

Towards A Theory of Strategy: Art Lykke and the Army War College Strategy Model

by
H. Richard Yarger

Gregory D. Foster argued in a *Washington Quarterly* article that there is no official or accepted general theory of strategy in the United States. In fact, he notes that as a people Americans seem to regard theorizing in general as a futile intellectual exercise. If one were to construct such a theory, Foster continues, it should incorporate those elements found in any complete theory: essential terminology and definitions; an explanation of the assumptions and premises underlying the theory; substantive propositions translated into testable hypothesis; and methods that can be used to test the hypotheses and modify the theory as appropriate.¹ Foster may have this theory thing right. There is little evidence that collectively as a nation there is any agreement on just what constitutes a theory of strategy. This is very unfortunate because the pieces for a good theory of strategy have been laying around the U.S. Army War College for years--although sometimes hard to identify amongst all the intellectual clutter. Arthur F. Lykke, Jr.'s Army War College strategy model, with its ends, ways, and means, is the centerpiece of this theory.² The theory is quite simple, but it often appears unduly complex as a result of confusion over terminology and definitions and the underlying assumptions and premises.

One sees the term strategy misapplied often. There is a tendency to use it as a general term for a plan, concept, course of action, or "idea" of a direction in which to proceed. Such use is inappropriate. Strategy is the domain of the senior leader at the higher echelons of the state, the military, business corporations, or other institutions. Henry Eccles describes strategy as "... the comprehensive direction of power to control situations and areas in order to attain objectives."³ His definition captures much of the essence of strategy. It is comprehensive, it provides direction, its purpose is control, and it is fundamentally concerned with the application of power.⁴ Strategy as used in the Army War College curriculum focuses on the nation-state and the use of the elements of power to serve state interests. In this context, strategy is the employment of the instruments (elements) of power (political/diplomatic, economic, military, and informational) to achieve the political objectives of the state in cooperation or in competition with other actors pursuing their own objectives.⁵

The underlying assumption of strategy from a national perspective is that states and other competitive entities have interests that they will pursue to the best of their abilities. Interests are desired end states such as survival, economic well-being, and enduring national values. The national elements of power are the resources used to promote or advance national interests. Strategy is the pursuit, protection, or advancement of these interests through the application of the instruments of power. Strategy is fundamentally a choice; it reflects a preference for a future state or condition. In doing so, strategy confronts adversaries and some things simply remain beyond control or unforeseen.⁶

Strategy is all about how (way or concept) leadership will use the power (means or resources) available to the state to exercise control over sets of circumstances and geographic locations to achieve objectives (ends) that support state interests. Strategy provides direction for the coercive or persuasive use of this power to achieve specified objectives. This direction is by nature proactive. It seeks to control the environment as opposed to reacting to it. Strategy is not crisis management. It is its antithesis. Crisis management occurs when there is no strategy or the strategy fails. Thus, the first premise of a theory of strategy is that strategy is proactive and anticipatory.⁷

A second premise of a theory of strategy is that the strategist must know what is to be accomplished--that is, he must know the end state that he is trying to achieve. Only by analyzing and understanding the desired end state in the context of the internal and external environment can the strategist develop appropriate objectives leading to the desired end state.

A third premise of a theory of strategy is that the strategy must identify an appropriate balance among the objectives sought, the methods to pursue the objectives, and the resources available. In formulating a strategy the ends, ways, and means are part of an integral whole and if one is discussing a strategy at the national (grand)level with a national level end, the ways and means would similarly refer to national level concepts and resources. That is ends, ways, and means must be consistent. Thus a National Security Strategy end could be supported by concepts based on all the instruments of power and the associated resources. For the military element of power, the National Military Strategy would identify appropriate ends for the military to be accomplished through national military concepts with national military resources. In a similar manner a Theater or Regional Commander in Chief (CINC) would have specific theater level objectives for which he would develop theater concepts and use resources allocated to his theater. In some cases these might include other than military instruments of power if those resources are available. The levels of strategy are distinct, but interrelated because of the hierarchical and comprehensive nature of strategy.

A fourth premise of strategy is that political purpose must dominate all strategy; thus, Clausewitz' famous dictum, "War is merely the continuation of policy by other means."⁸ Political purpose is stated in policy. Policy is the expression of the desired end state sought by the government. In its finest form it is clear articulation of guidance for the employment of the instruments of power towards the attainment of one or more end states. In practice it tends to be much vaguer. Nonetheless policy dominates strategy by its articulation of the end state and its guidance. The analysis of the end state and guidance yields objectives leading to the desired end state. Objectives provide purpose, focus, and justification for the actions embodied in a strategy.⁹ National strategy is concerned with a hierarchy of objectives that is determined by the political purpose of the state. Policy insures that strategy pursues appropriate aims.

A fifth premise is that strategy is hierarchical. Foster argues that true strategy is the purview of the leader and is a "weltanschauung" (world view) that represents both

national consensus and comprehensive direction. In the cosmic scheme of things Foster may well be right, but reality requires more than a “weltanschauung.” Political leadership insures and maintains its control and influence through the hierarchical nature of state strategy. Strategy cascades from the national level down to the lower levels. Generally strategy emerges at the top as a consequence of policy statements and a stated National Security Strategy (sometimes referred to as Grand Strategy). National Security Strategy lays out broad objectives and direction for the use of all the instruments of power. From this National Security Strategy the major activities and departments develop subordinate strategies. For the military this is the National Military Strategy. In turn, the National Military Strategy leads to lower strategies appropriate to the various levels of war.

The U.S. Army War College (in consonance with Joint Pub 1-02) defines the levels of strategy within the state as:

National Security Strategy (also referred to as Grand Strategy and National Strategy). The art and science of developing, applying and coordinating the instruments of national power (diplomatic, economic, military, and informational) to achieve objectives that contribute to national security (Joint Pub 1-02).

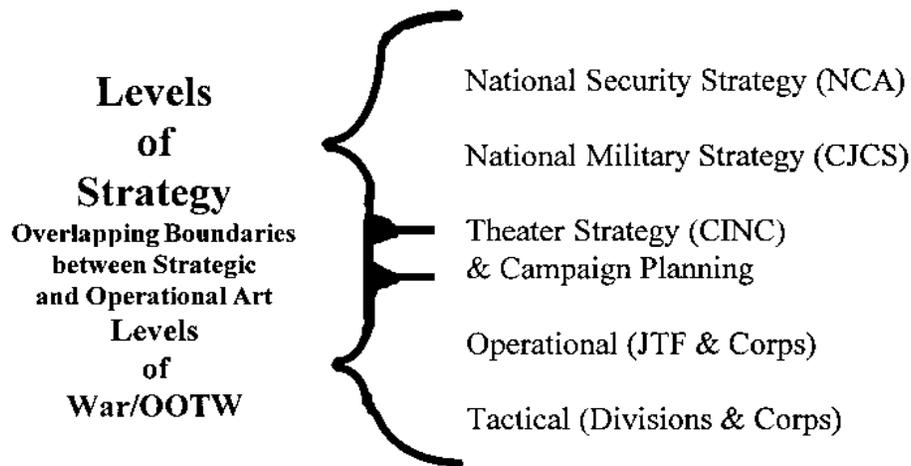
National Military Strategy. The art and science of distributing and applying military power to attain national objectives in peace and war (Joint Pub 1-02).

Theater Strategy. The art and science of developing integrated strategic concepts and courses of action directed toward securing the objectives of national and alliance or coalition security policy and strategy by the use of force, threatened use of force, or operations not involving the use of force within a theater (Joint Pub 1-02).

The hierarchical nature of strategy facilitates span of control. It represents a logical means of delegating responsibility and authority among senior leadership. It also suggests that if strategy consists of objectives, concepts, and resources each should be appropriate to the level of strategy and consistent with one another. Thus strategy at the national military level should articulate military objectives at the national level and express the concepts and resources in terms appropriate to the national level for the specified objective.

At some level planning and action fall below the strategic threshold. Under the National Military Strategy the CINCs develop Theater Strategy and subsequent campaign plans. At this juncture the line between strategy and planning merges with campaign planning that may be either at the theater strategic level or in the realm of Operational Art. Graphically the relationship between strategy and the levels of war appear as:

Strategic and Operational Art

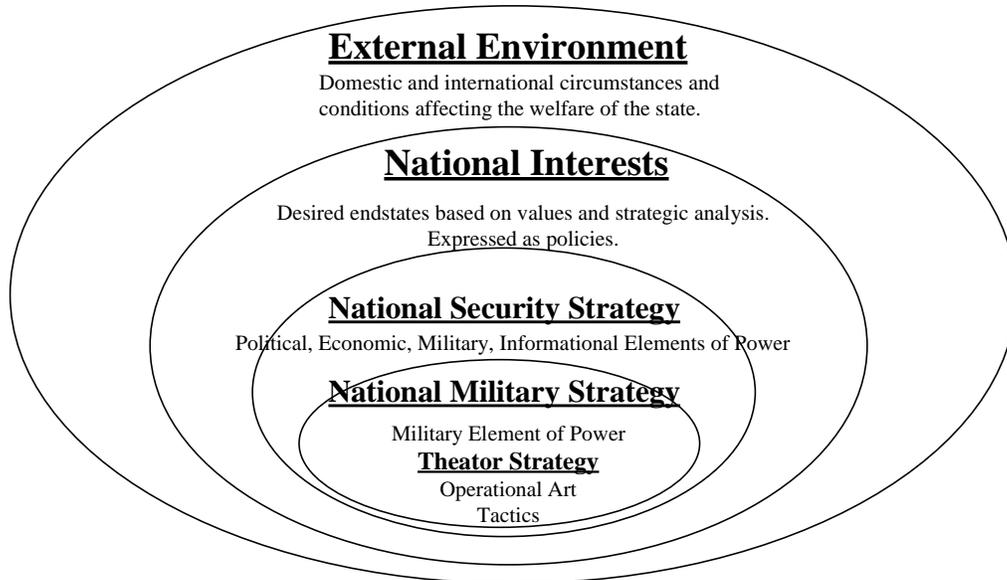


10

Strategy differs from operational art and tactics in functional, temporal, and geographic aspects. Functionally and temporally, tactics is the domain of battles, engagements of relative short duration. Operational art is the domain of the campaign, a series of battles occurring over a longer period of time. Strategy is the domain of war which encompasses the protracted level of conflict among nations, armed or unarmed. Tactics concerns itself with the parts or pieces, operational art with the combination of the pieces, and strategy with the combinations of combinations. Geographically, tactics is narrowly defined, operational level is broader and more regional in orientation, and strategy is theater-wide, intercontinental, or global. It should also be noted that with the advances in transportation and communications there has been a spatial and temporal convergence of strategy, operational art, and tactics. Increasingly, events at the tactical level have strategic consequences.¹¹

A sixth premise is that strategy is comprehensive. That is to say, while the strategist may be devising a strategy from a particular perspective, he must consider the whole of the strategic environment in his analysis to arrive at a proper strategy to serve his purpose at his level. He is concerned with external and internal factors at all levels. On the other hand, in formulating a strategy, the strategist must also be cognizant that each aspect--objectives, concepts, and resources--has effects on the environment around him. Thus, the strategist must have a comprehensive knowledge of what else is happening and the potential first, second, third, etc., order effects of his own choices on the efforts of those above, below, and on his same level. The strategist's efforts must be fully integrated with the strategies or efforts of senior, co-equal, and subordinate elements. Strategists must think holistically--that is comprehensively. They must be cognizant of both the "big picture," their own institution's capabilities and resources, and the impact of their actions on the whole of the environment. Good strategy is never developed in isolation.

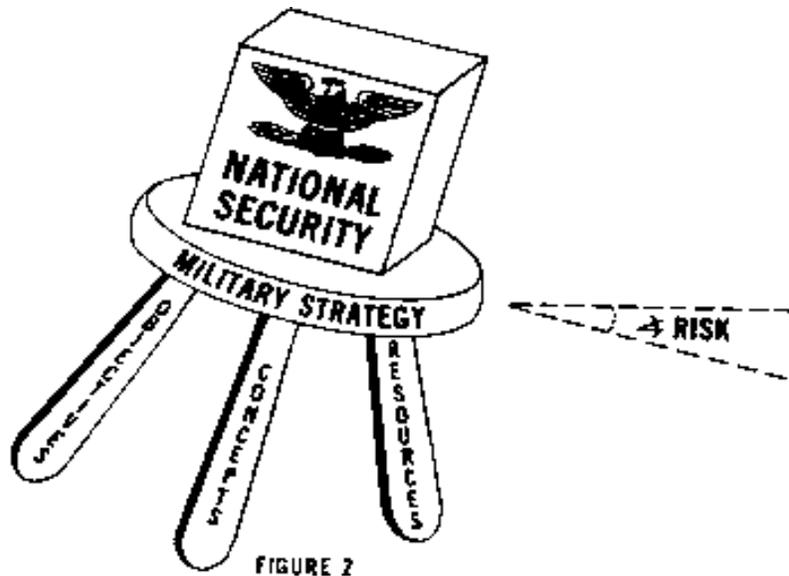
Comprehensiveness of Strategy



A seventh premise is that strategy is developed from a thorough analysis and knowledge of the strategic situation/environment. The purpose of this analysis is to highlight the internal and external factors that help define or may affect the specific objectives, concepts, and resources of the strategy.

The last premise of a theory of strategy is that some risk is inherent to all strategy and the best any strategy can offer is a favorable balance against failure. Failure can be either the failure to achieve one's own objectives and/or providing a significant advantage to one's adversaries.

Art Lykke gave coherent form to a theory of strategy with his articulation of the three-legged stool model of strategy which illustrated that strategy = ends + ways + means and if these were not in balance the assumption of greater risk.



In the Lykke proposition (model) the ends are “objectives,” the ways are the “concepts” for accomplishing the objectives, and the means are the “resources” for supporting the concepts. The stool tilts if the three legs are not kept in balance. If any leg is too short, the risk is too great and the strategy falls over.¹²

It should be evident that the model poses three key questions for strategists. What is to be done? How is it to be done? What resources are required to do it in this manner? Lykke argues that if any leg of the stool is out of balance then one accepts a corresponding risk unless one adjusts the legs. One might add resources, use a different concept, or change the objective. Or, one might decide to accept the risk. The theory is quite clear--a valid strategy must have an appropriate balance of objectives, concepts, and resources or its success is at greater risk.¹³ Lykke’s theory, like all good theory, does not necessarily provide a strategy. It is a paradigm that describes the questions to ask and the rules to follow. His strategic theory is supported by the underlying premises and assumptions above and its practice is facilitated by the sharing of common definitions and formats.

Art Lykke wrestled with his proposition for many years and taught thousands of Army War College students to use his model properly through definition and illustration. These definitions and illustrations are important because they provide the common understanding by which strategists communicate. They include:

Ends (objectives) explain “what” is to be accomplished. Ends are objectives that if accomplished create, or contribute to, the achievement of the desired end state at the level of strategy being analyzed and, ultimately, serve national interests. Ends are expressed with verbs (i.e., deter war, promote regional stability, destroy Iraqi armed forces).

Ways (strategic concepts/courses of action) explain “how” the ends are to be accomplished by the employment of resources. The concept must be explicit enough to provide planning guidance to those who must implement and resource it. Since ways convey action they often have a verb, but ways are statements of “how,” not “what” in relation to the objective of a strategy. Some confusion exists because the concept for higher strategy often defines the objectives of the next lower level of strategy. A simple test for a way is to ask “in order to do what?” That should lead to the real objective. Some concepts are so accepted that their names have been given to specific strategies (containment, forward defense, assured destruction, forward presence are illustrations). But note that in actual practice these strategies have specific objectives and forces associated with them and the concept is better developed than the short title suggests.

Means (resources) explain what specific resources are to be used in applying the concepts to accomplish the objectives and use no verb. Means can be tangible or intangible. Examples of tangible means include forces, people, equipment, money, and facilities. Intangible resources include things like “will,” courage, or intellect.

Risk explains the gap between what is to be achieved and the concepts and resources available to achieve the objective. Since there are never enough resources or a clever enough concept to assure 100% success in the competitive international environment, there is always some risk. The strategist seeks to minimize this risk through his development of the strategy--the balance of ends, ways, and means.

Ends, ways, and means often get confusing in the development or analysis of a specific strategy. The trick is to focus on the questions. Objectives will always answer the question of what one is trying to achieve. Concepts always explain “how” the resources will be used. Resources always explain what will be used to execute the concept. If the objective is “defend the United States (what?)”; “to develop, build, or establish a larger force” is a way (how?); and, “national manpower reserves, money, and training facilities” are examples of the means (resources to be used to support the “how”). The rule of thumb to apply here is that resources are usually physical and countable: Army, Air Force, Navy, units and armed forces of United States; personnel; dollars; facilities; equipment--trucks, planes, ships, etc.; and resources of organizations--Red Cross, NATO, etc. Means might also include such intangibles as “will, industrial capacity, intellect. etc.,” but state them as resources. Do not use means to describe concepts and do not articulate resources as ways or concepts. In a very simplified manner “diplomacy” is a way to promote regional stability (objective), but diplomats are the means. In the same manner Clausewitz preferred “overthrow of the enemy’s government” as the end, to fight a decisive battle as the way, and a larger army as the means. He saw the larger army as an appropriate resource to support his way--the decisive battle. To say “use of a larger army” infers a different concept for success and is an inappropriate statement of means (resources).

Over time thousands of students at the Army War College have tested Art Lykke's theory of strategy using the historical case study approach. His proposition is a common model for analyzing and evaluating the strategy of historical and current strategic level leadership. By using the theory to break a strategy into its component parts Art Lykke argued any strategy can be examined for suitability, feasibility, and acceptability, and, an assessment made of the proper balance among the component parts. In addition, his lecturing and presentations have led to the adoption of the basic model by a cohort of military and political strategists. This has, in turn, led to the proactive evaluation of strategy during development against the same standards of:

Suitability--will its attainment accomplish the effect desired (relates to objective)?

Feasibility--can the action be accomplished by the means available (relates to concept)?

Acceptability--are the consequences of cost justified by the importance of the effect desired (relates to resources/concept)?¹⁴

Not only has the basic proposition been tested in historical case studies and practical application, it has also proven itself adaptable to explaining differing aspects of strategic thought. Art Lykke's argument that nations engage in two distinct types of military strategy concurrently--operational and force developmental--illustrate the theory's adaptability. Operational strategies are based on existing military capabilities. Force developmental strategies are based on future threats and objectives and are not limited by existing capabilities. In fact, their primary role is to help determine and develop future capabilities.¹⁵ Thus, the theory lends itself to both warfighters and force developers within the military.

Art Lykke's theory of strategy is an important contribution to strategic thought. In encouraging the strategist to use the term "strategy" correctly while applying the strategy model and its four parts--ends, ways, means and risk, he provided a viable theory of strategy. The assumptions and premises of this theory have proven valid for analyzing and developing strategy. Above all a valid strategy must find a balance among ends, ways, and means consistent with the risk the nation is willing to accept. Art Lykke's theory of strategy provides the basis for clearly articulating and objectively evaluating any strategy.

NOTES:

¹ Gregory D. Foster, "A Conceptual Foundation for a Theory of Strategy," **The Washington Quarterly** (Winter, 1990): 43. Foster's analysis of the assumptions and premises of strategy is particularly thought provoking.

² Arthur F. Lykke, Jr., "Toward an Understanding of Military Strategy," chap. in **Military Strategy: Theory and Application** (Carlisle Barracks,

Pennsylvania: U.S. Army War College, 1989) 3-8. This document is the best written explanation of his ideas. Also used in this paper are the author's notes and recollections from Professor Lykke's lectures.

³ Henry E. Eccles, *Military Concepts and Philosophy* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1965) 48.

⁴ Foster, 50.

⁵ David Jablonsky, *Why Is Strategy Difficult?* (Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 1992; repr. 1995). Professor Jablonsky's work, of which this is representative, gives the best explanation. He lists the instruments of power as economic, psychological, political, and military. Socio-psychological is another term used as an instrument of power instead of psychological or informational. Note also that elements of power is more inclusive than instruments of power and includes demographic/geographic elements. Dr. Jablonsky raised Art Lykke's proposition to the political level.

⁶ Foster, 47-48.

⁷ Ibid., 55.

⁸ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, Ed. and Trans. by Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1976) 87.

⁹ Foster, 50.

¹⁰ This chart is commonly used to explain the overlapping. Abbreviations used: OOTW (Operations Other Than War, now Military Operations Other Than War); NCA (National Command Authorities); CJCS (Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff); CINC (Commander In Chief); and, JTF (Joint Task Force).

¹¹ Foster, 56.

¹² Lykke, 6-7.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Henry C. Eccles, "Strategy--The Theory and Application." *Naval War College Review* 32: 3 (May-June 1979): 11-21.

¹⁵ Lykke, 4.