Chapter-3

Art of War and Nuances of Strategy, Operational Art, and Tactics

Introduction

On strategy, Sun Tzu succinctly said, “All men can see these tactics whereby I conquer, but what none can see is the strategy out of which victory is evolved”1. Central theme of this dissertation being the politico-military strategy of Bangladesh liberation war, I have in this chapter explained the historical transformation and changed perception of strategy as applicable in modern warfare with a view to facilitating the reader with better clarity on its definition, attributes and correlation with other components of state machinery in conduct of war. Since time immemorial, there had been great many work on warfare and strategy like, Chanakya’s Arthashastrara, Sun Tzu’s Art of War, both written almost twenty five centuries ago, Niccolo Machiavelli’s The Art of War, The Discourses, and The Prince, written in 16th Century, Frederick the Great’s Instructions for His Generals, The Military Maxims of Napoleon, The Art of War by Jomini, Art of War by Clauzewitz, Strategy of Indirect Approach by Liddle Hart, and last but not the least contemporary American strategist Colin S. Gray’s Modern Strategy.

The art of warfare is practiced in three levels: the strategic, operational, and tactical. The English word strategy originated from the Greek word strategia, meaning the Generalship and therefore; the art of planning and directing overall military operations and movements in a war or battle2. For most of history two conceptual levels of warfare and command sufficed: Strategy- how to win war and Tactics-how to win battle. It seems that Admiral Marlborough was able to distinguish between the two when he famously said: ‘my strategy is one against ten, my tactics ten against one’3.

Over the time, scope of strategy which once was considered a pure military concept related to warfare has enhanced. Clausewitz defines military strategy as ‘the art of employment of battles as a means to gain the object of war’4. Liddle Hart modifies this definition to say “the art of distributing and applying military means to fulfill the ends of policy.”5. As society and warfare have steadily grown more complex, military
and politico factors have become more and more inseparable in the conduct of war. Georges Clemenceau, Prime Minister of France during World War-I, famously said, “War is too serious a business to be left to the Generals”\(^6\). General Charles de Gaulle an well-known WW-I and WWII veteran who later rose to become president of France said, “war is too serious a business to be left to politicians”\(^7\), a kind of rebuttal to Georges Clemenceau. In the context of modern warfare both are partially right from their respective standpoint. Essence of both the statements taken together makes complete sense because the kind of ramifications the war has on a nation state. Strategy is no more confined to the Generals which many centuries ago might have been the truth. Hence the importance of political strategy or policy guidelines on the aim of war which the military (army/navy/air force) commanders need to translate in terms of military strategy with a view to achieving the national aim. Political considerations have always conditioned military operations. Clausewitz makes this a central theme of his theory of war, repeatedly stressing the subordination of war to politics, asserting that ‘war should never be thought of as something autonomous, but always as an instrument of policy’\(^8\). When military and political strategy merge to achieve the national aim after factoring aspects of economy and available power of information, then the combined strategy takes the shape of ‘Grand Strategy’. The role of grand strategy is to coordinate and direct all the resources of a nation, or band of nations, towards the attainment of the political object of the war. Most importantly, Grand Strategy looks beyond the war to the subsequent peace\(^9\).

Col Ravi Nanda in his book National Strategy of India states: “In today’s environment, national strategy concerns whole gamut of national wellbeing and existence. National interest in purely political-military terminology should be one for which a nation should be ready to go to war. This definition would emphasize the seriousness with which national interest of a country need to be identified and analysed so that they do not commit their country to war by an error of judgment….national interest will also include the elimination of hostile neighbours or their neutralization by diplomatic, political or military means so that they cease to interfere with its national security. Diplomacy and foreign policy are two means for effective neutralization or elimination of the hostility of superpowers.”\(^10\)
Comprehensive Definition of Strategy

War strategy is aimed at achieving the policy objective. Webster dictionary defines strategy ‘the science and art of employing the political, economic, psychological, and military forces of a nation or group of nations to afford the maximum support to adopted policies in peace or war’\textsuperscript{11}. Strategy flows from the national policy. From military point of view, contemporary strategist Colin Gray’s definition is also worth mentioning. He said:

“By strategy I mean the use that is made of force and the threat of force for the ends of policy[emphasis in original]”\textsuperscript{12}

US Department of Defense gives a comprehensive modern definition of strategy by stating ‘It is the art and science of developing and employing instruments of national power in a synchronized and integrated fashion to achieve theater, national, and/or multinational objectives’\textsuperscript{13}. This definition encompasses aspects related to war strategy aiming at victory which is the very purpose of strategy.

Leadership and Strategy Formulation Process

High level conduct of war needs leadership vision, and constant focus on the strategic objective. Leaders at strategic level should be flexible to change and adapt with the change in situation, ‘… but above all (there should be) unity of purpose and effort based on a firm grip of reality. To that end, strategic leadership in war demands consistent coherence between political objectives and the politico-military organization.’\textsuperscript{14}. Strategic planning is an evolving process which needs to take note of various internal and external parameters which will be discussed along with risk calculus model to check risk factor on the evolved strategy.
Comprehensiveness of Strategy

Model 1

During the formulation of strategy, aspects needing considerations are: National Interests to include national policies based on national value and, end state desired. External Environment, to include domestic and internal conditions affecting the state, National Security Strategy, to include combined political, economic, military and Information elements of power (intelligence), National Military Strategy, which signifies military state of power aimed at achieving the policy objective during the war. Theatre level strategy gets executed through Operational Art and Tactics: fulfilling the military aim of the war. It therefore must be understood that strategy is comprehensive and cannot be formulated on a ‘stand-alone mode’. Above diagram in this context is self explanatory. Richard Yadger in his seminal essay, Towards a Theory of Strategy makes similar suggestions insisting on the totality aspect of strategy formulation. He says:

“While the strategist may be devising a strategy from a particular perspective, he must consider the whole of the strategic environment in his analysis to arrive at a proper strategy to serve his purpose at his level. …... in formulating a strategy, the strategist must also be cognizant that each aspect—objectives, concepts, and resources-
-has effects on the environment around him. Thus, the strategist must have a comprehensive knowledge of what else is happening……. The strategist’s efforts must be fully integrated with the strategies or efforts of senior, co-equal, and subordinate elements. Strategists must think holistically—that is comprehensively. They must be cognizant of both the "big picture," their own institution’s capabilities and resources, and the impact of their actions on the whole of the environment. Good strategy is never developed in isolation.”

**Risk Calculus: Strategy**

“The Art Lykke Strategy Model” is worth considering understanding the risk factor of an evolved strategy. Col Lykke a renowned professor of strategy who taught in US War College devised a simple but effective model known as ‘The Lykke Model’ shown below ‘depicts the risk factor to check the viability of the evolved strategy. Risk factor widens (becomes more) with the corresponding mismatch of ‘ends and the means’.

**Model. 2**

![Image of the Lykke Model](image)

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

Richard Yadger explains that it should be evident that the model poses three key questions for strategists. What is to be done? How is it to be done? What resources are required to do it in this manner? Lykke argues that if any leg of the stool is out of balance then one accepts a corresponding risk unless one adjusts the legs. One might add resources, use a different concept, or change the objective. Or, one might decide
to accept the risk. The theory is quite clear--a valid strategy must have an appropriate balance of objectives, concepts, and resources or its success is at greater risk. The strategist seeks to minimize this risk through his development of the strategy--the balance of ends, ways, and means.\textsuperscript{18}

To sum it up one would like to quote Henry Eccles who describes strategy as “....the comprehensive direction of power to control situations and areas in order to attain objectives”. His definition captures much of the essence of strategy. It is comprehensive, it provides direction, its purpose is control, and it is fundamentally concerned with application of power\textsuperscript{19}.

**Operational Art**

Operational art refers to the military commander’s employment of force in a theater of operations to achieve strategic objectives. Operational art is inextricably linked to the planning and conduct of military campaigns in specific theatres of war, which distinguishes it from tactics and strategy\textsuperscript{20}. As per US Army doctrine, ‘Operational Art’ has been defined as “the pursuit of Strategic objectives in whole or part, through the arrangement of tactical actions in time, space, and purpose”\textsuperscript{21}.

At the operational level, battles are fought to achieve or deny freedom of action, rather than to achieve total destruction of the enemy. Operational art is, therefore, oriented towards geography and terrain instead the classical strategy of focusing on the enemy. The retention and seizure of key terrain features, with a view to retain freedom of action while denying the same to the enemy, thus becomes central to the practice of operational art.

According to US historian Michael D Krause, the Germans are traditionally credited with delineating the three levels of warfare. The operational level of war, situated conceptually between war (the strategic level) and battle (the tactical level) was, according to Krause, first conceptualized by von Moltke, although it was not given this name by the German General. Instead, it was the Soviets who gave the Western world the term ‘operational art’. Between the wars, a group of outstanding Soviet military theorists—including M N Tukhachevsky, Aleksandr Svechin, N E Varfolomeev, G S Isserson and V K Triandaffilov—codified the theoretical basis for the development of the operational level of war and the concept of the operational art, both of which sought to redefine the purpose of battle in the post-First World War environment\textsuperscript{22}. Operational art, as a distinct field of study, emerged in the 1920s and
evolved over the next two decades as Soviet military theorists pondered the nature of modern war and solutions to the dilemma of the First World War. The most important question of the day was how to restore mobility and manoeuvre to a stagnant battlefield and to harness those means to achieve strategic aims. According to Shimon Naveh, the development of the post-1917 Soviet school of operational warfare is ‘the most creative theoretical adventure in the military history of the twentieth century’.

The Soviets, like the Germans before them, recognised the conditions of warfare were changing. Soviet strategists such as Tchaikovsky and Svechin had postulated in the early 1920’s that military art is divided into strategy, operational art and tactics. Over the years, the military world has realized that indeed, strategy and tactics are interconnected. There is a creative art called operational art which needs to be explained to ensure the tactical results are made to serve the strategic purpose of operations.

The military campaign through which operational art is conducted comprises of a series of major operations (land/air/sea) sequenced and synchronized in time and space to accomplish a strategic objective in a given theatre of operations. A Major operation is described as a series of tactical actions like battles, engagements, strikes, raids etc. sequenced in time and space to achieve an operational goal. A logical sequence of handling operational art would be by finding answers to the questions as under:

How does operational art fit into the strategy-operation-tactical levels of war? How do these interact? How does the military campaign become the vehicle of the operational art? How is the campaign designed? What are the strategic aims? End state and operational objectives sought to be achieved. What are the critical enemy factors which need to be taken into account to ensure defeat? How are the operations sequenced and harmonized? How operation is art executed? What is the end distillate-the campaign plan? How do the building blocks of operational art like manoeuvre, mobility, surprise, operational logistics and above all the leadership are appropriately employed to achieve success?

In essence, the operational level of war is the discipline of conceiving, focusing and exploiting tactical actions including their sequencing, to realize strategic aims. The operational level thus involves the decision of when, where for what purpose and under what conditions to give or refuse battle with reference to the strategic vision. As Manstein, the great World War II German strategist said, ‘the basic concept of a campaign plan with which it is intended to execute operations should be born in the
mind of the man who has to direct the campaign. This brings in the element of creativity in operational art, even in those cases when strategic vision is provided to the operational commander by an apex authority. The basic tool by which the operational commander translates tactical actions into strategic results is the campaign. Thus just as strategy is the discipline of making war and tactics the discipline of fighting and winning in combat, the operational level of war can be described as the discipline of campaigning. Its ‘means’ are tactical results. Its ‘ends’ is the accomplishment of the established strategic aim. Its ‘ways’ are the schemes by which the senior commanders combine and sequence the tactical means to reach the strategic end state. From the point of view of distributed operations, operational art is best expressed in the use of multiple axes of advance directed against the enemy’s capacity to wage war – his centre of gravity.

**Tactics**

The word tactics came from the modern Latin tactica (17c) which finds its origin from the ancient Greek word taktike meaning "art of arrangement" is a conceptual action implemented as one or more specific tasks. Webster dictionary defines ‘tactics’ “the activity or skill of organizing and moving soldiers and equipment in a military battle”. These days the word tactics is used in many fields like, politics, sports and business etc. Clausewitz said, military tactics are the science and art of organizing a military force, and the techniques for combining and using weapons and military units to engage and defeat an enemy in a battle. Tactics is operation and terrain specific. For example, tactics for offensive battles in each type of terrain like mountain, desert, jungle, plains and riverine etc. will be different. Similarly, different types of operations like, advance to contact, defence, attack, ambush, raid, patrolling, counter insurgency etc. have different tactics which are taught in military schools and practiced as part of military’s operational role. Military technology also gets factored in to tactical concept of battle. Whole aim is to defeat enemy earliest with least possible damage to own.

The four recognized operations of war are advance, attack, defence and withdrawal. Advance and attack are offensive operations while defence and withdrawal (retrograde) come under defensive operations. However, though offensive element is predominant in offensive operations, but certain amount of defensive aspects is
inherent in them. For instance an attack is launched from a firm base and terminates in
the reorganization on the objective; both have all the ingredients of a defensive
operation. Similarly there is an inherent element of offensive aspects of defensive
operation. It can be said that from the point of view of tactical concept, there is no
operation of war which is purely defensive or offensive in nature. Dividing line
between the two operations of war advance and attack is difficult to determine. This
will be obvious from the fact that a force undertaking advance operation of war will
invariably be required to launch a number of attacks during the course of advance.
In the case of Bangladesh campaign, being a riverine terrain, two aspects of tactical
warfare in addition to advance to contact require mentioning. Attacking force has to
invariably undertake crossing of river or in military tactical terminology ‘opposed
river crossing operation’. And the defending force needs to utilize these river
obstacles to their advantage. In this type of situation, both the defenders as well as the
attackers have unique problems which need to be planned and addressed. For example
a defender will always be short of troops. River being a natural obstacle, there is a
need to keep the ground ahead under surveillance, hold the likely crossing places
strongly and have sizable reserve to react.
An attacker in this type of situation must ensure that advance to the river line must
dovetail into the proposed plan of crossing. Advance should be made rapidly on a
wide front. Mechanised forces (armour and mechanized infantry), artillery and
bridging equipment with adequate engineering resources must be grouped with the
infantry. It would be better to organize into composite task force concept to attempt
encounter crossings. Employment of parachute units/ helicopter borne units in
conjunction with the task forces be considered to ensure speed and momentum. As far
as possible, selection of the crossing place (in tactical term ‘bridgehead’) should be
chosen after considering tactical as well as technical considerations like the place
which will offer maximum tactical advantage for progressing operation in depth and
requires affordable engineering efforts to cross. All efforts must be made to capture an
existing bridge intact. From tactical point of view, rivers are crossed by the assaulting
troops in dark so that there are fewer casualties. After establishing a bridgehead, it
should be ensured that the area is covered by artillery and air force through their
firepower. In a major river crossing operation, a reserve of engineer manpower and
equipment must be maintained to cater for any unforeseen eventualities of
bridges/rafts being damage/destroyed²⁹.
It is a matter of debate till what level the formations could be said fight tactical battles. In Indian context it is perceived that Battles up to the level of Division can be categorized under this head. In Corps level of military operations, it can be both strategy as well as tactics. In fact, there cannot be a sacrosanct dividing line. The United States Department of Defense Dictionary of Military Terms defines the tactical level as "the level of war at which battles and engagements are planned and executed to accomplish military objectives assigned to tactical units or task forces. Activities at this level focus on the ordered arrangement and manoeuvre of combat elements in relation to each other and to the enemy to achieve combat objectives."30 The art of warfare is practiced in three levels: the strategic, operational, and tactical. Operational art refers to the military commander’s employment of force in a theatre of operations to achieve strategic objectives. Operational art is inextricably linked to the planning and conduct of military campaigns in specific theatres of war, which distinguishes it from tactics and strategy. Strategy and tactics have long been studied and described, but the third level of war, the operational level, began to emerge only in the 19th century as nations began to field ever-larger armies. The manoeuvre of large armies or multiple armies required commanders to orchestrate large-scale manoeuvres in the theatre of war. During the Napoleonic Wars the aim of this manoeuvre was the pursuit of the decisive battle, such as Austerlitz and Waterloo. By World War I, it was clear that single battles could not yield strategic results. The armies were simply too large for single decisive battles to provide political results, and so campaigns designed to arrange a series of battles became necessary31. Historians have largely overlooked the operational level of 1971 Indo-Pakistan War. I intend to debate successful or otherwise practice of operational art during the Bangladesh Liberation War. “Ruthless honesty is critical to the high level conduct of war(strategic leadership), requiring an unremitting focus on the strategic objective, openness to change and adaptation, but above all unity of purpose and effort based on a firm grit of reality. To that end, strategic leadership in war demands consistent coherence between political objectives the political strategy and the politico-military and military organization. “.Actually leadership is the most important factor for formulating strategy. Clarity of thought, vision and adaptability exemplify the strategic leader as much as resolution and determination. An ability to live with ambiguity and uncertainty, and not least a pragmatic capacity to take a calculated risk
for the longer-term and greater benefit, distinguishes the successful strategic leader from the tactical thinker\(^{31}\).

As tactics is an application of strategy on a lower plane, so strategy is an application on a lower plane of ‘grand strategy’\(\ldots\) While practically synonymous with the policy which guides the conduct of war, as distinct from the more fundamental policy which should govern its objective, the term ‘grand strategy’ serves to bring out the sense of ‘policy in execution.’ For the role of grand strategy—higher strategy—is to coordinate all the resources of a nation, or a band of nations, towards the attainment of the political object of the war—the goal defined by fundamental policy\(^ {33}\).

Today wars are thus fought to fashion stability for which intense civil, military and bureaucratic cooperation is a pre requisite. How does one judge whether the strategy formulated by the leaders are right or wrong? Rightness or wrongness of a strategy depends on the situation. Because of this situational dependency, strategic planning is an evolving process. If you don’t like your current situation you have the power to change it. By changing, in a strategic situation you change others. There is a strategic umbilical cord connecting you to others. As they move you move and vice-a \(-\)versa\(^{34}\).

**Conclusion**

For a military campaign to be successful, political objectives and military strategy have to be in total sync. It is imperative that between the political and military leaders responsible for the higher direction of war, there is adequate harmony. ‘Strategy guides operations in three basic ways: it establishes aims, allocates resources, and imposes conditions on military action. Together with the enemy and the geography of the theatre or area, strategy guidance defines the parameters of operations\(^ {35}\).

Strategy is all about how (way or concept) leadership will use the power (means or resources) available to the state to exercise control over sets of circumstances and geographic locations to achieve objectives (ends) that support state interests.\(^ {36}\). The word strategy has found its usage in many fields other than military, like politics, economics, business, sports etc. The word ‘tactics’ too has similar usage in the fields like politics, sports, business etc. Strategy is in the higher plane and tactics is in the lower plane. So basic concept everywhere is optimal economic usage of resources for the maximum gain on a planned path to reach a desired goal. A strategist or a tactician has to be ever proactive and keep him abreast with the latest happenings. Strategist in particular must be a visionary person, who can chart a new course of action which
results in long term benefits to the nation/organization he/she is leading. A strategist as well as a tactician should have ‘out of box thinking ability’.

From the time of World War- I, process of evolving national strategy as well as war strategy have become more comprehensive. Improvement in automobile, weapon, ammunition and surveillance technology have added new dimension to operational art and tactical level of war. International relations, strategic alliances with other friendly nations, justification of resorting to military action and last but not the least; legality aspect of the conduct of war adhering to international norms and conventions have to be factored while resorting to nation’s last option ‘military’. In essence, war strategy is nation’s policy in motion.

A large nation like India with many neighbouring countries surrounding it, and that too when some are not too friendly; make it a compulsion for continuous review of international situation as well as internal economic and military capability so that the country can remain prepared for any eventuality. Therefore it is strategic imperative for India, to prepare or perish.

Strategy and tactics have long been studied and described, but the third level of war, the operational level (operational art), in context to 1971 Indo-Pakistan War has been hardly studied which I intend to cover in my thesis albeit briefly. By World War I, it was clear that single battles could not yield strategic results. The armies were simply too large for single decisive battles to provide political results, and so campaigns designed to arrange a series of battles became necessary. Understanding of warfare is a science, but the conduct of war itself is largely an art. This will not change in the future regardless of scientific and technological advances. As in the past, the character of war will change, even dramatically, but the nature of war as explained by Clausewitz will not.
End Notes of Chapter III


3. The Royal College of Defence Studies (RCDS) Pamphlet, Thinking Strategically,(4th Ed. September 2012,UK),p. 4-5. Marlborough had coined this concept to differentiate between strategy and tactics. However, Mao Tse tung too while summing up the experience of the Second Revolutionary Civil War : 1927-37 said, “Our strategy is pit one against ten and our tactics are pit ten against one” quoted in Li Tso- Peng, Strategy: One Against Ten; Tactics: Ten Against One,(Foreign Language Press,Peking,1966), p.4


6. "War is too important to be left to the generals” is a famous quote, attributed to Georges Clemenceau (1841-1929), see https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Georges_Clemenceau viewed on 21 October 2014.


8. Clausewitz, On War, ibid, p. 88.

9. Liddle Hart.BH. Strategy ,p.322..


25. Ibid, p.32.


29. Indian Army’s Precis on Tactics, published by Ministry of Defence(Army), New Delhi,( restricted document, hence no further details).


32. Publication of Royal College of Defence Studies (RCDS) , Thinking Strategically, October 2012,pp1-12.


