: 1) Leadership style must align with organizational goals and the strategic context; 2) Intangible leadership skills remain central despite technological change; and 3) Leaders must remain flexible in pursuit of strategic goals. In addition to highlighting these core concepts, this article extracts two mainstay principles for any leader, at any time, in any context: A leadership style tailored to circumstances and conditions is necessary to motivate and accomplish objectives for the organization's success; and a winnable strategy is one that is not only iterative and exploratory but also effective in aligning resources to the military environment with cross-cutting policy objectives in mind.

References

[1] Leadership could be winnowed down to what U.S. statesman and leadership professional Dr. John Gardner once wrote as "the process of persuasion or example by which an individual (or leadership team) induces a group to pursue objectives held by the leader or shared by the leader and his or her followers."; John W. Gardner, On Leadership: With a Preface to the Paperback Edition (New York: Free Press, 1993), 1.

[2] The term revolutionary war is best defined as indirect engagement over direct engagement to gain military and political goals from an oppressive government.

[3] John W. Gardner, On Leadership: With a Preface to the Paperback Edition (New York: Free Press, 1993), 121.

[4] Allan Ramsay, "Letters on the Present Disturbances in Great Britain and Her American Provinces." (Reprinted, 1777), https://jstor.org/stable/60236392, 20.

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[6] Andrew Jackson O'Shaughnessy, The Men Who Lost America: British Leadership, the American Revolution, and the Fate of the Empire (Yale University Press, 2014), 7.

[7] Christopher Wingate, "Military Professionalism and the Early American Officer Corps 1789-1796," Art of War Papers, 2013, https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Portals/7/combat-studies-institute/csi-books/MilitaryProfessionalism.pdf, 26.

[8] Bruce J. Avolio, Full Range Leadership Development (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2011).

[9] Todd Weber, Fred Walumbwa, and Bruce Avolio, Leadership: Current Theories, Research, and Future Directions, 2009, https://my.carolinau.edu/ICS/icsfs/2_Eagly_(2005).pdf?target=66fa6d3b-0a74-4a66-99f8-0461d3b6668d, 423.

[10] Bernard M Bass and Paul Steidlmeier, "Ethics, Character, and Authentic Transformational Leadership Behavior," The Leadership Quarterly 10, no. 2 (1999): 181–217, https://doi.org/10.1016/s1048-9843(99)00016-8, 184.

[11] Strategy for this analysis can best be defined as, "how to use force to achieve political goals—sits at the intersection of the political and the military spheres."; Risa Brooks, "Paradoxes of Professionalism: Rethinking Civil-Military Relations in the United States," MIT Press Direct, 2020, https://direct.mit.edu/isec/article/44/4/7/12253/Paradoxes-of-Professionalism-Rethinking-Civil, 35.

[12] "1) War must be fought in the interior of the country; 2) It must not be decided by a single stroke; 3) The theater of operations must be fairly large; 4) The national character must be suited to that type of war."; Carl von Clausewitz, Michael Howard, and Peter Paret, On Victory and Defeat: A Princeton Shorts Selection from On War (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2011), Chapter 26.

[13] John W. Gardner, On Leadership: With a Preface to the Paperback Edition (New York: Free Press, 1993), 122.

[14] Ibid., 7.

[15] Michael Howard, "The Use and Abuse of Military History," The RUSI Journal 138, no. 1 (February 1993): 26–30, https://doi.org/10.1080/03071849308445676, 29.

[16] Shane R. Reeves, "Why Study War? Military Readiness's Intellectual Dimension - Modern War Institute," Modern War Institute -, June 17, 2025, https://mwi.westpoint.edu/why-study-war-military-readinesss-intellectual-dimension/.

[17] Richard K. Betts, "Is Strategy an Illusion?" International Security 25, no. 2 (2000): 5–50, http://www.jstor.org/stable/2626752, 13.

[18] Ibid., 5.

[19] Ibid., 7.

[20] Stephen D. Biddle, Nonstate Warfare: The Military Methods of Guerillas, Warlords, and Militias (Princeton, NJ: Princeton

University Press, 2021), 6-7.

[21] Instruments of power: "DIMEFL" Diplomatic-Information-Military-Economic-Financial-Legal.

[22] While much has been written about the military's role in responding to crisis or conflict, there is little agreement as to the military's role in proactively disrupting U.S. adversaries short of war in renewed major-power rivalry. US naval military analyst Toshi Yoshihara proposes an Allied or major status quos powers strategic disruption strategy that intentionally allows adversary state powers to expand further while simultaneously exploiting their critical vulnerabilities. There are disruptive approaches that can enable strategic national gains and military advantage during competition that include efforts to impose costs, create dilemmas, and target adversary vulnerabilities. In sum, deterrence, compellence, and strategic disruption are relevant concepts of strategy for renewed major-power rivalry-era military practitioners and are useful in understanding the basis for any status quos power policy and strategy.

[23] Leadership in the American Revolution: Papers Presented at the Third Symposium, May 9 and 10, 1974 (Washington: Library of Congress, 1974), 91.

[24] Carl von Clausewitz, Michael Howard, and Peter Paret, On Victory and Defeat: A Princeton Shorts Selection from On War (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2011), 111-112.

[25] Richard K. Betts, "Is Strategy an Illusion?" International Security 25, no. 2 (2000): 5–50, http://www.jstor.org/stable/2626752, 39.

[26] Ibid., 3.

[27] Ibid., 39.

[28] Dr. Michael Mendel advocates the study of renowned strategists like Carl von Clausewitz and Sun Tzu as a way to "identify the central tenets of warfare" and not treat technology as a standalone panacea all to itself for success in warfare; Michael Handel, Masters of War: Classical Strategic Thought, Taylor & Francis Group, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 2001), https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/mono/10.4324/9780203017746/masters-war-michael-handel, 17.

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