MILITARY STRATEGY IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Edited by
Kersti Larsdotter

Military Strategy in the 21st Century

Military Strategy in the 21st Century explores military strategy and the new challenges facing Western democracies in the twenty-first century, including strategy in cyber operations and peacekeeping, challenges for civil-military relations, and the strategic choices of great powers and small states.

The volume contributes to a better understanding of military strategy in the twenty-first century, through exploring strategy from three perspectives: first, the study of strategy, and how our understanding of strategy has changed over time; second, new areas for strategic theory, such as peacekeeping and cyberspace; and third, the makers of strategy, and why states choose sub-optimal strategies.

With the increasing number of threats challenging strategy makers, such as great power rivalry, terrorism, intrastate wars, and transnational criminal organisations, *Military Strategy in the 21st Century* will be of great value to scholars of IR, Security Studies, Strategic Studies, and War Studies as well as policymakers and practitioners working with military strategy in particular and international security and war in general. The chapters were originally published as a special issue of the *Journal of Strategic Studies*.

Kersti Larsdotter is Associate Professor of War Studies at the Swedish Defence University. Her research includes the dynamics, nature, and conduct of war, specifically civil wars and different forms of military interventions. She has published in journals such as the *Journal of Strategic Studies*, *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, and *Parameters*.

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Military strategy in the 21st century

Kersti Larsdotter

ABSTRACT
This special issue explores military strategy in the twenty-first century. The articles scrutinise strategy from three perspectives: the study of strategy, and how our understanding of strategy has changed over time; new areas for strategic theory, i.e., areas where the development of war has made strategy become more important, such as peacekeeping operations and cyberspace; and the makers of strategy, more specifically why states choses suboptimal strategies and how wars in the twenty-first century influence strategy makers.

The development of international security and the conduct of war in the twenty-first century has proven highly problematic for strategy makers. The increasing number of nonstate threats, such as terrorism, intrastate wars, and transnational criminal organisations, the changing norms of intervention, as well as the blurring of lines between war and peace, have challenged strategy, both in theory and practice. Western democracies intervening in intrastate conflicts have received sharp criticism. Not only have they been criticised for pursuing the wrong strategies in contemporary conflicts, such as those in Afghanistan and Iraq, they have also repeatedly been accused of not having a strategy at all, or at least not clearly stated political goals, for the use of military force in these interventions.[1]

The aim of this special issue is to contribute to a better understanding of military strategy and the challenges facing Western democracies in the twenty-first century. We will do that by exploring strategy from three perspectives. The first focuses on the study of strategy, and on how our understanding of strategy has changed over time. The second perspective focuses on new areas for strategic theory, i.e., areas where the development

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[1]See, for example, Tim Bird and Alex Marshall, *Afghanistan: How the West Lost its Way* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press 2011); Alastair Finlan, *Contemporary Military Strategy and the Global War on Terror: US and UK Armed Forces in Afghanistan and Iraq 2001–2012* (London: Bloomsbury Academic 2014); Hew Strachan, 'Strategy or Alibi? Obama, McChrystal and the Operational Level of War', *Survival* 52/5 (2010), 157–182.

of war has made military strategy more important, such as peacekeeping operations and cyberspace. Finally, the last perspective focuses on the makers of strategy, more specifically, on why states choses suboptimal strategies, and how wars in the twenty-first century influence strategy makers.

This special issue contains the papers of the conference on 'Military Strategy in the 21st Century' at the Norwegian Defence Command and Staff College in Oslo 13th–14th June 2017. The conference is the fourth since the first Doctrine Conference in Oslo in 2014, the papers from which were published in the *Journal of Strategic Studies* Vol. 39, 2016 Issue 2. The second conference 'Mission Command—Wishful Thinking?' explored historical and contemporary issues of mission command. The papers are part of an edited volume published by the Royal Swedish Academy of War Sciences.

The study of strategy

Strategic Studies is a multidisciplinary and rather young academic discipline, but with roots in a long tradition of the study of strategy in military academies. Although relatively well established today,[2] fundamental questions about the development and identity of the discipline are continuously debated, some of which are particularly pertinent to the development of wars in the twenty-first century.

Although strategy is usually understood as the relationship between ends and means, the nature of this relationship is frequently debated.[3] One of the main questions concerns the relation between the military and political levels. At one end of the scale is Carl von Clausewitz with his understanding of strategy as 'the use of the engagement for the purpose of the war'.[4] This is usually contrasted with an understanding of strategy as the use of war for the purposes of policy, i.e., that battle is not an end in itself but rather a means to an end. The tension between the military and political levels has resulted in the development of different concepts of strategy, such as 'military strategy', focusing on the military level of war, as well as 'grand

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[2]The number of introductory books in Strategic Studies has, for example, increased over the last 10–15 years. See, for example, John Baylis, James Wirtz, Eliot Cohen and Colin Gray (eds.), *Strategy in the Contemporary World: An Introduction to Strategic Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2002); Thomas M. Kane and David J. Lonsdale, *Understanding Contemporary Strategy* (London: Routledge 2012); Thomas G. Mahnken and Joseph A. Maiolo (eds.), *Strategic Studies: A Reader* (London: Routledge 2008); Elinor C. Sloan, *Modern Military Strategy: An Introduction* (London: Routledge 2017).

[3]For an overview of several definitions, see John Baylis and James J. Wirtz, 'Introduction', in John Baylis, James Wirtz, Eliot Cohen and Colin Gray (eds.), *Strategy in the Contemporary World: An Introduction to Strategic Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2002), 1–14, 4.

[4]Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, translated and edited by Michel Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 1976), 177.

strategy' and 'national strategy', focusing on the political level, including other means than military.

Another important question is whether strategy should be understood as the 'instrumental link between military means and political ends' or as the 'process by which military objectives and force levels are set'.[5] Both understandings have merit. Understanding strategy as the former makes us focus on *how* military force can be used to achieve political or military objectives. Richard K. Betts, for example, defines strategy as 'a plan for using military means to achieve political ends'.[6] Other scholars understand strategy more in terms of a 'theory of victory' or 'theory of success', emphasising the causal mechanism between ends and means.[7] By understanding strategy as a link between ends and means, the discussion about levels mentioned above becomes less important. It is possible to include several levels of analysis, 'from maneuvers of units in specific engagements through larger campaigns, whole wars, grand strategies, and foreign policies', Betts argues, as long as focus is on 'the *linkages* in the hierarchy of policy, strategy and operations, where the logic at each level is supposed to govern the one below and serve the one above'.[8]

Instead, by understanding strategy as a process, the focus is turned to the actors conducting strategy and the relationship between them. Basil Liddell Hart, for example, defines strategy as 'the art of distributing and applying military means to fulfill the ends of policy'.[9] Who the strategy makers are, how they develop strategies and what influence their decision-making processes, are all significant questions. Here, the levels discussed above become more important. If one understands strategy as the use of the battle for the purposes of war, or 'the art of military command', military commanders are the main actors. However, if understanding strategy as the use of the war for the purposes of policy, or 'the art of controlling and utilizing the resources of a nation', politicians become the object of study.[10]

A third important question concerns the relationship between strategy in theory and strategy in practice. Strategic Studies has developed in close relationship to practice. Indeed, one of the founders of Strategic Studies as an academic discipline, Bernard Brodie, called strategic theory 'a theory for action'.[11] However, with the development of strategy as a field of study

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[5]Hew Strachan, 'Strategy in Theory; Strategy in Practice', this issue.
[6]Richard K. Betts, 'Is Strategy an Illusion?', *International Security*, 25/2 (2000), 5–50, 6.
[7]Jeffrey W. Meiser, 'Ends + Ways + Means = (Bad) Strategy', *Parameters* 46/4 (2016/2017), 81–91; Barry R. Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain, and Germany between the World Wars* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press 1984).
[8]Betts, 'Is Strategy an Illusion?', 6.
[9]Quoted in Baylis and Wirtz, 'Introduction', 4.
[10]Quotes from Edward Mead Earle, 'Introduction' in Edward Mead Earle (ed.), *Makers of Modern Strategy: Military Thought from Machiavelli to Hitler* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1944), vii–xi, viii.
[11]Bernard Brodie, *War and Politics* (New York, NY: Macmillan Publishing 1973), 452.

outside of the military academies, the division between strategy in theory and strategy in practice has become larger. Already by the mid-1960s, Brodie admitted that strategic theory had drifted too far from the practice of strategy.[12] Several scholars have expressed similar concerns, and at the turn of the century, Betts noted that many academics do not 'grasp how hard it is to implement strategic plans'. Rationalist models of strategy, he argued, could only provide 'heuristic beginnings for real strategies which, by definition, must be demonstrably practical'.[13]

In the first article of this special issue, 'Strategy in Theory; Strategy in Practice', Hew Strachan contributes to this debate. According to Strachan, our understanding of strategy has changed over time. Indeed, he argues that the development of war since the end of the Cold War has left us especially uncertain of what strategy means, unclear about who makes strategy, and confused about the relationship between strategy in theory and strategy in practice.

In the days of Napoleon and Clausewitz, the focus of strategy was on how to win wars. But, when wars became more complex, strategy became increasingly connected to policy. In the seminal work, *Makers of Modern Strategy: Military Thought from Machiavelli to Hitler*, Edward Mead Earle argues that 'as war and society have become more complicated […] strategy has of necessity required increasing consideration of nonmilitary factors, economic, psychological, moral, political, and technological'.[14] With the introduction of nuclear weapons in the 1940s, and the increasing focus on deterrence during the Cold War, strategy became about preventing war rather than waging it. In the event of nuclear war, experiences of traditional wars were not considered important, and the use of the battle for the purposes of war became all the more distant.

Since the end of the Cold War, and especially after 9/11, Strachan argues that 'the actual experience of war has required us to re-integrate [war and strategy] in ways that had not been necessary when war was more a threat than an actuality'.[15] This has made us confused. In the absence of strategy in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the military has presented counterinsurgency doctrine as strategy, rather than the tactical method it is. At the same time, politicians have become all the more involved in tactical solutions to strategic problems, for example, through the use of drones for targeting enemy leaders. As a solution, Strachan suggests that the debate needs to 'be informed by the recognition of the distinction between strategy in theory and strategy in practice'.[16] He argues that both perspectives are

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[12]Brodie, *War and Politics*, 474–475. For an overview of the development of Strategic Studies, see Richard K. Betts, 'Should Strategic Studies Survive?', *World Politics* 50 (1997), 7–33.
[13]Betts, 'Is Strategy an Illusion?', 7–8. See also Alexander L. George, *Bridging the Gap: Theory and Practice in Foreign Policy* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press 1993); Joseph S. Nye, 'Bridging the Gap between Theory and Policy', *Political Psychology* 29/4 (2008), 593–603.
[14]Earle, 'Introduction', viii.
[15]Strachan, 'Strategy in Theory'.
[16]*Ibid*.

required, but needs to be related to each other. He concludes by stressing the more pragmatic aspects of strategy. Strategy, he argues, 'needs to be modest about itself and about what it can deliver. It is, after all, more of an art than a science, and it behoves those who think about it and those who practice it not to be too brazen about its status'.[17]

Strategic theory

Apart from questions about the discipline itself, one of the most central questions in Strategic Studies is how to use force or the threat of force to achieve desired ends. Different strategies of coercion, such as deterrence, compellence and coercive diplomacy, have been especially scrutinised.[18] While traditional strategic theory has primarily focused on the military strategy of states,[19] changes in international security and the conduct of war over the last decades have opened up new areas for the study of strategy.

One such area is peacekeeping operations. Peacekeeping is rarely considered a military endeavour. But, while traditional peacekeeping operations were only deploying a few number of troops with a limited mandate to use force, contemporary operations are usually large, with up to 20,000 troops, and with much more forceful mandates than before. These developments have made peacekeeping an increasingly important area for the study of military strategy. So far, this has largely been overlooked.[20]

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[17]*Ibid.*

[18]See, for example, Daniel Byman and Matthew Waxman, *The Dynamics of Coercion: American Foreign Policy and the Limits of Military Might* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2002); Lawrence Freedman, *Deterrence* (Cambridge: Polity Press 2004); Alexander L. George, *Forceful Persuasion: Coercive Diplomacy as an Alternative to War* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press 1991); Peter Viggo Jakobsen, *Western Use of Coercive Diplomacy after the Cold War: A Challenge for Theory and Practice* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan Press 1998); Glenn H. Snyder, *Deterrence and Defense: Toward a Theory of National Security* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 1961).

[19]Strategic Studies has indeed often been accused of being state centric, not including non-state actors, transnational groups and international organisations. See, for example, Baylis and Wirtz, 'Introduction', 11; Barry Buzan and Lene Hansen, *The Evolution of International Security Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2012), 37; Isabelle Duyvesteyn and James E. Worrall, 'Global Strategic Studies: A Manifesto', *Journal of Strategic Studies* 40/3 (2017), 347–357, 349; Keith Krause and Michael C. Williams, 'From Strategy to Security: Foundations of Critical Security Studies', in Keith Krause and Michael C. Williams (eds.), *Critical Security Studies: Concepts and Cases* (London: Routledge 1997), 33–59. See Pascal Vennesson for a refutation. Pascal Vennesson, 'Is Strategic Studies Narrow? Critical Security and the Misunderstood Scope of Strategy', *Journal of Strategic Studies* 40/3 (2017), 358–391, 368–372.

[20]Notable exceptions are, Alexander J. Bellamy, 'Lessons Unlearned: Why Coercive Diplomacy Failed at Rambouillet', *International Peacekeeping* 7/2 (2000), 95–114; Ken Ohnishi, 'Coercive Diplomacy and Peace Operations: Intervention in East Timor', *NIDS Journal of Defense and Security* 13 (2012), 53–77. For a special focus on the protection of civilians, see Arthur J. Boutellis, 'From Crisis to Reform: Peacekeeping Strategies for the Protection of Civilians in the Democratic Republic of the Congo', *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development* 2/3 (2013), 1–11; Stian Kjeksrud, 'The Utility of Force for Protecting Civilians', in Haidi Willmot, Ralph Mamiya, Scott Scheeran and Marc Weller (eds.), *Protection of Civilians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2016), 329–349; Paul D. Williams, *Enhancing Civilian Protection in Peace Operations: Insights from Africa* (Washington, DC: Africa Center for Strategic Studies 2010).

In the second article of this issue, 'Military Strategy and Peacekeeping: An Unholy Alliance?', Kersti Larsdotter addresses this question in a comprehensive manner. She outlines the logic of four main strategies— defence, deterrence, compellence and offence—for peacekeeping operations, using traditional strategic theory as a point of departure. She argues that all four can indeed be utilised for the most common strategic objectives in peacekeeping. Defensive strategies can be used in the protection of civilians as well as for self-defence. Deterrence can also be used for these purposes, but it can also be used to deter violence against the political process in general. Compellence is useful when the peacekeepers are deployed in an ongoing conflict, to stop violence against civilians or the disarmament process. Lastly, offensive strategies, although furthest from the peacekeeping norm, can deprive the spoilers of the means of continued fighting.

Larsdotter also traces the use of these strategies in two consecutive UN operations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo: MONUC and MONUSCO. She finds that all four strategies are indeed used in the two operations. They are, however, neither comprehensive nor proactive, leaving the true potential of military strategy unrealised. She concludes that while the military strategy of peacekeeping operations is ultimately restrained by a great number of factors, such as the need for consensus in the Security Council or the will of the troop contributing countries, it 'does not reduce the importance of having a logically coherent idea about how military force can contribute to keep the peace'.[21]

Another, quickly emerging, area for the study of strategy is cyber warfare.[22] The increasing dependence on information systems has made cyberspace a new 'war fighting domain'.[23] Issues such as the risk of cyber war,[24] and the consequences of the offensive and defensive abilities of cyber tools for the international system, i.e., the offense-defence balance, are commonly discussed.[25] Lately, scholars have increasingly turned their attention to cyber strategies, especially different forms of coercion, adapting

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[21]Kersti Larsdotter, 'Military Strategy and Peacekeeping: An Unholy Alliance?', this issue.
[22]See, for example, the roundtable in Timothy J. Junio, 'How Probable Is Cyber War? Bringing IR Theory Back in to the Cyber Conflict Debate', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 36/1 (2013), 125–33.
[23]Jon R. Lindsay, and Erik Gartzke, 'Coercion through Cyberspace: The Stability-Instability Paradox Revisited', in Kelly M. Greenhill and Peter Krause (eds.), *Coercion: The Power to Hurt in International Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2018), 179–203.
[24]Adam Liff, 'Cyberwar: A New "Absolute Weapon"? The Proliferation of Cyberwarfare Capabilities and Interstate War', *Journal of Strategic Studies* 35/3 (2012), 401–428; Thomas Rid, 'Cyber War Will Not Take Place', *Journal of Strategic Studies* 35/1 (2012), 5–32; Brandon Valeriano and Ryan C Maness, 'The Dynamics of Cyber Conflict between Rival Antagonists', *Journal of Peace Research* 51/3 (2014), 347–360. See also Timothy J. Junio, 'How Probable is Cyber War? Bringing IR Theory Back In to the Cyber Conflict Debate', *Journal of Strategic Studies* 36/1 (2013), 125–133, as well as the rest of the roundtable in the same issue of *Journal of Strategic Studies*.
[25]Ilai Saltzman, 'Cyber Posturing and the Offense-Defense Balance', *Contemporary Security Policy* 34/1 (2013), 40–63; Rebecca Slayton, 'What is the Cyber Offense-Defense Balance? Conceptions, Causes, and Assessment', *International Security* 41/3 (2016/2017), 72–109.