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ARTICLE



Western strategy's two logics: Diverging interpretations

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ABSTRACT

Classical strategy as a concept encompasses two different logics (instrumentality and adversariality) as well as two different modes (decision-making and performance). In modern strategy, these modes have been on diverging paths, with varying interpretations privileging one logic above the other. Game theory focuses on decision-making, but encompasses both adversariality and instrumentality. Operational art focuses on performance, but in an adversarial context. The ends, ways, means model emphasises performance in an instrumental context. Each is imbalanced and inadequate when faced with the challenge of comprehending and controlling war. Strategic studies must make a return to balanced interpretations of strategy.

KEYWORDS Strategy; game theory; operational art; adversarial; instrumental; war

Given its lacklustre performance in recent decades, it has become a common refrain that strategy, especially as practiced by the West, is increasingly becoming a lost art. This is based on the belief that strategy itself has lost its way, that '[t]he word 'strategy' has acquired a universality which has robbed it of meaning, and left it only with banalities',¹ due to conceptual revision in reaction to the emergence of total war, but also simply to careless usage. People think poorly about strategy in its original context of war, and therefore also perform poorly when practicing it.

Losing the meaning of strategy is also a consequence of strategy's own nature, which simultaneously encompasses two distinct logics: instrumentality and adversariality. In this it necessarily reflects the nature of war itself, from which classical strategy emerged. The original purpose of strategy was to comprehend and ultimately to direct war. Clausewitz's page one definition of war remains among the best available: an act of violence to impose our will upon the enemy. This definition neatly and eloquently encapsulates the two vital logics of war: that it is instrumental, and that it is adversarial (and, of

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¹Hew Strachan, 'The lost meaning of strategy', *Survival* 47/3 (July 2005), 33.

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course, also that it is necessarily violent). By definition mass social violence is not war if it is not both instrumental and adversarial – if it is missing either of these logics, it is something else, whether senseless violence, a massacre, a genocide, etc. Strategy logically must, and classically often did, reflect this dual logic, without which it cannot be fit for its original purpose to understand and direct war, because its perspective on war becomes inherently flawed.

Yet misunderstanding strategy is not an issue of adversariality and instrumentality alone, but also of the portrayal of these two logics: is strategy only decision-making or is it a broader performance? Appreciation of the significance of both adversariality and instrumentality to strategy may take diverse forms, which are variably useful. The question of interpreting strategy as decision-making versus performance is not prominent in classical strategic theory, in which those who made the strategic decisions about campaigns were usually the same people who performed tactically during the campaign itself. The boundary between strategic decision-maker and tactical performer was thin. Those who wrote about strategy or the art of war typically had military backgrounds and were fully appreciative of the interplay between decision-making and performance. Even today, although strategies in practice are often defined and discussed in terms of key decisions made, these decisions do not exist in a vacuum. Rather, strategic agency is enacted through the tactical and operational performance which follows from one decision and not only informs, but leads up to the next.

With the advent of strategic studies as a modern academic discipline in the early Cold War, this holistic appreciation of strategy as something adversarial and instrumental *and* as encompassing both decision-making and performance gradually unravelled. Strategy was defined increasingly either in instrumental or in adversarial terms, but rarely both, and was portrayed increasingly in decision-making terms, with performance falling by the wayside. Most of the impetus for this conceptual and interpretive shift came from academics, particularly and increasingly from political science, whose authorial output greatly outweighed that of individuals from the military. Simultaneously, however, conceptualisations which the military preferred also contributed to this unravelling, such as the notion of the levels of war, which explicitly separated strategy as decision-making from operations as performance. Or, as General Tommy Franks told Paul Wolfowitz in the run-up to the invasion of Iraq in 2003, 'keep Washington focused on policy and strategy. *Leave me the hell alone to run the war.*'² Even military practitioners sharply delineated decision-making and performance, effectively also separating instrumentality and adversariality. The result is that what should be a

²Quoted in Hew Strachan, 'Strategy or Alibi? Obama, McChrystal and the Operational Level of War', *Survival* 52/5 (September 2010), 165.

general theory of strategy has been and is being drawn and quartered. This is reflected in many of the prominent definitions used today.

Colin Gray defines strategy as 'the bridge that relates military power to political purpose; it is neither military power *per se* nor political purpose. By strategy, I mean *the use that is made of force and the threat of force for the ends of policy*'.³ Basil Liddell Hart defined strategy as 'the art of distributing and applying military means to fulfill the ends of policy'.⁴ Admiral JC Wylie defined it as '[a] plan of action designed in order to achieve some end; a purpose together with a system of measures for its accomplishment'.⁵ These definitions not only privilege instrumental logic over adversarial logic, each even explicitly fails to mention the latter. Both Gray and Liddell Hart indirectly distinguish between strategy and policy by mentioning the latter in their definitions of the former, thereby sustaining the distinction despite the lack of definitional emphasis on adversarial logic. The frequent conflation of strategy and policy by other academics as well as by policy-makers demonstrates that this distinction is not automatic. In terms of portrayal, however, all three depict strategy as a performance punctuated by decision-making rather than as just decision-making. This is perhaps a defining issue for the field of strategic studies itself – those who specialise in strategy tend to define it performatively, whereas those outside the field tend to consider strategy in terms of decision-making.

Fewer definitions or models of strategy emphasise its adversarial logic, excepting game theory and the operational level of war. The loss of its adversarial aspect within mainstream understanding may contribute to the conflation of strategy with policy, which is not inherently adversarial. Each of the two main definitions of strategy's adversarial logic portrays it differently, games of strategy focusing on decision-making versus the performance-centric operational level. Again, strategic studies as a field seems more attuned to the performative aspect of adversariality than observers from beyond the field.

Only a small subset of definitions manages to incorporate and balance both logics. Clausewitz's definition of strategy as the use of the engagement for the purpose of the war largely accomplishes this. Although adversariality is not explicitly mentioned, it is strongly implied in the emphasis on the engagement, the battle. Moreover, it sits within a context well defined by Clausewitz's own definition of war, which starkly features instrumentality and adversariality and not much else. This context is even more fundamental to Clausewitz's theory of war than to his definition of strategy. Another, more precisely even-handed, definition of strategy is provided by the French

³Colin S. Gray, *Modern Strategy* (Oxford: Oxford UP 1999), 17.

⁴Basil Liddell Hart, *Strategy* (New York, NY: Meridian 1991), 321.

⁵J.C. Wylie, *Military Strategy: A General Theory of Power Control*, (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press 1989), 14.

general André Beaufre: 'the art of the dialectic of force or, more precisely, *the art of the dialectic of two opposing wills using force to resolve their dispute*.'⁶ This definition is precisely balanced in a way that even Clausewitz's is not, at least not without referring to his separate definition of war. Beaufre's definition allows the user to capture succinctly and fully the fundamental dynamics of strategy. Both definitions, besides encapsulating the two logics equally, are also performative in interpretation – strategy is something done as an activity, not purely decided.

The gradual partitioning of strategy matters because the logics of instrumentality and adversariness in practice are conditioned by each other but also by decision-making *and* by performance, and affect both of those in turn; to neglect any one of these elements results in partial strategic blindness, conceptually and ultimately practically. Strategy is holistic in that it must incorporate all of these logics and facets to be useful. This is something which some attempts at generating a general theory of strategy recognise and get right. However, without employing an equally holistic perspective while reading this works, important nuances can be lost. The US admiral JC Wylie, for instance, proposed a theory of strategy as a general theory of power control. This seems extraordinary to anyone focused on decision-making – how can one control the decision-making of the enemy, an independent actor? Yet Wylie was not discussing controlling decision-making, but rather controlling the performance which stems from decision-making, which is an entirely possible, albeit not easy, task. This nuance is lost if one's understanding of strategy ends with decision-making and does not also encompass performance. Similarly, one of Colin Gray's earlier attempts at building a general theory of strategy emphasised the task of command performance and 'joining up the dots' between strategists and the effect they are trying to achieve with a dedicated chapter.⁷ Holistic understandings of strategy, such as those proposed by Wylie and Gray, lead to the conclusion that contemporary distinctions in strategy such as between deliberate and emergent strategies are absurd – and for good reason. The deliberate/emergent strategy distinction reflects the difference between a singular decision-making perspective and one which privileges the performative dimension. As the increasing popularity of emergent strategy demonstrates, one cannot ignore performance in strategy.

These problems are less – if at all – relevant to Chinese, and possibly other non-Western, interpretations of strategy. Classical Chinese strategic thinking, unlike that of the West, is not strictly adversarial. It instead emphasizes the propensity of things: 'Chinese strategy aimed to use every possible means to influence the potential inherent in the forces at play to its own advantage, even before the actual engagement, so that the engagement would never

⁶ André Beaufre, *An Introduction to Strategy* R.H. Barry trans. (London: Faber and Faber 1965), 22.

⁷ Colin S. Gray, *The Strategy Bridge: Theory for Practice* (Oxford: Oxford UP 2010), ch. 6.

constitute the decisive moment, which always involves risk.⁸ Despite this relative lack of adversariality, central to the notion of the propensity of things is the performative dimension, or how the Chinese can affect the environment now to make future performance as easy as possible. Although explicit conceptual comparisons of Western and non-Western interpretations of strategy remain to be conducted, the focus in this article is explicitly on *Western* interpretations and portrayals of strategy.

This article also does not focus on how Western conceptions of strategy unravelled, which continues to be a worthy topic for research. Rather, it focuses specifically on the meaning and implications of individually interpreting adversariality and instrumentality through the lens of either decision-making or performance, as it is through these concepts, lenses, and interpretations that strategy is taught in universities and defence colleges as well as communicated among practitioners, analysts, and academic experts. Thus the implications are explored of decision-making portrayals of the logics of adversariality and instrumentality, both of which focus on games of strategy from game theory. Similarly explored are the implications of performative portrayals of the two logics, with adversariality and arguably instrumentality channelled through the operational level of war, and instrumentality again through balancing or aligning ends, ways, and means.

It is concluded that decision-making portrayals of strategy, regardless of whether they emphasise adversarial or instrumental logics, tend to be less useful than performative portrayals. Decision-making portrayals tend to simplify or ignore key aspects of the real-world interaction between instrumentality and adversariality in war, although because of their undue simplicity they are very effective at combining the logics of adversariality and instrumentality. Simultaneously, however, it is exactly these less realistic portrayals of strategy which are more popular, especially beyond military circles and strategic studies. Performative portrayals of strategy simplify or ignore as well, usually by privileging either instrumentality or adversariality over the other, often to the point of hardly recognising the other logic. This divisiveness leads to its own forms of strategic blindness. Understanding the weaknesses of each portrayal and the limitations of each logic within each portrayal is the necessary first step to putting strategy back together and making it whole and useful again.

Decision-making portrayals of adversariality and instrumentality

One of the first widespread understandings of strategy derives from game theory, specifically from games of strategy (not of skill or chance). Modern

⁸François Jullien, *The Propensity of Things: Toward a History of Efficacy in China* Janet Lloyd, trans. (New York: Zone Books 1995), 35.

game theory was developed by John von Neumann and Oskar Morgenstern in their 1944 work *Theory of Games and Economic Behavior*. Before long, various scholars, chief among them Thomas Schelling, believed in its potential to provide insight into the growing superpower nuclear conflict, albeit not necessarily in its original mathematical, zero-sum form. Game theory encompasses both the instrumental and adversarial logics of strategy, but from a decision-making perspective alone.

From the beginning, Schelling emphasised that this notion of strategy was distinct from the traditional concept of military strategy: 'This is not the military usage.'⁹ However, as he delved deeper into the logic of games of strategy as they apply to superpower nuclear diplomacy and conflict, Schelling came to identify his particular conception of strategy ever more strongly with strategy as such: 'Military strategy can no longer be thought of, as it could for some countries in some eras, as the science of military victory. It is now equally, if not more, the art of coercion, of intimidation and deterrence. The instruments of war are more punitive and acquisitive. Military strategy, whether we like it or not, has become the diplomacy of violence.'¹⁰

Despite this change in perspective, the essence of strategy as derived from games of strategy remained fixed on a specific idea, the making of decisions. Through his modifications of game theory in application to questions of superpower nuclear conflict, Schelling sought to develop 'a *theory of inter-dependent decision*.'¹¹ This is to say, strategy is not simply making a decision. It is making a decision in the context of an interactive and competitive, albeit not wholly adversarial, situation. It is 'concerned with situations – games of "strategy," in contrast to games of skill or games of chance – in which the best course of action for each participant depends on what he expects the other participants to do.'¹² Even early critics of game theory such as Bernard Brodie acknowledged its close relevance to the logic of adversariness in strategy and war: 'The refinements of *game theory* ... are generally of little importance to the strategist ... What matters is the *spirit* of the gaming principle, the constant reminder that in war we shall be dealing with an opponent who will react to our moves and to whom we must react.'¹³ Game theory from the beginning was explicit about its focus on adversarial logic in decision-making.

Alongside this emphasis, Schelling established two further points which defined strategy. First, that it was fundamentally about bargaining.

⁹Thomas C. Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict* (Cambridge: Harvard UP 1980), 3n.

¹⁰Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven: Yale UP 2008), 34.

¹¹Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict*, 16; see also Neil Martin, 'Strategy as Mutually Contingent Choice: New Behavioral Lessons from Thomas Schelling's *The Strategy of Conflict*', *SAGE Open* (April-June 2016), 1–12.

¹²Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict*, 9–10; see also Emerson M.S. Niu and Peter C. Ordeshook, *Strategy and Politics: An Introduction to Game Theory* (Abingdon: Routledge 2015), 2–3.

¹³Bernard Brodie, quoted in Robert Ayson, *Thomas Schelling and the Nuclear Age: Strategy as Social Science* (London: Frank Cass 2004), 130.

To study the strategy of conflict is to take the view that most conflict situations are essentially *bargaining* situations. They are situations in which the ability of one participant to gain his ends is dependent to an important degree on the choices or decisions that the other participant will make. The bargaining may be explicit, as when one offers a concession; or it may be by tacit maneuver, as when one occupies or evacuates strategic territory. It may, as in the ordinary haggling of the market-place, take the *status quo* as its zero point and seek arrangements that yield positive gains to both sides; or it may involve threats of damage, including mutual damage, as in a strike, boycott, or price war, or in extortion.¹⁴

Or, as Schelling later wrote, '[c]oercion requires finding a bargain, arranging for him to be better off doing what we want – worse off not doing what we want – when he takes the threatened penalty into account.'¹⁵ In other words, game theory also encompasses instrumental logic. It is not simply about adversarial decision-making for its own sake, but decision-making for a purpose – to change the enemy's mind.

Second, the focus of strategy turned to the *non-use* of military power; 'strategy – in the sense in which I am using it here – is not concerned with the efficient *application* of force but with the *exploitation of potential force*.'¹⁶ As Schelling clarified, 'though "strategy of conflict" sounds cold-blooded, the theory is not concerned with the efficient *application* of violence or anything of the sort; it is not essentially a theory of aggression or of resistance or of war. *Threats* of war, yes, or threats of anything else; but it is the employment of threats, or of threats and promises, or more generally of the conditioning of one's own behaviour on the behaviour of others, that the theory is about.'¹⁷ He retained this emphasis in later work as well: 'brute force succeeds when it is used, whereas the power to hurt is most successful when held in reserve. It is the *threat* of damage, or of more damage to come, that can make someone yield or comply. It is *latent* violence that can influence someone's choice – violence that can still be withheld or inflicted, or that a victim believes can be withheld or inflicted.'¹⁸ The emphasis on latent over active force excludes performance as a perspective on strategy, as the whole point is to avoid the active use of force. In game theory, the notion of performance is limited to coming to and communicating a decision, rather than performing during the implementation of said decision.

Such decision-making perspectives on instrumentality have permeated strategic discourse, leading to an arguable misappropriation of classical strategic theory, especially of Clausewitz. As Hew Strachan has noted, '[t]oday we too often use his normative statement about war's relationship to

¹⁴Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict*, 5.

¹⁵Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 4.

¹⁶See note 14.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 15.

¹⁸Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 3.

policy as though it applied to the causes of war'.¹⁹ This reflects not just the decision-making perspective on instrumentality but also its exclusivity, because it bundles the whole notion of war's instrumental worth into a single decision – to go to war, or not to go to war. Performance is excluded.

The game theoretical understanding of strategy has endured to the present and continues to underpin much discussion of strategy and of war – Schelling's original distinction between his notion of strategy and the military usage of the term having been long forgotten. Scholars, particularly beyond strategic studies itself, continue both to apply bargaining or game theories to war, and to focus on decisions and ideas.²⁰ Ivan Arreguín-Toft's theory of asymmetric conflict focuses on competing strategic choices between stronger and weaker actors.²¹ In his work on gambling, chance, and war, Justin Conrad recently commented on the aptness of game theory and its assumptions. 'This is the true essence of strategy: making decisions while simultaneously anticipating the adversary's decisions (who is engaging in the same process). A situation is therefore strategic "if an actor's ability to further its ends depends on the actions others take."'²² Some scholars continue to believe that game theory has also been successful in its application to war: 'military and defense strategy [is] the area in international relations to which game theory has been most frequently (and successfully) applied.'²³ Although this game-theoretical interpretation of strategy lies mostly beyond the realm of strategic studies, there are nonetheless academic strategists who favour it.²⁴

Game theory is an expansive theory, which encompasses both the adversarial and the instrumental logics of strategy. Yet it does so through a portrayal focused on pure decision-making, excluding actual performance from the notion of strategy. It considers interdependent adversarial decision-making and the instrumental value of making particular decisions. This basic understanding of strategy is reasonably workable within the context of economic behaviour, especially at the individual level from which it originated, because strategic behaviour and performance at that level of economic analysis is effectively synonymous with decision-making. However, solely within strategic studies, the utility of this concept of strategy remains

¹⁹Hew Strachan, 'Strategy in the Twenty-First Century', in Hew Strachan & Sibylle Scheipers (eds.), *The Changing Character of War* (Oxford: Oxford UP 2011), 508.

²⁰See for example Max Gallop, 'More dangerous than dyads: how a third party enables rationalist explanations for war', *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 29/3 (2017), 353–381.

²¹Ivan Arreguín-Toft, 'How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict', *International Security* 26/1 (Summer 2001), 93–128.

²²Justin Conrad, *Gambling and War: Risk, Reward, and Chance in International Conflict* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press 2017), 46.

²³Steven J. Bram, *Game Theory and Politics* (Mineola: Dover Publications 2004), 1.

²⁴See for example John Stone, 'Beyond Clausewitz: Better ways of thinking strategically', *Comparative Strategy* 36/5 (2017), 468–478.

limited, because a solely decision-focused portrayal of the two logics of strategy is flawed.

Criticism of decision-based theories of strategy

Strategy stemming from games of strategy and other decision-based theories presents problems of two types. First are those resulting from the self-imposed limits of the concept, which focuses only on decisions and says nothing about the actual implementation of strategy, its vital performative element. Second are problems resulting from the assumption that all decisions are of equivalent value, which hardly accords with reality. Limited, decision-focused portrayals of strategy do not fully reflect either the adversarial or instrumental logics of strategy.

Originally Schelling strictly differentiated between strategy from games and the military understanding of the concept – there was no connection between them. This was manifested particularly in his explicit focus on exploiting the threat from military power while otherwise embracing its non-use, which made a great deal of sense in the Cold War superpower nuclear conflict context. Nuclear strategy is the classic case of implementation being unthinkable, despite the efforts of many strategists including Bernard Brodie, Herman Kahn, and Colin Gray to think about doing so, just in case. Ultimately, it seemed that every attempt to think about implementing nuclear strategy ran into a dead end. In the superpower nuclear realm, non-use became preferable to the prospect of global Armageddon. Yet, born of game theory and reinforced by nuclear experience (or vice versa), the tendency to ignore actual implementation of strategy, even with reference to non-nuclear topics, still endures today, even if not explicitly enunciated.

Eschewing implementation is inappropriate in relation to strategy and its vital implementation component, despite the later pronouncements of Schelling and others that old notions of strategy were obsolete. As Wayne Hughes, Jr observes, '[s]trategy and tactics are best thought of as handmaidens, but if one must choose, it is probably more correct to say that tactics come first because they dictate the limits of strategy. Strategy must be conceived with battle in mind'.²⁵ Colin Gray agrees, noting that although '[i]t has long been commonplace to claim that while one *has* a strategy, one *does* tactics ... The truth that strategy is done by tactics is overshadowed by the yet greater truth that strategy is done as tactics'.²⁶ In other words, '[t]he fundamental basis for grasping the meaning of strategy can be approached by understanding it to be composed entirely of tactical and operational level

²⁵ Wayne P. Hughes, Jr., 'The Strategy-Tactics Relationship', in Colin S. Gray and Roger W. Barnett (eds.), *Seapower and Strategy* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press 1989), 47.

²⁶ Colin S. Gray, *Schools for Strategy: Teaching Strategy for 21st Century Conflict* (Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute 2009), 6.

behaviour.²⁷ Strategy in practice cannot be anything other than a set of tactical actions, whether in sequence or by accumulation, whose aim is to alter the strategic – and ultimately political – situation. This link between strategy and its performative element tactics is vital for instrumentality. As Clausewitz emphasised to a colleague, ‘the main lines of every major strategic plan are *largely political in nature*’.²⁸ Or, instrumental value in war is a matter of performance, of ensuring that the tactics and operations chosen may truly lead to the desired political ends, and then performing in such a manner that they actually do. Performance is crucial to comprehending fully the instrumental logic of strategy in war, but this is a perspective entirely excluded by a decision-focused portrayal such as game theory. To the extent that it is considered at all, performance is simply assumed to be apt – sufficiently well-designed to achieve desired goals – and good enough actually to achieve those goals.

In his interpretation of game theory, Schelling sought – not entirely successfully – to escape considerations of performance by emphasising non-use and the virtues of latent force, identifying it as the real factor which changes the minds, decisions, and behaviour of the opponent, rather than destruction itself. Yet just being in the adversarial situation war is a mutual acknowledgement that no form of power short of applied military force will gain the belligerents the ends they wish to achieve, a reflection of the violent and destructive means chosen to achieve policy objectives. It inherently begins as a zero-sum game. Part of the purpose of strategy is to change the enemy’s mind about this zero-sum beginning. Through the actual practice of strategy and the application of military force, strategists seek to coerce their opponents into perceiving the zero-sum game of war through a different lens. They aim to force a change in the rules, partway through the game, from zero-sum to a non-zero-sum – or simply to crush the enemy and impose a true loss despite his zero-sum assumptions. Strategy is practiced explicitly to break the enemy’s adversarial mentality, or to defeat him despite it.²⁹

In the context of real war and real adversariality, rather than diplomacy, Schelling’s belief in latent force breaks down. The latency of military power just prior to the outbreak of any war is hardly a whit different from the latency of military power just after the outbreak of said war. Yet the conditions change because one polity challenges its opponent in the real, not just latent, application of military force. Or, as Geoffrey Blainey wryly suggested, ‘[w]ar itself is a dispute about measurement [of relative power].’³⁰ This is a challenge

²⁷ Colin S. Gray, ‘So What! The Meaning of Strategy’, *Infinity Journal* 6/1 (Winter 2018), 5.

²⁸ Quoted in Peter Paret & Daniel Moran (eds.), *Carl von Clausewitz: Two Letters on Strategy* (Fort Leavenworth: US Army Command and General Staff College 1984), 21.

²⁹ Lukas Milevski, ‘Choosing Strategy: Its Meaning and Significance in Context’, *Infinity Journal* 6/2 (Summer 2018), 12–16.

³⁰ Geoffrey Blainey, *The Causes of War* (New York: The Free Press 1988), 122.

fuelled by an adversarial mentality. Latency is significant only in the context of the ability actually to apply military force to break that adversarial mentality. Without establishing a pattern of real military and strategic superiority through actual action, latency in itself is useless to the strategist for breaking the enemy's adversariality and for changing his mind about the rules of the game in war, because latent force alone clearly did not deter the onset of adversariality and war in the first place.

Schelling himself appeared to admit this with regard to traditional military strategy, although he set it up to emphasise the importance of latent force: 'Military victory was but the *price of admission*. The payoff depended upon the successful threat of violence.'³¹ Latency is usually meaningful after victory but not defeat, because it is at that point that the relative value of reciprocal latent force is least in doubt, and perhaps even exaggerated. Yet, he believed that the introduction of nuclear weapons had decisively altered this question of causality. '*Victory is no longer a prerequisite for hurting the enemy*. And it is no assurance against being terribly hurt. One need not wait until he has won the war before inflicting "unendurable" damages on his enemy. One need not wait until he has lost the war.'³²

Yet military strategy continues to require battle. Moreover, military victory remains far more than merely the price of admission. Schelling treated victory not only as if it were guaranteed, but as if the character of victory in battle were constant. Both assumptions are false. Victory is rarely guaranteed. If it were, it would be unlikely (albeit not outside the realm of historical possibility and precedent) for the guaranteed loser actually to participate. Moreover, not all victories are equal, let alone the strategic circumstances in which they occur. Battle is a measure of the effectiveness of one's military force relative to that of the opponent. It also influences the material basis of the military power each side may bring to bear against the other. Both are vital considerations with regard to the utility of latent force, albeit wholly ignored by Schelling and others who follow decision-based theories of strategy.

The details of battle – which are ultimately details of performance – matter. Latent force will hardly change the opponent's mind and behaviour if, in application, it continuously fails to defeat the armed forces of the enemy. Even in victory, the latency of the surviving force is unlikely to influence the adversary if the victory was dearly bought. King Pyrrhus of Epirus was unfortunate in bequeathing to posterity his name in the form of pyrrhic victory. Having defeated the Romans at Heraclea in 280 BC and Ascalum the following year, Pyrrhus reportedly lamented that another such victory would undo him. The latent value of Pyrrhus' force, even after multiple victories, remained barely higher than the latent value of the defeated Roman force. Pyrrhic

³¹Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 13.

³²*Ibid.*, 22.

victory is merely the most obvious of an entire set of influences upon the limits of the attack in war, which Clausewitz called the culminating point of victory. 'It is not possible in every war for the victor to overthrow his enemy completely. Often even victory has a culminating point ... As a war unfolds, armies are constantly faced with some factors that increase their strength and others that reduce it. The question therefore is one of superiority. Every reduction in strength on one side can be considered as an increase on the other. It follows that this two-way process is to be found in attack as well as in defense.'³³ The culminating point of victory is manipulable, through the wages of battle as well as other operational influences.

This idea of the culminating point of victory is directly related to the value of latent force, because it is the point at which applied military power no longer has any latent value regarding the attack – that is, any latent value for changing the enemy's mind and behaviour. Military victory is not merely the price of admission for employing the latent value of force; the details of battle and the character of the victory provide vital information concerning that latent value. This information is crucial for both the attacker and the defender. For the attacker, it influences his perceptions on the likelihood of changing his opponent's mind; for the defender, it influences his perceptions of his enemy's ability to manipulate him so that he may want or be forced to change his mind, either at that moment or before victory is achieved. Schelling could get away with his assumptions about battle and latent force in nuclear strategy, but not in strategy as a whole. The instrumental value of latency is constantly and necessarily altered throughout, by the adversarial performance of opposing forces.

The sole element of implementation which games of strategy consider is performance related to making and communicating a decision. The metaphor of poker as a basis for understanding decision-making in war is a reflection of this rather limited perspective on implementation.³⁴ Poker involves no element of implementation beyond choice and communication. Players choose to fold, bluff, or raise. One may be mistaken in choosing one over the other two, but one cannot fold poorly, or raise in a skilful manner, except inasmuch as the player is trying to convey a deceptive reason to his opponent about the motive for his choice. The game of chicken, upon which Schelling drew in his discussion on nuclear strategy and diplomacy, is another example of a game centred on making and communicating decisions and, more importantly, commitments while under pressure. As Schelling explained, '[t]he commitment is a *strategic* move, a move that induces the other player to choose in one's favor. It constrains the other player's choice by affecting his expectations.'³⁵ These

³³Carl von Clausewitz, *On War* Michael Howard and Peter Paret, eds. and trans. (Princeton: Princeton UP 1984), 566.

³⁴Such as in Conrad, *Gambling and War*.

³⁵Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict*, 122.

metaphors reflect the original context of game theory: individual economic behaviour. In implementing an individual economic decision – such as making a purchase – under normal circumstances, one cannot make the payment in such a way that the purchase is refused. The outcome is not dependent upon the performance. In military strategy, the outcome *is* dependent upon the performance. Important though the actual performance of decision-making may be at times, game theory interpretation of implementation is nevertheless fatally limited when it comes to strategy in the real world.

There is an observable pattern within strategic thought which reflects this basic point. Strategic theorists have repeatedly conceived of ‘grand strategy’ as a higher level of decision-making, one without concerns about implementation. What universally emerged in their thinking was some new concept specifically designed to accommodate the performative element of strategy. Thus Julian Corbett wrote about major and minor strategy, whose difference ‘is correlative to that between Tactics & Strategy’ and later clarified this with another statement. ‘This distinction between Grand & Minor Strategy is only another way of saying that every strategical problem must be considered in two separate ways: – 1st from the point of view of its object. 2nd from the point of view of the method, by which that object can be attained.’³⁶ John Frederick Charles Fuller and Basil Liddell Hart both structured grand strategy and its minor companion concept in much the same way. Moreover, this tendency is not restricted to a trio of past British strategic theorists but still exists in modern strategic literature, in works which incorporate the idea of grand strategy as well as in those which distinguish strategy itself, as a particular decision-making level, from operations, as has been the fashion in most Western militaries since the 1980s. Thus even the structure of strategic theory clearly indicates that it is absolutely necessary to accommodate performance by inclusion of an operational level or an operational art. However, game theory provides no scope for such an accommodation because implementation exists entirely beyond game theory’s set of assumptions. Even if it were to, this is not necessarily sufficient. The bifurcation of strategy into two concepts and realms of professional responsibility is damaging both to the understanding of strategy itself and to its practice in the real world. In theory and in practice, both the purpose of action and an understanding of its instrumental value become divorced from the conduct required to achieve the purpose.³⁷

Another weakness of strategy as merely a theory of decisions, however adversarial and interdependent they may be, is its assumption that all decisions exist within a single level of decision-making, that is, that all decisions

³⁶ Julian Corbett, *Lectures on Naval Strategy* NMM CBT/31, Corbett Papers, Caird Library, National Maritime Museum, 117, 118.

³⁷ Lukas Milevski, ‘Grand Strategy and Operational Art: Companion Concepts and Their Implications for Strategy’, *Comparative Strategy* 33/4 (September 2014), 342–353.

are strategic in nature. One folds, bluffs, or raises in poker. One commits to the straight in chicken, or one veers away. Each decision by the opponents decides that round or at least participation in that round, and the consequences of the decisions flow from the accepted rules of the game. This understanding of the role of decisions is built upon neglect of the implementation which lies beyond strategic decision-making. Strategy is done with tactics and as tactics. Decisions must be made in military operations, in direct engagements, etc., by lower-level personnel, which condition and shape the performative aspect of strategy and therefore its instrumental value within the adversarial relationship. In principle, game theory does not constrain the analyst to only a specific level of decision-making – strategic, tactical, etc. – but in reality, it has little, if anything, to say about the interaction among multiple levels of decision-making. Edward Luttwak reminds us that this interaction among levels can be ironic or even paradoxical, in that decisions which are sound at one level may be potentially harmful at another level.³⁸

Decision-making in strategy is not just a question of a single level. The poker player chooses to raise and he lets the cards take over. The strategist chooses to pursue a strategy for annihilation and his responsibilities are only beginning. As Arthur Lykke wrote, 'do not make the mistake of calling a strategic concept a strategy. Strategic concepts must always be considered in relation to military objectives and resources.'³⁹ The decision for a basic strategy – a concept – is the start, rather than the end, of the strategist's responsibilities. From the basic intent, one must craft and then enact a suitable plan. In games of strategy, the decision is the strategist's entire output, and the output of two opposing strategists results in an immediate outcome, whatever it may be. In actual strategy, the decision is the strategist's first input into a continuous process of performance and adaptation, a first input which initiates nearly the entire performative, yet still adversarial, element of strategy in the pursuit of instrumental value to break the enemy's adversarial mentality. Between strategy and games of strategy, the respective meanings of the decision are exactly opposite, regardless of whether one considers the adversarial or the instrumental logic of strategy.

Performative portrayals of adversariality and instrumentality

Decision-making interpretations of strategy clearly virtually demand counterpart concepts which emphasise strategy's performative aspects. Since the late 1970s and early 1980s, that need has been filled by the related concepts of the operational level of war and operational art.

³⁸Edward N. Luttwak, *Strategy: The Logic of War and Peace* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard UP 2001).

³⁹Arthur F. Lykke, Jr., 'Defining Military Strategy', *Military Review* (May 1989), 6.

As a specific *level*, the operational seems to be a Western development, but operational *art* as a concept was first theorised in the interwar Soviet Union. Soviet operational art encompassed the adversarial logic of strategy, but only partly the instrumental. As Soviet theorist Aleksandr Svechin explained, '[t]actics and administration are the material of operational art', tactics being the primary adversarial element and administration being the ability materially to sustain prolonged adversarial interaction.⁴⁰

From the instrumental perspective, Soviet operational art focused on regaining or reaffirming the instrumentality of tactics after the experience of the First World War and the changing character of battle during and after that war. Operational art in and of itself did not extend all the way up from the battle to achieving its political goals, but only from the battlefield to the campaign. Thus, Svechin argued that '[o]perational art also dictates the basic line of conduct of an operation, depending on the material available, the time which may be allotted to the handling of different tactical missions, the forces which may be deployed for battle on a certain front, and finally on the nature of the operation itself.' By contrast, '[s]trategy is the art of combining preparations for war and the grouping of operations for achieving the goal set by the war for the armed forces.'⁴¹ The Soviet perspective was that battlefield tactics alone could no longer contribute directly to the winning of the war, but had to be grouped together to form self-contained, coherent operations, which in turn became the basic building blocks of strategically meaningful military activity. Operational art was a re-emphasis on campaigning. What is notable about operational art and strategy in the Soviet perspective is that, although the full instrumental logic was split between them, they were not only equally adversarial but also equally performative. Operational art was performative in terms of combining tactics and battles, whereas strategy was performative in terms of combining operations and campaigns.

This broad understanding was both adopted and adapted by Western militaries and defence analysts from the late 1970s onward, first in the United States and increasingly in the rest of NATO. In the process, it became a level of war rather than just an art relating to distributing and fighting multiple battles coherently with a particular campaign goal in mind. In the words of Edward Luttwak, one of the popularisers of the operational level of war in the United States at that time:

The operational level of war, as opposed to the tactical and strategic levels, is or ought to be of greatest concern to the analyst. In theater strategy, political goals and constraints on one hand and available resources on the other determine projected outcomes. At a much lower level, tactics deal with specific

⁴⁰Aleksandr A. Svechin, *Strategy* Kent D. Lee ed. (Minneapolis: East View Information Services 1991), 69.

⁴¹*Ibid.*

techniques. In the operational dimension, by contrast, schemes of warfare such as blitzkrieg or defense in depth evolve or are exploited.⁴²

The two Western operational concepts, level and art, are explicitly adversarial in their performative logic. Luttwak in particular focused on this logic, as seen by his distinction between theatre strategy, a level at which political goals are relevant, and the operational level, where they are not. He further explains potential operations in terms of how the operational commander interacts with the opposing force, on a spectrum ranging from attrition to relational-manoeuvre.⁴³ General Rupert Smith agrees: 'the operational art can only be expressed in relation to, and in the face of, an opponent practising his operational art. You should have a strategy before the war or operation commences, and you should have trained your forces in their skill at arms and tactics. But the operational art can only be practised in the event, and the art is effectively judged by the opponent.'⁴⁴ Eventually, the operational level and operational art became distinct: the operational level of war became the level in which tactical actions are sequenced in such a way as to produce military success, whereas operational art became the practice of actually doing so. 'Freedom of action at the operational level allows for the expression of operational art, a major medium for which is manoeuvre, both physical manoeuvre and mental (or psychological) manoeuvre, in the sense of mentally out-manoeuvring your opponent.'⁴⁵ This suggests that the operational level became the *level* at which adversarial interaction occurs, in a way that strategy no longer was portrayed to be, while operational art was the actual practice of interacting with the adversary operationally.

Moreover, operational concepts also fulfil the logic of instrumentality through performance. They were conceived to be the link between tactics and strategy both in level and performance, which otherwise ostensibly do not meet. 'The purpose of tactics is to win battles. The purpose of strategy is to win wars. The purpose of the operational art is to win the campaigns, which are based upon battles and which in turn contribute to strategic victory. Put quite simply, then, the operational art is the vital link between tactics and strategy.'⁴⁶ This represents the consensus on the role of the operational level and of operational art, at least conceptually. 'The operational commander, in other words, must be constantly interacting with the strategic level even as he gauges his adversary and determines how to use tactical forces to accomplish that sequence of actions.'⁴⁷ Operations must

⁴²Edward N. Luttwak, 'The Operational Level of War', *International Security* 5/3 (Winter 1980–1981), 61.

⁴³*Ibid.*, 63–65.

⁴⁴Rupert Smith, 'Epilogue', in John Andreas Olsen and Martin van Creveld (eds.), *The Evolution of Operational Art: From Napoleon to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford UP 2010), 233.

⁴⁵John Kiszely, 'Thinking about the Operational Level', *RUSI Journal* 150/6 (2005), 39–40.

⁴⁶David T. Zabecki, *The German 1918 Offensives: A Case Study in the Operational Level of War* (London: Routledge 2006), 11.

⁴⁷David Jablonsky, 'Strategy and the Operational Level of War: Part I', *Parameters* 27/1 (Spring 1987), 65.

serve strategy, which in turn is the codification of political objectives in a wartime context.

Criticism of performative portrayals of adversariality and instrumentality

The operational level and operational art have both come under significant criticism over the past decade regarding their basic conceptual usefulness, largely for 'devouring' strategy.⁴⁸ Such criticism will not be repeated here but will serve as a departure point. A major reason operational considerations, whether as a level or an art, are considered to have devoured strategy is because strategy itself became a weak concept: 'the problem lies not with our understanding of the operational level, but with our understanding of strategy, and even more with our approach to its direction. Operational art has been stretched hither and yon because it is not contained by a sure grasp of the relationship between war and policy, and by proper structures to debate and guide strategy.'⁴⁹

Strategy weakened under the influence of the World Wars, which pushed it towards policy, and then nuclear strategy, which transformed it from a performative (no one wishing actually to practice nuclear strategy) into a decision-making concept. Yet through this evolution the West's strategic thought diverged substantially from that of the Soviet Union. Whereas the Soviets maintained their performative interpretation of strategy in tandem with the performative portrayal of operational art, the West's conceptualisation of strategy centred on decision-making. This in turn led to a cleavage between strategy and operational art.

This cleavage engendered the notion that the operational level and operational art were a professional military, politics-free zone. General Wesley Clark stated at the time of the Kosovo War that 'Using military force effectively requires departing from the political dynamic and following the so-called "Principles of War" identified by post-Napoleonic military writers a century and a half ago'.⁵⁰ Tommy Franks' infamous outburst, cited above, also reflected this belief, which itself is much older than operational art and has on occasion been repeated by those who perhaps should have known better. As Moltke, the Elder stated, '[p]olicy uses war for the attainment of its goals; it works decisively at the beginning and the end of war, so that indeed policy reserves for itself the right to increase its demands or to be satisfied with a lesser success.' He further commented that 'strategy must always direct its endeavors toward the highest aim attainable with available means. Strategy

⁴⁸Justin Kelly & Mike Brennan, *Alien: How Operational Art Devoured Strategy* (Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute 2009).

⁴⁹Strachan, 'Strategy or Alibi?', 177.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 165.

thus works best for the goals of policy, but in its actions is fully independent of policy.⁵¹

Yet following such pronouncements means that the instrumental logic of strategy is broken by separating the military objectives – the maximum possibly attainable – from the political purpose of the war. This leads to an over-emphasis on adversariality, not without purpose for operational artists always recognise the higher political goal, but without heed for it in their actual conduct of warfare. Thus, although in principle Western interpretations of the operational level of war and operational art are meant to act as a bridge to connect tactics to strategy, in practice they fail to do so, resulting in a system where considerations of strategic decision-making and operational performance hardly meet, and instrumentality disappears.

Performative portrayals of instrumentality

With the operational level of war only dubiously related to the logic of instrumentality, it is worthwhile to consider a performative portrayal of strategy which is explicitly instrumental: the ends, ways, means model of strategy. Originally understood just in terms of means and ends, this model is one of the best-known interpretations of strategy, not simply within the military or academic strategic studies community, but even among the general public where many may define strategy in such a manner. Clausewitz wrote about means and ends in *On War*. Students at war colleges include analyses in their essays based not only on means and ends but also on ways. Among them was, in 1932, an Ernest J. King who would in a few years become Commander in Chief, United States Fleet and Chief of Naval Operations during the Second World War. He defined strategy in his senior thesis at the US Naval War College as ‘the science or art of military position and of the combination and employment of “ways and means” on a broad scale (differentiated from tactics) for gaining advantage in war.’⁵² Yet means and ends was only truly embedded in modern strategic studies as a dominant model through the writing of Colonel (Ret.) Arthur Lykke, who in the process also cemented the addition of ways, to turn the binary relationship into a trinity.

Lykke defined the model in a 1989 article for the professional journal *Military Review* by conveying it as a simple formula with which readers could approach the task of thinking seriously about strategy. ‘With our general concept of strategy as a guide – strategy equals *ends* plus *ways* plus *means* – we can develop an approach to military strategy.’⁵³ He continued, explaining the pieces of his formula:

⁵¹Daniel Hughes (ed.), *Moltke on the Art of War: Selected Writings* (Novata; Presidio Press 1993), 44.

⁵²Ernest J. King, ‘Senior Class of 1933 Thesis: The Influence of the National Policy on the Strategy of a War’, Ernest J. King Papers, ‘Library of Congress, Box 23’, Naval War College Thesis 1932, 12.

⁵³Lykke, ‘Defining Military Strategy’, 3.

Ends can be expressed as military objectives. *Ways* are concerned with the various methods of applying military force. In essence, this becomes an examination of courses of action designed to achieve the military objective. These courses of action are termed 'military strategic concepts.' *Means* refers to the military resources (manpower, materiel, money, forces, logistics, and so forth) required to accomplish the mission.⁵⁴

Lykke was adamant that this formula was 'applicable to all three levels of war: strategic, operational and tactical. It also reveals the fundamental similarities among national military strategy, operational art and tactics. Strategists, planners, corps commanders and squad leaders are all concerned with ways to employ means to achieve ends.'⁵⁵ Not content with the basic framework of ends, ways, and means alone, Lykke introduced the metaphor of the national security stool to explain how these three relate among themselves, which 'leads one to the observation that the legs must be balanced or national security may be in jeopardy. If military resources are not compatible with strategic concepts, or commitments are not matched by military capabilities, we may be in trouble. The angle of tilt represents risk, further defined as the possibility of loss, or damage, or of not achieving an objective.'⁵⁶

Lykke's ends, ways, means model became one of, if not the, dominant model of strategy within strategic studies, especially among military professionals. For many years Lykke himself taught it in class at the US Army War College, where

the student response is always overwhelmingly favorable, with Lykke's framework invariably forming the structure for subsequent seminar problems on subjects ranging from the U.S. Civil War to nuclear strategy. This is due, in part, to the fact that students weaned on the structural certitude of the five-paragraph field order and the Commander's Estimate naturally find such structure comforting in dealing with the complexities of strategy.⁵⁷

It is clear, simple, and appears to be a reductionist yet still reasonably comprehensive perspective on what is needed to practice strategy effectively. Moreover, in principle, those who are taught this model of strategy at the US Army War College are also well-prepared to identify its limitations without being restricted by them.

[T]hose students also know from their experience in the field that there are limits to the scientific approach when dealing with human endeavors. As a consequence, they can also appreciate the art of mixing ends, ways, and means, using for each element some subjective and some objective criteria of suitability, feasibility, and applicability – the essence of strategic calculation.⁵⁸

⁵⁴Ibid., 3–4.

⁵⁵Ibid., 4.

⁵⁶Ibid., 6.

⁵⁷David Jablonsky, 'Why is Strategy Difficult?' in J. Boone Bartholomees, Jr. *U.S. Army War College Guide to National Security Issues, Volume 1: Theory of War and Strategy* (Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute 2012), 3.

The ends, ways, means model has faced minor revision over time. Currently, the US Army War College offers its own distinct definition of strategy, employing Lykke's formula as a basis but iterating upon it: "Strategy is the alignment of ends (aims, objectives), ways (concepts), and means (resources) – informed by risk – to attain goals." Astute readers will note that this differs significantly from the notion of "balancing" ends-ways-means, and is even further from the concept of a formulaic equation.⁵⁹ Unfortunately, the substantive difference between aligning and balancing is not explained. In a separate revision, Colin Gray added assumptions to the model: ends, ways, means – and assumptions.⁶⁰ This revision appears primarily to emphasise the importance of assumptions to the practice of strategy, as Gray does not integrate assumptions into the workings of the model itself, but focuses instead on explaining assumptions as such.

Other scholars have noted the unpredictability inherent in the practice of strategy. 'Without believing in some measure of predictability, one cannot believe in strategic calculation. For strategy to have hope of working better than a shot in the dark, it must be possible to analyze patterns of military and political cause and effect, identify which instruments produce which effects in which circumstances, and apply the lessons to future choices.'⁶¹ The ends, ways, means model has some value in this respect. The ends chosen reflect the strategist's desired effect by indicating how he wishes to constrain his opponent's freedom of action. The means are the source of the effect to be achieved, for power in varying forms displays varying effects. The ways, finally, determine whether or not the means may successfully achieve the desired effects, and if so, how efficiently they may do so.⁶² However, this interpretation of the ends, ways, means model makes sense only within a holistic understanding of strategy – that is, one informed by a significant body of contextual knowledge.

Criticism of performative portrayals of instrumentality

Unlike game theory, the ends, ways, means model of strategy has in recent years come under constant assault. Many criticise it, from a variety of angles, and with varying degrees of accuracy. The two main complaints focus on the formulaic application of the model and the overall suitability of ends-based rationality. But the ends, ways, means model also falters in its appreciation of

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹Jacqueline E. Whitt, 'Wrong and Useful: Models and Metaphors for Strategy', USAWC War Room, 11 August 2017, <https://warroom.armywarcollege.edu/articles/wrong-useful-models-metaphors-strategy/>, accessed 6 December 2017.

⁶⁰Colin S. Gray, *Perspectives on Strategy* (Oxford: Oxford UP 2013), 28–31, 197–198.

⁶¹Richard K. Betts, 'Is Strategy an Illusion?' *International Security* 25/2 (Fall 2000), 16.

⁶²Lukas Milevski, 'Whence Derives Predictability in Strategy?' *Infinity Journal* 2/4 (Fall 2012), 4–7.

the instrumental logic of strategy, despite embracing that logic far more than the theory of games of strategy.

The primary criticism of the ends, ways, means model is that, whatever its virtues, it is too often misused: 'this model has become a crutch undermining creative and effective strategic thinking. Like any crutch, the supportive structure of the formula originally served an important purpose of avoiding an ends-means mismatch. This approach has become counterproductive because it has the effect of neutering the ways.'⁶³ Or, per Antulio Echevarria, 'If the art of strategy is truly lost, perhaps it is because – despite our rhetoric to the contrary – we really wanted it to be a science all along.'⁶⁴ Another critic has argued that 'Lykke's model is flawed on four counts: (1) it's too formulaic, (2) "ends" don't really end, (3) it minimizes the adversary, and (4) our strategic performance since widespread adoption has been unremarkable at best.'⁶⁵

In aggregate, such criticism relates mostly to those who employ the model rather than to the model itself; the original modeller, Lykke, assumed that only a certain type of user would employ the model. To reiterate Jablonsky's point about those who have been taught the model, 'those students also know from their experience in the field that there are limits to the scientific approach when dealing with human endeavors.'⁶⁶ According to many critics, this was an inapt assumption, as not everyone brings or accepts the necessary external contextual knowledge, rather than trying to dispel it through (mis) use of the ends, ways, means model.

Reductive in and of itself, the model remains both elegant and employable. According to Colin Gray, 'it can be objected that EWMA [ends, ways, means, and assumptions] is so austere economically of all detail that it lacks substantive value for strategy. Nothing would be further from the truth. It is precisely because EWMA eschews all attempts at localizing detail, that it is able to preserve the great beauty of simplicity and easy comprehension.'⁶⁷ Yet although simple and easy to understand, this model relies upon a breadth of theoretical and conceptual assumptions about strategy which are themselves not inherent in the model.

For example, the ends, ways, means model says nothing about the adversarial logic of strategy, upon which game theory is fixated and which is an indelible part of strategy. Despite its importance, adversarial logic can nonetheless be forgotten, which leads to later 'rediscovery' of the adversarial,

⁶³ Jeffrey W. Meiser, 'Ends + Ways + Means = (Bad) Strategy', *Parameters* 46/4 (Winter 2016–17), 82.

⁶⁴ Antulio J. Echevarria II, 'Is Strategy Really A Lost Art?' *Strategic Studies Institute Op-Ed*, 13 September 2013, <http://ssi.armywarcollege.edu/index.cfm/articles/Is-Strategy-Really-A-Lost-Art/2013/09/13>, accessed 5 December 2017.

⁶⁵ M.L. Cavanaugh, 'It's Time to End the Tyranny of Ends, Ways, and Means', *Modern War Institute*, 24 July 2017, <https://mwi.usma.edu/time-end-tyranny-ends-ways-means/>, accessed 6 December 2017.

⁶⁶ Jablonsky, 'Why is Strategy Difficult?' 3.

⁶⁷ Gray, 'So What! The Meaning of Strategy', 5.

inherently competitive logic of strategy.⁶⁸ If most users of the model are indeed less interested in the art and craft of strategy than in turning it into a science, the capacity of the model to mislead is substantial because so much of its accurate use relies on contextual knowledge about the fundamental nature of the phenomenon to which it is being applied. To mislead is especially dangerous given that subjective judgement in strategy is unavoidable: 'no scientific method exists for determining how much military power is enough, or when balance is achieved. The answer depends largely on the professional judgment of military commanders, and on what domestic conditions will allow in terms of the expenditure of fiscal resources and political capital. In truth, balance, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder.'⁶⁹

The ends, ways, means model has also been criticised as an example of ends-based rationality which has taken such strong hold as to exclude other forms of reasoning.

The military profession has relied too much on the expectations envisioned by the limited philosophy of ends-based, rationalistic models of strategy ... [which] has crippled the ability to educate practitioners who are neither exposed nor required to consider other philosophical forms of strategic reasoning.⁷⁰

Others agree with this basic perspective. As Adam Elkus has written, the model, 'while good as a simple heuristic, neglects important aspects of strategy-making that arise from the characteristics of strategic problems themselves.' Moreover, '[e]nds, ways, and means stories are "just so" stories in part because they elide the complexity of strategic reasoning. Differing strategic problems vary in their tractability and ambiguity, and ends-based rationalism as a worldview poorly equips strategic thinkers to understand such variation.'⁷¹

Yet this critique must be tempered. Strategy is fundamentally about consequence, which leads one to question how ends-based thinking as such can be flawed without the whole idea of strategy being unworkable. Rather, this strand of critique targets the mainstream (mis)interpretation of ends, ways, and means as a putative scientific method of studying, planning, and making strategy without regard for necessary circumstantial adaptation in actual practice. Only in this narrower context does the criticism make sense, but this context is itself part of the more fundamental stream of criticism about the model.

⁶⁸See for example Thomas G. Mahnken, *Competitive Strategies for the 21st Century: Theory, History, and Practice* (Stanford: University of Stanford Press 2012).

⁶⁹Antulio J. Echevarria II, *Military Strategy: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford UP 2017), 6.

⁷⁰Christopher R. Paparone, 'Beyond Ends-Based Rationality: A Quad-Conceptual View of Strategic Reasoning for Professional Military Education', in Gabriel Marcella (ed.), *Teaching Strategy: Challenge and Response* (Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute 2010), 310.

⁷¹Adam Elkus, 'Beyond Strategy as a Means to an End', *Infinity Journal* 3/4 (Winter 2014), 11, 12.

The ends, ways, means model emphasises the instrumental logic in strategy far more effectively than the theory of games of strategy or the operational level of war and operational art, the first of which completely fails to acknowledge instrumentality and the latter two neglecting it in practice despite pious conceptual statements. Yet even with regard to instrumentality, the ends, ways, means model is of uneven utility. It contains intrinsic potential for significant depth with regard to instrumental logic; through ends, ways, means, and their mutual connections, one is able to get into the fine detail of tactics and operations. However, the model can also be satisfied superficially with a higher level, lower detail appreciation of instrumentality. For instance, although the model would certainly be satisfied with an in-depth answer to the 'ways' portion, it would be just as satisfied if one merely denoted a general desired operational mode, whether AirLand Battle, Deep Operations, Shock and Awe, etc. This shorthand is enabled because the operational modes themselves comprise an agreed upon set of battlefield and operational tactics which do not need detailed explanations every time one employs them. Yet this convenience relies on external contextual knowledge which may not be available to every user of the model, and even the subset of professional users may have flawed assumptions or preferences of their own.

Most criticism of the ends, ways, means model, whether apt or not, focuses on its inherent logic. Many critics emphasise the lack of explicit acknowledgement of the adversary. Indeed, beyond the mention of risk, adversariality is not a prominent or even explicitly mentioned feature of ends, ways and means strategy, while risk itself is never tied solely to the effects of the adversary's action and agency. Despite the weakness of this strict Clausewitzian critique, the emphasis on battle, on the engagement, at least introduces adversariality into the means-ends relationship as Clausewitz understood it but which is lacking in the modern ends, ways, means model. As Echevarria argues, 'the Lykke equation or structure provides little more than a starting point for planning. ... What distinguishes a strategy from a plan is the nature of the environment and the presence of an adversary or a rival. If the environment is competitive and an adversary is present, one needs a strategy; otherwise, a plan will suffice.'⁷² Harry Yarger expands on this to differentiate among planning, policy, and strategy, all of which employ ends, ways, and means. The primary feature which distinguishes strategy from both planning and policy is its adversarial element and the non-linearity and uncertainty caused by this adversariality as well as other factors.⁷³

⁷²Echevarria, *Military Strategy*, 6.

⁷³Harry R. Yarger, *Strategy and the National Security Professional: Strategic Thinking and Strategy Formulation in the 21st Century* (Westport: Praeger Security International 2008), 8–9.

Conclusion

How strategy is portrayed is vital to understanding it, as concepts are necessarily conveyed through portrayals, which then affect how recipients further think about and communicate them. Not all portrayals are equal in their value or capability to reflect the full nature of the phenomenon. Many modern interpretations of strategy attempt to encapsulate one or both of its logics, instrumentality and adversariality, but their success is uneven because of the limitations of the specific portrayals, whether they be decision-making or performative. As a result, strategy has been drawn and quartered among the four possible combinations of instrumentality/adversariality and decision-making/performance. However, these quarters are not equally useful for the strategist.

Within the contexts of strategic studies and real-world practice, strategy must incorporate both instrumental and adversarial logics. Neither can independently enable effective strategy. Emphasising instrumentality without the adversary allows you to identify plausibly the correct tool for the job but without having any idea whether or not it will actually be effective in practice. Simultaneously, a focus on adversarial logic without consideration of instrumentality and the achievement of desired goals beyond the adversarial relationship is to be reduced to senseless hostility and violence. Plausibly effective strategy exists where both logics are brought together.

Moreover, both logics must be portrayed in a useful way, which is often performative rather than decision-making. This is not to say that decision-making is unimportant. Decision-making tends to punctuate performance, often marking key performative inflection points, those moments when performance went in a different direction, whether temporally, geographically, effectively, etc. Nonetheless, performance can occur without decision-making – sometimes the enemy acts against oneself and one must perform – and decision-making lacks foundation, meaning, and context when bereft of performance. Few responsible strategists would make decisions without some understanding of performance up to that point and of the anticipated performance of the armed forces relative to any of the considered decisions. Performance fundamentally matters for decision-making, while decision-making is best considered as directing performance. Both performance and decision-making can also be examined at any degree of granularity, and those gradations may interact. High-level political decisions may turn on anticipations of tactical performance, whereas tactical performance may be affected by past high-level political or military decisions, such as about organisation, allocation of resources, etc.

Although not every real-world example of strategy in practice will equally demonstrate the various logics and portrayals of strategy, if strategy as a concept does not encompass both logics and both portrayals then it is more

likely to fail at its fundamental task – to allow us fully to understand war with the ultimate purpose, if necessary, of harnessing it for our own purposes. As Lawrence Freedman notes, '[w]ar is a bad thing to happen but, at least on occasion, a good thing to do.'⁷⁴ Strategy, crucial to overcoming war as a bad thing to happen to turn it into also being a good thing to do despite its inherent badness, can succeed by identifying and employing the necessary means and ways to achieve the desired ends, in the face of an unwilling and actively resisting adversary, as performed as an integrated whole by strategists and tacticians obeying the two logics of instrumentality and adversariality.

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Notes on contributor

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