

STRATEGY – PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

Talk by Lieutenant General Hamid Nawaz Khan
to Staff Course 2000

Introduction

Recent events have torn history from its mooring, sweeping aside the constants that have defined our world since 1945. The old rules no longer pertain; woe to those who fail to take heed. A world in flux will not deal gently with those resting on their laurels

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Strategy in its purist form is concerned with warfare. The origin of word *Strategy* can be traced back to mean *The art of a general* – a concept broad enough to encompass every aspect of ancient warfare. Often politics and warfare were the province of a single person. Seen in this context the term *Strategy* had largely a military connotation, dealing with maintenance and handling of forces in the field, distinct from that of statecraft. The concepts of strategy and tactics were inter-mingled. Strategy was generally considered to be 'the art of bringing

forces to the battlefield in a favourable position', while the battlefield was generally the realm of tactics. This was the state of things up till the beginning of the French Revolution. The period prior to it is called an age of limited warfare. The wars were limited in objectives as well as resources. The process of evolving strategy was relatively simple by modern standards. Jomini defined the strategy of that time as

The art of bringing the greatest part of the forces of an army upon the important point of the theatre of war.

At about the same time, Clausewitz established a clear place for strategy in his theory of war. He argued that the art of war, like any art, is creative and not imitative. Armed conflict is only the means to a political end without which war becomes pointless and devoid of sense. Therefore, war must not be removed from its political context.

A second conclusion reached by Clausewitz was that war is waged by *a remarkable trinity* of the government, armed forces and the people. The government establishes the political purpose, the military provides means (force) for political end and the people provide the will.

Side by side, with the course of military history, conceptual development of strategy has been an on-going process. From a simplistic definition of strategy as an art of a general, a complex structure of various strategy levels has been evolved. Let's have a look at these.

Operational Strategy

A dynamic, logical and conceptual process pitted against an opposing mind set, applying a whole gamut or range of means available to attain the stipulated ends in the most effective ways (NDC Operational Strategy Folder).

Military Strategy

The art of distributing and applying military means to fulfil the ends of policy (Liddle Hart). *The art of the dialectic of two opposing wills using force to resolve their disputes* (Andre Beaufre).

National Strategy

The art and science of development and using the political, economic and psychological powers of a nation, to-

gether with its armed forces, during peace and war to secure national objectives (US Publication).

This evolutionary process has been motivated by various factors like the nature of warfare itself, development in the means of warfare, and strategic concepts propounded by military thinkers as well as elemental schools of strategic thought. I will give you a brief resume of this evolutionary journey. Then we will take a brief look at the future face of the war and draw some relevant conclusions and lessons for the application of strategy at various levels.

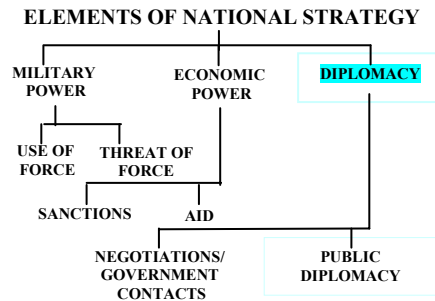
The Spectrum of Strategy

The spectrum of strategy, with passage of time, has expanded laterally and vertically. More expansion has taken place in the realm of policy as well as conceptual development of military and services strategies.

The basic instruments of statecraft are military force, diplomacy and economic power. Military force comprises both the use of force and threat of force. Diplomacy encompasses both government contacts and public diplomacy, and economic power can range from sanctions to aid. Each instrument has its particular character, advantage and constraints; and all are inter dependent and inseparable. In war, of course, the military instrument

STRATEGY: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

would be predominant while diplomacy and economic power would take the supporting role.



The Policy. The policy tackles all issues related to the higher direction of war. Some main ones are:-

- *Aim and Objectives of War.*
- *Exterior Manoeuvre.* This includes alliances and inter-state relationship. Conditioning of the adversary through media war, sabotage and subversion etc.
- *Internal Manoeuvre.* Prepare the nation for war (economics, development of infrastructure, institutions, and morale etc).
- *Initiation of War.* How should the war be initiated and to prepare manoeuvres for strategy?
- *Policy for the Conduct of War.* How to achieve the ends desired of war?
- *War Termination Strategy.* How the war should be terminated in order to achieve the aim and objectives of war?

(Defence Committee of the Cabinet issues it in the form of war directive)

Military Strategy. It includes military objectives, strategy concepts and resources. Keeping in view the bounds and parameters set by the policy, main issues that need to be resolved are: What is the overall strategic effect desired? What should be overall strategy? Which service strategy should predominate? Inter dependence and linkages of service strategies. Direction and guidance for the service strategies and the main effects desired from each. JSHQ issues it in the form of Joint Strategic Directive.

Based on the Joint Strategic Directive, the three-services evolve their respective service and operational strategies and tactics.

Nature of Warfare

Some of the significant phenomenon of warfare, which have a bearing on the application of strategy, and are worthy of your attention: -

- *Expansion of the Battlefield.* Whole nation has to face the brunt of war now as much as the armed forces.
- *Diversity of Armed Forces.* With the advancement in technology, it is becoming increasingly difficult to assess the military balance of adversaries. The potential of acquiring *diversity* is much more today despite the improvements in intelligence gathering.
- *Phenomenon of Chance.* Phenomenon of chance is as true of

peacetime events as of great battles. Thus, unpredictability was and will remain central to how the future events will unfold. The world is presently going through information and military technology revolution. What is in store for us?

- *Geo-political Dimensions.* Every war has a geo-political dimension, of course, different for every other war. Open hostilities for prolonged periods will be difficult to sustain without prior consensus of powers to be. It highlights the importance of effective exterior manoeuvre to support the military action on one hand, and the constraint on the strategists to attain the desired results remaining within the limits imposed by international pressure to terminate the hostilities within the permissible time on the other.

Development in Warfare

Some of the developments in warfare are: -

- *Weapons of Mass Destruction.* Deterrence based on nuclear weapons has different dynamics altogether. With the nuclearisation of South Asia, the cost and benefit equation of war is totally disturbed. A total war is less likely now. Future war is expected to be limited in objectives, intensity and time as well as space dimensions. Desired effects will be sought

while keeping the actions within the tolerance threshold of either side. It has two serious implications for us: -

- Changing the territorial status quo through application of military instrument has become more difficult, requiring new finesse in the application of strategy.
- Both, India and Pakistan perceive more liberty of action and relative impunity as far as Low intensity conflict (LIC) and unconventional warfare is concerned.
- *Military - Technology Revolution.* In Gulf War and Kosovo, the world saw a demonstration of what modern technology can deliver. With the passage of time more and more armies are going to be hit by the technological bug. It has serious implications for strategy.
- *Media War.* With the help of modern technology, the ability to monitor activities on the *other side of the wall* and influence the minds through an effective media campaign has enhanced manifold. A new dimension has been added to war and, consequently, to strategy.

Basic Forms of Strategic Thought

Derivatives of direct and indirect strategy propounded by Clausewitz and Liddle Hart respectively have been extensively

debated by military thinkers. These are the only two strategies through which main effects and decisive results can be achieved. Therefore, it will be worth while to discuss these briefly before proceeding further. These strategies are: -

- Strategy of Annihilation (Unlimited War).
- Strategy of Paralysis (Indirect Approach).
- *Strategy of Annihilation*. It is based on the Clausewitzian view that the destruction of enemy's main forces on the battlefield constituted the only true aim of war – idea of unlimited war and decisive battle. He professed that objective of military strategy was destruction of opposing forces.
- *Strategy of Paralysis*. Liddle Hart, as opposed to Clausewitz, argued that the perfect strategy would be to produce a decision without serious fighting. He maintained that the universal adoption of the theory of unlimited war has gone far to wreck civilisation.

Elemental Schools of Strategic Thought

All those who deal with and influence strategy should recognise that a *service perspective* of strategic thought does exist and it does influence the mind, whether it realises it or not. Therefore, the

conceptual framework of each service should be clearly understood. There are three generally recognised strategic schools of thought directly associated with each service.

Maritime Strategy

Classic maritime strategy had a number of theorists; most notable are Mahan and Corbett. The theory as most clearly articulated by Corbett, consists of two major parts: -

- Control of the seas.
 - Using sea control, to establish control on land.
- To establish control of seas (seven seas), controls decisions ashore. To establish this control they: -
- Seek to dominate the critical sea-lanes and choke points.
 - Control the landmass by blockade or projecting expeditionary forces ashore.
 - Destroying the enemy fleet facilitates by the exercise of control.

The underlying assumptions are: -

- Naval power is founded on maritime communications.
- Naval forces are the key to success in war.
- Contrary to land based air power and missiles there is a concept of *forward from sea*.

Theory attempts to place navy at the forefront of defensive effort of a nation and suggests success without extensive commitment of land forces.

Air Strategy

Founded by Douhet, postulated that: -

- Aeroplane has revolutionised the warfare. The nation that possesses command of the air can play such havoc as to lead to enemy's surrender.
- The most powerful selling point is that given a free hand air power makes protracted wars obsolete.
- Douhet and his disciples believed that air power, unaided, is decisive. In this role its principal missions are destruction of enemy's air capabilities and war making potential.
- Logically then, an independent air arm takes precedence over other services. Land forces play a secondary role of occupation after surrender or for mopping up.
- Physical destruction from the air will compel compliance from enemy. It promises a painless (less casualties) and independent success e.g., Gulf war and Serbia.

Main Bugs / Problems with Air Strategy

- United States and Soviet Russia ineffectiveness and defeat in

Vietnam and Afghanistan respectively despite their air power.

- Mutual neutralisation of air power in war between equals (e.g., France vs Germany).
- Ineffective against big countries likes China, India and even Pakistan.
- Ineffective against revolutionary model of war.
- Ineffective against country without significant infrastructure (e.g., USA vs Afghanistan).
- Ineffective under special terrain and weather conditions (e.g., built up areas, jungles, fog, mountain country etc).
- Cost prohibitive /unaffordable.
- Technology intensive and not available to all nations.

Land Strategy

In contrast, land power strategy has not been synthesised by one or two theorists as the maritime and air strategy. It is the oldest of military powers and its theory is also loosest in structure and clarity. Nonetheless, there is a rich history and literature in regard to land power to guide us. It is a distinct product of nation's culture and geography. We have already discussed two main land power strategy theories of Clausewitzian (strategy of destruction and unlimited war) and

STRATEGY: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

Liddle Hart's School of thought (strategy of paralysis or indirect approach).

US Land Power School. US Army War College group has summarised land power as stated below: -

- Application of the nations Army to exert decisive and lasting influences on land in support of national interests.
- Land power permits joint forces to achieve decisive victory.
- Land power shapes the peacetime international security environment, and responds decisively to the full spectrum of conflict.
- The destiny of nations is shaped by forces on land.
- Land forces symbolise nations' highest commitment and determination.

Land Power Strategy. In essence, then, the land power strategy is: -

- Ultimately the resolution of armed conflict is always predicated on land armies defeating the opposing armies and physically occupying or threatening to occupy the enemy's territory, thereby eliminating or controlling the enemy government and its ability to resist one's will.
- Armies must meet and one must be defeated in battle.

- Navy and airforce are in support roles delivering men, supplies and fire support, or creating conditions for land power to be applied.
- Land power strategy focuses on the destruction of enemy's army and occupation of his territory – an end that only an army can assure. (This is pure Clausewitzian thought.)
- The destruction of enemy forces and capture of space does not invalidate the role of maritime or air power but the use of land power or potential use of land power is the decisive factor.
- From this fundamental belief structure and the experience of land power, a number of corollaries and doctrinal truths emerge:-
 - Decisiveness and lasting influence in terms of both national greatness and survival depend ultimately on the land power, defeating enemy's land forces and occupying his territory.
 - The use of land power connotes political resolve exceeding that in the use of other forces (naval or air).
 - National perspective is so strong that Army is less inclined to articulate a land strategy because it views an independent service strategy as inconsistent with Army's natural role.

- Only land power recognises and embraces the inter dependency as part of its strategic construct. It is the land power school that is the advocate of the concept of jointness.
- Land power has a national focus. A basic principle of land power is that for every objective, seek unity of command and unity of effort. It requires a single command with the requisite authority to direct all forces in pursuit of a unified purpose.
- Thus, national focus and a search for unity characterise land power strategy.

There is validity in all the service perspectives. No service can be ignored except at the risk of the national interest. Relevant question is how to integrate the three-service perspectives in a correct mix suiting our strategic challenges.

Future Strategic Environment

For almost a decade now the military planners, around the globe, have foreseen an impending revolution in military affairs, sometimes called military – technology revolution. Such a revolution would touch virtually all aspects of the defensive forces from strategy, basic organisations to tactics. The Gulf war was just a demonstration of the use of new military technology and the

decisive results that it can achieve in extremely favourable circumstances.

If this is the reality of the future then we need to know what the revolution in military affairs will look like? Four questions are relevant in this context: Will it change the appearance of combat and structure of the armies? Will it alter the countries power position? Will it lead to changes in strategic thought at the military and operational levels?

The Forms of Combat

A transformation of combat means changes the fundamental relationship between offensive and defensive, space and time and fire and manoeuvre.

On the strength of firepower accuracy and reach, a military cliché has it that what can be seen on the modern battlefield can be hit, and what can be hit will be destroyed. Sophisticated armies can inflict unprecedented levels of destruction on any moving force. Fixed sites are also increasingly vulnerable.

The platform has become less important, while the quality of what it carries has become critical. On a world dominated by long-range, intelligent precision weapons the first blow can prove decisive. Incentive for pre-emption may grow.

The Structure of Military Organisations

- The balance between quality and quantity has shifted in favour of quality.
- The age of mass armies equipped with bulk produced weapons is coming to an end.
- The new military will be increasingly a joint force; or perhaps, one might say, less and less a traditional, service-oriented force. Air operations have become inseparable from almost any action on the ground.
- Fighting units will become small and deploy well dispersed. Extensive use will be made of fire brought to bear from the air or rear areas.
- The new technologies will increasingly bring to the fore new type of leaders, an expert in missile operations, air space manager and the electronic warfare.
- The cultural challenge for military organisations will be to maintain a warrior spirit and the intuitive understanding of war that goes with it.
- A profound problem would be to resist the temptation to centralise authority.

Implications for Strategy

- With some exceptions, limited wars seem more likely in the future; particularly in so far as its objectives are concerned.
- Armies defied comparison in the past. Their strength varied greatly depending on where and whom they were fighting. Opacity in the matter of military power may prove one of the most troubling features of the current revolution.
- The revolution may bring a kind of tactical clarity to the battlefield, but at the price of strategical obscurity.
- Military leaders will themselves be handling forces they do not fully comprehend and will be divided on the utility of various forms of military power.
- The whole spectrum of strategy will still be relevant because it is effects oriented. Operative factors and TSR matrix will still be pertinent but applied by keeping in view the new realities of prevailing environment.

A Word of Caution. At this point in time, United States (and NATO countries) only has the military capability based on the full potential of revolution in military technology. Rest of the world, including our adversary, will adopt to new change gradually and progressively.

Lessons / Conclusions of Strategy

Inter State Relationship. Some of the conclusions that can be drawn are: -

- Economic influence will determine which states will be *constant players*, i.e., nations whose interests and views must always be taken into account.
- An increasingly sophisticated understanding will be required to determine relationship between internal political / economic matters and external affairs.
- Third world forces in most regions will continue to modernise, grow and generally become more competent and lethal. World will have three types of armies; modern, qualitatively superior, quantitatively large and primitive but ideologically motivated.
- Virtually every region, one or more states will attempt to establish regional hegemony for next several decades.
- It will be possible to be an economic power without being a military power. Wield great political influence without the corresponding military weight traditionally needed to do so.
- It would be difficult, if not impossible, to be economically weak yet militarily strong and politically influential.

- World powers and US will be most influential when co-operating with each other rather than confronting one another.

Policy

- Clarity of national purpose, aims and objectives is essential. Vagueness in policy can be interpreted erroneously by the military strategy.
- Military strategy must remain subservient to policy and must strive to achieve the ends desired by policy. In other words, strategy must be in harmony with policy.
- Policy should not demand what strategy cannot deliver. Strategy cannot redress the imbalance created by faulty policy.
- Instruments of state power other than the military force have gained more potency. Military strategy would need to be applied in more complex environment.

Military Strategy

- Strategy does not demand what militarily is not attainable.
- Strategist must have a strategic vision that is translated in the form of clear ideas to execution level.
- Strategy in 21st century will demand a sense of intangibles and uncertainties.

TSR Matrix

- Space for the application of military strategy has been enlarged while the time to attain the desired effects has been drastically curtailed. Modern technology has made it increasingly difficult to assess the relative strength of the adversary. This means that: -
 - Clarity of strategic design and singleness of conception at all tiers is even more essential.
 - Strategy would need to be more flexible and responsive in order to meet the unexpected situations.
 - The potential of achieving surprise, at all levels, has generally enhanced.
 - Strategic leaders would need to be sharp, decisive and knowledgeable.
- Means to execute strategy must be affordable. Over stretch of resources causes loss of power even when the victory has been won.

Fire Power and Manoeuvre. Accuracy and reach of modern weapon systems have imposed serious limitations on the execution of decisive ground manoeuvres. Joint operations; particularly, air - ground integrated operations will be the basic form of offensive manoeuvre.

South Asian Deterrence

- Weapons of mass destruction are more a weapon of peace than war.
- Strategy of deterrence based on nuclear capability has two significant disadvantages / implications for us: -
 - Disproportionate confidence in nuclear weapons to deter across the entire conflict spectrum.
 - A propensity to escalate from a position of disadvantage or adversity.
- Future war will be limited in nature and fought well below the threshold of the adversaries.
- Nuclear threshold is directly proportional to our conventional war-fighting capability.
- Unconventional warfare of low and medium intensity will be the prime feature of our conflict environment.


Operational Strategy

- True aim of strategy is not to seek a battle but to create a situation where continuation of action would be fatal for the enemy.
- Retain freedom of action for yourself and curtail liberty of action of your adversary.
- Have a clear perception of our own enemy.

- There is always an element of calculated risk in operational strategy (but not in military strategy).
- The biggest lesson of history and of strategy is the sheer unpredictability and uncontrollability of human, political, economic and military affairs. The patterns and influences of the past will repeat themselves in different forms and arrays.

Conclusion

History has constantly displayed an uncomfortable ability to turn on those who were most confident about the future. One, thus, can safely predict that: -

- Power will lie at the heart of virtually everything that happens in the 21st century. More likely it will be economic or political power. It will also appear, quite often, in the guise of military force.
- The world is presently going through an information revolution. Future technologies may create pockets of military capability that will allow small states to hold off larger ones. The future holds a great opportunity for you. Step forward and take it. 

Lieutenant General Hamid Nawaz Khan, HI(M) was commissioned in an Artillery Regiment in 1966. He is a graduate of the Command and Staff College, Quetta and National Defence College, Islamabad. Later he has been on the faculty of both the institutions. He has also held the most coveted command and staff appointments, which include command of an infantry division and chief of staff of a corps. He was also the Chief Instructor in War Wing of National Defence College. Before retirement, he held the appointment of VCGS.
