Crafting Naval Strategy: Observations and Recommendations for the Development of Future Strategies

Bruce B. Stubbs
Sam J. Tangredi

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Edited by Sam J. Tangredi
Cover

Electronics Technician Second Class Robert K. Burns, from San Diego, stationed aboard the *Los Angeles*-class attack submarine USS *Pasadena* (SSN 752), participates in a demonstration of 3-D facial scanning capabilities at Activision Capture Studio during a tour of the facility as part of LA Fleet Week 2017.

Source: USN photo by Mass Communication Specialist First Class Christopher Okula / Released
Crafting Naval Strategy
The overall subject matter of this series of Naval War College monographs is applied research on national-security issues. The intent is to provide the backdrop for expanding and continuing public discussions on the topics that volumes in the series identify and examine, as a start to critical public investigations and dialogue. The objective is to aid readers in understanding issues impacting current choices that ultimately will determine the course of war and peace into the far future. Volumes in the series will strive to provide as much rigor and balance as possible in their research and analyses, as well as respect for other points of view.

The series is sponsored by the College’s Leidos Chair of Future Warfare Studies and the Institute for Future Warfare Studies within the Strategic and Operational Research Department of the Center for Naval Warfare Studies.

We thank the Naval War College Foundation (NWCF) and the Leidos Corporation’s most generous support to the NWCF in donating resources used in funding the research of the Leidos Chair and the Institute for Future Warfare Studies. It is in part through their generosity that we are able to offer this series to the public.

Opinions, conclusions, and recommendations expressed or implied in this series do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Naval War College, the Department of the Navy, the Department of Defense, or any other agency, organization, or command of the U.S. government.

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CONTENTS

Series Introduction ........................................... vii
Introduction, by Sam J. Tangredi ............................ 1

Crafting Naval Strategy
Observations and Recommendations for the Development of Future Strategies .............................. 15

Annotated Bibliography on Strategy Development,
by Sam J. Tangredi ............................................. 81
About the Contributors ......................................... 107
Series Introduction

It is with great pleasure that we introduce this first volume of a new series of Naval War College (NWC) monographs. It is sponsored by the College’s Leidos Chair of Future Warfare Studies and the Institute for Future Warfare Studies (IFWS) within the Strategic and Operational Research Department (SORD) of the Center for Naval Warfare Studies (CNWS). Please add to that pleasure (and onslaught of acronyms) a tide of humility and earnest prayers for this volume’s utility.

We have nicknamed this new monograph series the Black Books. This is in honor of the long-standing series of Blue Books, the international law studies volumes published by NWC’s Stockton Center for International Law (the first volume of which dates from 1895, making it the oldest international law journal in the United States), as well as the more recent, though already widely respected, Red Books of NWC’s China Maritime Studies Institute (CMSI).

Obviously, we desire to match the excellence of the preceding series with another “color revolution,” so to speak, this one in applied research on national-security issues. Black is the color of outer space and the ocean’s greatest depths, and, traditionally, the symbol of the unknown. In artistic terms, it is described as the absorption of all colors so that none are reflected back to the eye. Black appears as the void into which great light—wisdom out of inquiry—can be projected. We hope that these Black Books will provide the backdrop for expanding and continuing public discussions on the topics they identify and examine. They are intended to be but the start of critical public investigations and dialogue, not their conclusion.

The monographs in the series will be linked to a common theme. Their objective is to aid readers in understanding issues impacting current choices that ultimately will determine the course of war and peace into the far future. This is as much a practical policy endeavor as a scholarly one.

Each monograph is the individual product of the author or authors. The volumes are the products of personal effort and are not, and are not intended to be, official statements of the Naval War College, the Department of the Navy, the Department of Defense, or any other agency of the U.S. government. As the standard disclaimer reads: the views
expressed are those of the authors and editors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the U.S. government.

No research into national security or other social science issues truly can be “value-free” or “value neutral.” Humans never can be neutral about other humans. Obviously, the authors and editors care deeply about the future security, prosperity, and happiness of the American people, and those of their allies and friends, but in this series we will strive to provide as much rigor and balance as possible in the research and analyses, as well as respect for other points of view. In this, we admit our biases to permit the reader’s greater understanding.

We give great thanks to the Naval War College Foundation (NWCF) and the Leidos Corporation’s most generous support to the NWCF in donating resources used in funding the research of the Leidos Chair and the Institute for Future Warfare Studies. It is in part through their generosity, without expectation of recompense, that we are able to offer this Black Book series to the public.
**Introduction**

**Sam J. Tangredi**

Distilling a lifetime of career experience to provide insights for future generations is a daunting challenge. Although they may be critical to the education of those who will hold similar positions of responsibility, such insights do not always lend themselves to formal academic instruction, especially when the experiences seem to contradict some of the tightly held theories and idealizations of professional scholars. In the area of naval and military affairs, strategy development and subsequent decision-making rarely follow the prescribed path of the logical and formal process diagrams outlined in textbooks and statements of doctrine.

This is particularly true for planning and decision-making in periods of utmost pressure, stress, and danger, such as when military forces consider that combat operations may be imminent. Yet it is likewise true during periods of apparent peace but great strategic and economic uncertainty. Strategic planning in such organizations at such times may occur with the structure and regularity of ocean waves; but those waves become erratic in shape and form once they hit rocks and shoals and eventually crash on the beach. It is hard to capture and describe fully the eternal need of strategists to adapt to environmental conditions that twist objectives and constantly threaten to capsize—or at least transform—the formal planning process itself.

The author of this monograph attempts to capture exactly that.
Planners versus Planning versus Plans

The “great captains” of military history have described the contradictions between rigorous, formal, institutionalized planning and the commonly chaotic results and necessary readjustments through a series of pithy aphorisms that by now have become clichés. The Prussian field marshal Helmuth von Moltke the Elder is cited—routinely, exhaustingly, almost annoyingly—as having said, “No plan survives contact with the enemy.”

Yet perhaps Moltke captured the challenge more succinctly in a lesser-known but more apt quote: “Strategy is a system of expedients; it is more than a mere scholarly discipline.” Today, expedient often is used as a pejorative term, indicating a decision based on immediate advantage without regard to consistency, logic, or ethics. In fairness, however, expedients can consist simply of morally neutral variables that merely were not included in the original plan—humans not being omniscient. Meanwhile, actual conditions on Earth change constantly. Moltke’s intent is to convey the point that the strategist should expect, even anticipate, disruptions to the planning process and must be able to go beyond the “discipline” or structure of his or her training. The problem for strategists is how to learn to do this; it is a skill that largely must be self-taught.

A second problem, rarely described in treatises on the planning process, is determining how and when to stop the formal planning phase and commence implementation, yet to remain ready to modify the plan in the midst of (violent) attention-absorbing activity—in other words, to know when the plan is developed enough to be put into action with a chance of success. At some point, one must take the chance, then stand ready to correct the plan. This always involves risk and uncertainty. Reportedly, during the age of fighting sail the French command to put a ship about was à-Dieu-va—roughly in English, “we must chance and trust in God”—certainly an admission of the risks inherent in any plan.

An even more apocryphal aphorism illustrating this dilemma comes from American general George S. Patton Jr., who is credited with saying, “A good plan, violently executed now, is better than a perfect plan next week.” Another, more plausible, version is the following: “A good solution applied with vigor now is better than a perfect solution applied ten minutes later.” Neither version may be an accurate quote; however, both capture the spirit of the author, as well as the reality that events rarely can wait for a plan to be perfected. In that sense, no effective plan or strategy—that is, a plan that affects events—is ever complete.

A third problem involves decision makers who act in a manner opposite to a Patton, with caution toward full commitment to a plan that is only partly (or not at all) their own. In this situation—one discussed from various approaches in the “how-to” segments of this volume—the strategic planner often must operate as a strategic
entrepreneur—a marketer and salesperson, so to speak. The planner must convince the decision makers that the plan should be adopted and attempted. In theory, it was these very decision makers who charged the strategic planner with creating the plan, so they should be eager to adopt it. Yet the reality can be that a strategy may be developed simply because an organization has a planning staff, members of which anticipate the need for a plan; whereas decision makers may not see any need for a comprehensive plan, particularly when they are accustomed to improvising to meet emerging management requirements and conditions.

Even when a new operating environment appears to be emerging, the need for a new strategy may be resisted. The decision makers may feel themselves too busy to examine the details of a comprehensive plan, particularly one created without their direct input. Some may question the need for a publicly articulated plan, since they view themselves—occupying the nexus of decision—as issuing the organization’s “plan” through their very decisions. A plan implies that many people in an organization may examine it, and will base their individual or intermediate decisions on its written objectives. This is among the reasons that decision makers who hate to delegate generally hate plans.

Other decision makers who have little use for public planning often fear that such plans may “give potential secrets away” or pin the organization down and leave too little room for changes in policy. Often there is an additional fear that one sector’s plan may “get ahead of” and contradict the thinking at the very top, causing the displeasure of bosses or some level of disharmony within the organization.⁵

That this has happened periodically in the U.S. Navy—touted as one of the best-planned organizations in history—is no great secret. The Navy, along with the Marine Corps, earned a deserved reputation by planning for a potential war with imperial Japan for at least twenty years before the Pearl Harbor attack made that war a reality in 1941. The Cold War’s Maritime Strategy of the 1980s often is held up as a paragon of comprehensive, iterative, and highly creative planning that contributed to the containment and eventual collapse of the Soviet Union without resort to global (and possibly nuclear) war.⁶ Yet during periods of its history, and particularly in more-recent years, which have been characterized by “jointness”—an important contribution to increasing interoperability among the armed services, but one that has concreted into an ideology—Navy leaders have been suspicious about contemplating and developing (let alone adopting) plans that are more than exact repetitions of higher guidance. Why allow strategists to roam intellectually—and especially publicly—in crafting options if that may create debate and dissension within the organization, as well as raise public expectations of results that cannot be guaranteed?
A fourth problem, one generated by the nonlinear nature of planning and response, is that it is hard ever to quantify the results of a successful plan, so as to use that plan as a model of success from which strategists should learn. Presumably the most successful defense strategies are those that deter or prevent war rather than wage it. However, both strategists and scholars uniformly have been unsuccessful in demonstrating that deterrence strategies actually deterred particular wars. There simply are too many independent variables—some of them unrecognized—that might result in a war having not been fought. If one cannot point to strategies having definitive outcomes, how can one point to the importance of having a consistent strategy? This difficulty is compounded by an additional paradox, phrased most succinctly by Richard J. Danzig, an Under Secretary and then a Secretary of the Navy in the 1990s and early 2000s. Danzig notes that “to the extent we foresee the future and effectively address it, then the future will not develop as we anticipated it.” Thus, the optimal plan, from a national security point of view, if adopted and enacted, never can “prove” the threats it addressed. Acting on them caused the threats to dissipate before they became a crisis, or they morphed into something else.

These four problems sum to a conundrum that is expressed best in a final aphorism: “Planning is everything; the plan is nothing.” Management consultants have attributed this wisdom—in its shortened form—to General, then President, Dwight D. Eisenhower (once Patton’s commander). In part, the quote agrees with that of Danzig in maintaining that actual, specific plans—particularly when they deal with emergency conditions—cannot predict events with enough certainty to be followed step-by-step. Eisenhower: “Plans are worthless, but planning is everything. There is a very great distinction because when you are planning for an emergency you must start with this one thing: the very definition of ‘emergency’ is that it is unexpected, therefore it is not going to happen the way you are planning.”

In such unexpected crises, Eisenhower advises, “the first thing you do is to take all the plans off the top shelf and throw them out the window and start once more. But if you haven’t been planning you can’t start to work, intelligently at least. That is the reason it is so important to plan, to keep yourselves steeped in the character of the problem that you may one day be called upon to solve—or to help to solve.” Later in the same address, Eisenhower softens his rhetoric concerning initially throwing plans out the window, admitting that the contingency strategies that take human relations into account retain some validity.

However, the point of the adage—framing the conundrum itself—is that over the long term the practice of “crafting strategy” is more valuable to any organization (and national security itself) than any specific strategy itself, because it trains an experienced
crafting naval strategy

5

cadre whose members can draft, debate, and update not just a plan for a specific condition but a concept of the organization’s professional character and understanding of its continuing purpose. This is what the late Harvard professor Samuel P. Huntington meant by “strategic concept.” Without continuous planning—or a strategy-crafting process—organizations can lose not only the plans that guide their actions (even if much of them must be discarded once actual action occurs) but their own sense of self and the justification for their own existence.

Table 1 summarizes the problems, paradoxes, and conundrums of military planning. Obviously, it can be expanded to include other planning issues.

The author of this monograph discusses all these problem sets with a recognition that the “crafting of strategy” is about the planners and the methods they use for planning, not about the specific result that is called a plan. The value of his observations is derived from experiences that have been common in naval planning of which the strategist-planners always should remain aware. The fact that many of these experiences sometimes are counterintuitive or deviate from academic theories of planning makes his contribution even more valuable for those who would be the planners—who need continually to redevelop a planning process to update and revise their plans repetitively, or even to discard and replace them. The author avoids the use of the word plan, preferring the word strategy to describe the complex nature of the “capstone” statement of the Navy’s strategic concept. However—and as discussed later—the terms plan and strategy always will remain conflated in public perception.

As Crafting Naval Strategy clearly articulates, the planning that strategists will do (1) will require a series of expediencies; (2) likely will result in an imperfect plan that will be used under conditions not fully foreseen; (3) will need to be conducted under unrelenting time, bureaucratic, and political pressures; (4) may result in a product that decision makers never will examine “fairly”—with logic and attention—because they are enamored of an existing strategic concept, their own vague thoughts, or the newest buzzwords; (5) may be never acknowledged fully or may remain hidden from view; and (6) will produce a strategy that never can be proved to have accomplished successfully that which was intended, even when events turn out favorably.

For those who are ready to take up this frustrating yet rewarding challenge of crafting strategy, Bruce Stubbs certainly has something to say, and it is not simply about developing plans. It is, ultimately, about the fact that the strategists of the “Naval Service” play the most significant role in helping the service define itself. And when we discuss a unitary strategy for the Department of the Navy (which is the true meaning of the “Naval Service”), we are describing how two services—the U.S. Navy and U.S. Marine
TABLE 1

PROBLEMS, PARADOXES, AND CONUNDRUMS OF CRAFTING PLANS AND STRATEGIES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Implications</th>
<th>Representative Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 All plans are affected by &quot;expedients&quot;</td>
<td>Crafting plans and strategies cannot be a &quot;scientific,&quot; bounded process, but needs to incorporate factors that have indirect effects on the problem</td>
<td>Moltke the Elder, 1871</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Never a clear agreement about what constitutes a &quot;satisfactory&quot; plan</td>
<td>The decision to put plans into action is subjective; speed of implementation always must be a consideration</td>
<td>Patton, 1944(?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Decision makers not directly involved in plan development remain skeptical</td>
<td>The crafting of plans and strategies necessarily includes the act of convincing leadership of the validity of the plan, or the very need for a plan</td>
<td>Recent experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Hard to quantify the results of any plan</td>
<td>Interim evaluations of the ultimate success of any plan remain difficult since there is always risk in crediting emerging events to the plan</td>
<td>Traditional experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 If a plan is successful it changes the environment, thereby requiring a new plan and, possibly, reducing the perception of its validity</td>
<td>If indeed the plan is achieving success, emerging events affected by the plan will change the environment, requiring adjustment of the plan</td>
<td>Danzig, 1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Specific plans rarely can account for unexpected changes in the environment, and should not be expected to</td>
<td>The process of planning and the skills of the planners in adapting to changed circumstances are more important than the product</td>
<td>Eisenhower, 1957</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Current plans/strategies define the organization's concept of self (strategic concept)</td>
<td>Crafting strategy goes beyond the development of a plan to deal with specific or broad problems; it involves defining the organization's purpose, self-perception, and public justification</td>
<td>Huntington, 1954</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Corps—define themselves individually and collectively (often, by courtesy, with the involvement of the U.S. Coast Guard).14

Unpacking the Terms

Thus far we have used the terms strategy, plan, and strategic concept nearly interchangeably, which is pretty standard for all such discussions; even the grand theorist of war
Carl von Clausewitz was guilty of this. Strategies, plans, and strategic concepts are indeed, most obviously, interrelated. Strategists, often styled strategic planners, develop all three. Yet, for the sake of precision and for the injection of some academic rigor, we need to identify the nuances among the terms and how they are used in Crafting Naval Strategy.

Although derived from the ancient Greek word *strategia* (or *strategike*), meaning the arts or skill of a military commander (*strategos*, a combination of admiral and general), it was not until around 1800 that the word *strategy* came into common use in describing planning for war. Since then its popularity and ubiquity have increased to the point that it is used to describe planning for almost every endeavor—business strategies, learning strategies, dating strategies, etc. In her studies of the history of military strategy, Professor Beatrice Heuser of the University of Reading (U.K.) somewhat humorously recommends using “Strategy with a capital ‘S’” to describe “the link between political aims and the use of force, or its threat.”

Strategy often is viewed as being complex, whereas plans are viewed as being simpler. Some sources view a strategy as consisting merely of a series of interrelated plans. In this monograph, Bruce Stubbs takes issue with that perception and argues that “strategy is about understanding your environment and making choices about what you will do,” whereas “planning is about making choices about how to use the resources you have and the actions you will take to achieve the choices made in your strategy.” Some might argue that this is an artificial separation, but it is based on Sir Lawrence D. Freedman’s assertion that “strategy is more than a plan” because “strategy comes into play where there is actual or potential conflict, when interests collide and forms of resolution are required.”

A definition of *strategy* that still retains influence, at least within naval intellectual circles, is that of Rear Adm. Joseph C. Wylie Jr., USN, whose *Military Strategy: A General Theory of Power Control* was first published in 1967 and is still in print. “Strategy is a plan of action designed in order to achieve some end; a purpose together with a system of measures for its accomplishment.” In that view, what separates a strategy from desires or daydreams is the “system of measures” by which a strategy in progress can be evaluated and adjusted as necessary. Although Stubbs does not cite Wylie, this perspective is very much in keeping with that of Freedman, who also states that *strategy* is “the art of creating power,” which has similarity to Wylie’s idea of “power control.”

In this volume, the author has opted for a definition that emphasizes components—combining ends, ways, and means (and risk). The benefit of this definition is its simplicity in describing the outline of how strategists craft their work. However, there are some who argue that the concepts underpinning defense strategies should be developed in
an intellectual environment that ignores resource constraints. Such an environment emphasizes and soars with the possible rather than remaining anchored by the practical. Doing so would allow military planners, in theory, to conceive and include solutions and weapons that are in the infancy of their development or do not even exist yet. Others argue, however, that such an “idealized” approach cannot deal with those expediencies required in strategic planning, as identified by Moltke. Stubbs’s addition of scarce resources as a determinant is in keeping with Moltke, and aids in separating the crafting of strategy from “concept development,” “writing doctrine,” and other military intellectual activities.

The term strategist often is seen as being a bit grandiose, as if the user is implying that he or she possesses a higher level of thinking than the norm. Thus, many who craft strategy prefer to state, “I am a strategic planner,” rather than “I am a strategist.” Generally speaking, this looks better in a résumé (or at least it seems to display a pleasing degree of humility). In the military, this also is sometimes a mark of deference—the staff officers who put together the strategy are the strategic planners, whereas the commander who approves the strategy is the strategist. Yet, practically speaking, strategists and strategic planners are the same.

Since the joint U.S. armed forces have conceptualized a three-tiered system in which planning is categorized by command levels of activity—strategic, operational, and tactical—planners are divided into strategic planners, operational planners, and tacticians. Under this approach, strategic planners draft their products for the highest level of command, generally for four- and three-star flag and general officers and the Office of the Secretary of Defense. However, all three groups craft strategy as that term is understood generally and technically. In accordance with Stubbs’s approach, the membership of all three groups must consist of strategists, along with other specialists. For many years, the U.S. Navy used only two levels of distinction, the strategic and the tactical; thus, the term strategists also included those working at the operational level. Now the strategy-operations separation is standard, which creates some confusion between how the military actually creates strategy and general public perceptions.

There also is what might seem to be an esoteric debate within the Department of Defense (DoD)—fueled by joint ideology—on whether the individual services should be allowed to describe their planning as strategy. In this view, strategy—which essentially is conflated with war plans—properly belongs to the ten or so geographic and functional combatant commanders, with supervision by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (and, de facto, the Joint Staff). These regional and functional strategies are developed from a chain of documents initiated by the president and interpreted, in turn, by the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs; all these documentary interpretations can (and should) also be termed strategies. What plans the military
departments (Army, Navy, and Air Force) and their individual services and service chiefs might develop are therefore not strategy. They may be plans for manning, training, and equipping (the services’ Title 10 responsibilities); or they may be plans for developing platforms, weapon systems, and systems integration; but they are not strategies. To take this to its absurd conclusion, planning personnel in the service staffs cannot be considered strategists.

This is, of course, ideology, not logic. If strategy indeed is a series of plans, a method of power control, or a determination of ends, ways, and means, the services must be involved in its formation, since it is they that provide the force—that is, the means of power, or simply the means—to the combatant commanders. Those who craft long-range plans logically are strategists, by whichever definition of strategy one prefers.

A way to dodge the whole joint debate—as I frequently have proposed—is to refer to the services’ own internal strategies as strategic visions. This adds to the various definitions of strategies Huntington’s “strategic concept” approach to defining the service’s purpose. The strategic concept term still might be useful—the Navy used it to indicate underlying service principles until the 1990s—but for the last two decades the Joint Staff has used the term concept to indicate a point of doctrine under development. The joint concept-development process has become greatly formalized, with service representatives participating, inevitably crowding out other uses of the concept term, such as Huntington’s. (Many of these joint concepts actually are initiated by service planners.) The use of strategic vision could incorporate both service strategy and purpose while avoiding semantic disputes; however, use of this term admittedly has not gained much traction.

Even if one disagrees with the definitions used in this monograph, the objective of the work is to identify “how to” craft strategy, so that aspiring (and current) strategists can become better acquainted with what Moltke called expediens. In the real world, such wisdom transcends disputes over exact definitions.

About the Author and Structure

Bruce Stubbs’s career as a naval strategist began with his admission to the U.S. Coast Guard Academy in the class of 1970 and was reinforced by his graduation from the Naval War College in 1991, having earned the degree of master of arts in national security and strategic studies, with distinction.

As a Coast Guard officer, Stubbs specialized in national security operations, commencing his close association with the U.S. Navy as an exchange division officer in USS Badger (DE 1072), seeing combat action in the Vietnam War. He qualified as a USN surface warfare officer and successfully completed the Cold War–era Tactical Action Officer School.
During his rise to the rank of captain, U.S. Coast Guard, his assignments included being a member of the National Security Council staff—a position involving much crafting of strategy; military aide to the commandant of the Coast Guard (the chief of staff of the service); commanding officer of the national security cutter USCGC Harriet Lane (WMEC 903); and commandant of cadets at the Coast Guard Academy. His last active-duty tour was as assistant Coast Guard commandant for capability, in which he was program manager for the Coast Guard’s operational forces: 275 ships, two thousand boats, 220 aircraft, and 188 multimission coastal stations. Along with staff, he developed the operational requirements for the Coast Guard’s multibillion-dollar Integrated Deepwater System Project to recapitalize forty-nine major cutters, forty-one coastal patrol boats, 220 aircraft, and all associated sensors and communications systems. He also oversaw the fielding of armed Coast Guard helicopters, a seminal event in the Coast Guard’s history.

Following his retirement from active duty, Stubbs worked as a national security analyst, writer, and consultant for two corporations. Most of his work was on Coast Guard and DoD issues.

After serving briefly with the Department of State as maritime security adviser to the U.S. special envoy for Middle East security, he entered the Department of the Navy as director of the office of the DoD Executive for Maritime Domain Awareness, joining the ranks of the Senior Executive Service. He also served for five months as the Acting Deputy Under Secretary of the Navy.

Starting in 2011, he then served for five years as deputy director of the Navy’s Strategy and Policy Division (OPNAV N51B), and then director of the reorganized Strategy Division (OPNAV N50). Currently he manages the same portfolio of naval strategy and policy development as director of the Strategy and Strategic Concepts Division (OPNAV N72S), a successor organization.

Ten years of directly leading and supervising the Navy’s top strategic-planning teams, along with his previous experiences in personally crafting strategy, motivated Stubbs to develop and deliver a briefing on his observations to inform a wide audience of the particulars of naval strategy development, especially for naval officers preparing to fill strategic-planning billets. Going through a series of revisions, updates, improvements, and expansions, his brief has been presented frequently over the past five years at strategy conferences and seminars, most recently at the Naval War College in 2019. The briefing always has represented an unofficial and personal (although obviously very well informed) view, completely unclassified, and never purporting to embody official Navy policies. As noted in the series introduction, this is an individual contribution to which
the standard disclaimer applies: the views expressed are those of the authors and editors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the U.S. government.

The true strength of the briefing is in its personal and unofficial nature, containing observations and recommendations that simply neither can be found in academic texts on strategy nor are taught in DoD strategy-planning courses. As repeatedly noted, Stubbs’s briefing adds a discussion of the “expediencies” of strategy development into what largely has been a theoretical study of efficient procedures or of history in far hindsight. It adds the wisdom obtained in fresh makings of the sausage.

This monograph is structured around the briefing, presenting the briefing slides along with an expanded explanatory text. The author obtained permission for the use of the images contained in the slides from their originators. The intent is to capture the visual impact of the briefing while providing written detail as well. Many individuals learn better through visual graphics than through text; others learn more by means of text. This monograph tries to combine both, retaining the spirit of the oral briefing yet providing greater permanence to the briefing’s wisdom. The briefing also hereby is made more accessible. An additional goal is to put the briefing in context with other resources on strategy, which prompted the creation of the included annotated bibliography.

Using the Monograph

In the spirit of the great Chinese sages of war, such as Sun-tzu (or those who wrote in his name), Crafting Naval Strategy could be subtitled The Forty-Four Recommendations for Effective Strategy Development. There is, in fact, an ancient Chinese text on warfare entitled The Thirty-Six Stratagems, with the number thirty-six originally being a metaphor for “numerous.” As in other traditional texts, each entry in The Thirty-Six Stratagems consists of a one-sentence proverb followed by a lengthier explanation. Similarly, the entries in this monograph consist of a visual image (slide) and an explanation.

In whatever way one counts or separates the observations, examples, and recommendations that Stubbs provides—whether thirty, thirty-six, or forty-four—each entry can be contemplated individually. The reader may weigh its validity and choose to reject that particular recommendation without having to reject the overall work. The crafting of any particular strategy occurs at a specific point in time in a specific political environment; not every recommendation may fit the exact circumstance in which the crafting is done. Additional “expediencies” may be placed on the strategist, which may preclude the adoption of any particular recommendation. Yet the whole remains an education in the art of the craft, as it is practiced in the present and will be in the immediate future.
Ultimately, that is the goal in publishing this Black Book—to help “complete” the education of future naval strategists (and renew the thinking of current strategists) in the practical realities of fulfilling their task successfully. It is not a rejection of more-theoretical, -detailed, or -scholarly texts, but rather is meant as a supplement for academic programs and self-study.

If but one individual remembers but one of the “stratagems” explained herein when first sitting down to draft or revise a strategy, then the monograph will have been of value.

Notes

1. Quoted in Robert D. Heinl Jr. [Col., USMC (Ret.)], Dictionary of Military and Naval Quotations (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1966), p. 239. Other sources indicate a more correct quotation would read as follows: “No plan of operations extends with certainty beyond first encounter with the enemy’s main strength.” The latter quote is from Über Strategie (1871), as translated in Daniel J. Hughes, ed., Moltke on the Art of War: Selected Writings, trans. Daniel J. Hughes and Harry Bell (Novato, CA: Presidio, 1993), p. 92.

2. Hughes, Moltke on the Art of War, p. 124.


5. Ironically, it was the Chinese Communist Party leader Deng Xiaoping (1904–97) who best expressed this reservation by advising his cadres as follows: “Don’t debate… Once debate begins, things become complicated.” Quoted at the beginning of Michael Pillsbury, China Debates the Future Security Environment (Washington, DC: National Defense Univ. Press, 1999).


7. In contrast, I would argue that the overall defense strategy of the United States and NATO and its partners in the Cold War can point to its great success. In one concise sentence, one can define the continuing, backbone, fifty-year U.S. strategy in the Cold War as being intended “to contain the expansion of the Soviet Union until the internal contradictions within communism bring about its demise.” The foreign influence of the Soviet Union waxed and waned throughout the era, once the borders of the Warsaw Pact were set, but its expansion of the 1940s and ’50s was contained, and the internal contradictions within the communist system broke it. Whether deterrence, active resistance, forbearance, or doubts about the validity of communism among Soviet decision makers was the dominant factor is objectively unknowable. What is known and can be measured objectively is that the Soviet Union collapsed, communism was discredited, and there was no global war or war in Europe, the apparent cockpit of contention.


11. Ibid.


13. Capstone is the term the Joint Staff uses in describing the top-level (guiding) document in any series of related plans, concepts, or doctrine. Thus, the Joint Staff J-7 drafts the Capstone Concept for Joint Operations for signature by the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff. The current version is classified, although early versions were public. The services tend to avoid using the capstone term.

14. The most recent version of Naval Doctrine Publication 1 (NDP-1), of April 2020, refers to
the U.S. Navy, U.S. Marine Corps, and U.S. Coast Guard collectively as “the Naval Service.” This is unique, since all previous documents have referred to the Navy and Marine Corps as “the Naval Services,” and with the U.S. Coast Guard as the “Sea Services.” The U.S. Coast Guard has not been referred to previously as “naval,” presumably owing to legal restrictions; the Coast Guard is part of the Department of the Navy only in wartime. Whether the change in NDP-1 was by deliberate design or simply expedient is unclear. U.S. Navy Dept., Naval Warfare, Naval Doctrine Publication 1 (Washington, DC: 2020).


20. It has been suggested that Sun-tzu himself wrote The Thirty-Six Stratagems, but there is no evidence for that. The version that currently exists supposedly was rediscovered circa 1941. Of a number of modern English-language interpretations, one of the most popular has been Gao Yuan, Lure the Tiger Out of the Mountains: The 36 Stratagems of Ancient China (New York: Touchstone Books, 1992).
Observation 1

1. Effective strategy is born from an individual willing to challenge current wisdom.

“When we all think alike, no one thinks very much.”
Walter Lippman, The Stakes of Diplomacy

All my comments flow from personal observations, but that is appropriate. The genesis of all effective strategies occurs within the minds of individuals. The drafting of a strategy may involve a team of researchers, thinkers, and writers, but the truly innovative ideas come out of group discussions only rarely. The group may develop, reinforce, and strengthen those ideas further through conversation and debate; however, the
principal or fundamental idea guiding any strategic concept inevitably is the product of the personal study, education, contemplation, and experience of an individual strategist. *Thought leader* is a term used frequently to describe such a person, particularly in laudatory introductions and résumés. To some it is a grandiose term, but it is appropriately descriptive.

The standard caveat applies to this publication: these are my personal observations and do not necessarily represent the official views of the Department of Defense (DoD) or the Department of the Navy. Yet that caveat also applies to the generating thought of any strategy; the final, official document, signed or released by the proper authority, represents an official view, whereas a strategy in the process of development does not.

I have been by position a thought leader in the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) and the Department of the Navy, as well as a student of strategy and history by avocation and passion. In providing these observations, I rely on over thirty years of experience in the development of strategic documents, including five years as the deputy director of strategy and policy on the staff of the Chief of Naval Operations (OPNAV) and then five more years as the director, during both stints as a member of the Senior Executive Service. Throughout this period, my position title, division designator, and relevant organizational chart have been adjusted, but the job has remained: to lead the drafting of plans and policies that direct service-wide decision-making and outline the objectives of the organization in a particular time and situation.

Time and situations change, and that is why effective strategy changes. These observations focus on the construction and production of naval strategies, not on the merits of a particular maritime or sea power strategy. During my ten years at OPNAV, I have served four Chiefs of Naval Operations (CNOs) and have had active and direct participation in the production of the following three capstone Navy service strategies (or strategic visions, as the introduction calls them):


Each of these strategic visions was designed for a particular situation—a *problem set*, one might call it—in which the U.S. Navy needed first to determine and then to explain how it could contribute most effectively and efficiently to the national security of the United States, identifying Navy objectives and the manner in which they would be achieved. Sometimes, of course, those objectives are not achieved before the situation changes. In this monograph, I will not debate the merits of the strategic visions to which
I have contributed but will outline elements of the craft applicable to the process of determining and explaining how the U.S. Navy could contribute most effectively and efficiently to the national security of the United States.

Within OPNAV, this process includes the development of Navy input for the production of U.S. national-security strategy documents, such as the National Defense Strategy and National Military Strategy, as well as the drafting of other internal Navy strategic documents such as the U.S. Navy Arctic Roadmap 2014–2030, the Navy Strategic Plan series, the Navy’s “Strategic Laydown and Dispersal Plan,” and the first USN-USCG National Fleet Plan.

Prior to this assignment, in another life, I was one of the five principal authors of the first National Strategy for Maritime Security (2005), signed by President George W. Bush, as well as the principal author of the U.S. Coast Guard’s Maritime Strategy for Homeland Security, the Coast Guard’s first National Plan to Achieve Maritime Domain Awareness, the U.S. Coast Guard Strategy for Maritime Safety, Security, and Stewardship, and the first edition of Coast Guard Publication 1, U.S. Coast Guard: America’s Maritime Guardian. The common element in all these experiences is the knowledge and skill sets that the individual participants brought to the process.

Since my goal is to pass along the accumulated knowledge and experience in the crafting of strategy to those who will perform this task in the future, it is appropriate to acknowledge the importance and intellectual independence of the individual strategist.

Observation 2

2. Five realities are applicable to all strategies.

- All strategies are political documents
- Decision makers face huge time demands
- Everyone is a strategist
- The staffing process dulls all strategies
- Much of what passes for service “strategies” are really plans

“The basic principles of strategy are so simple that a child may understand them. But to determine their proper application to a given situation requires the hardest kind of work from the finest available staff officers.”

President Dwight Eisenhower

Graphic source: Blue Diamond Group. Used by permission.
What follows are the realities that need to be kept in mind always:

All strategy statements are political documents. Whatever their form, all strategy statements are political documents that reflect accommodations, compromises, agendas both overt and hidden, and prejudices. As the introduction refers to them, these factors are the expedients. Kori N. Schake, a scholar and former government official, writes that “[s]trategy divorced from politics leads either to irrelevance, because the strategy will not be employed, or disaster, when political leaders are confronted with the unexpected costs and consequences.”

Decision makers are subject to huge time demands. Senior leaders are caught up in pressing matters of the day and have limited time to reflect on weighty, long-term issues. This results in what might be called the difference between strategic thinking and strategy thinking. Many senior leaders engage in strategy thinking, in that they contemplate plans to solve the pressing matters, which may range from putting together a service’s budget for the coming fiscal year to determining how to counter current gray-zone activity. Few have the time or inclination to engage in the type of long-range, service-defining, ”every assumption on the table” strategic thinking that is necessary for the craft of drafting a (reasonably) enduring strategic vision.

Everyone is a strategist. Col. Jobie S. Turner, USAF, expounds on this theme, noting the reality that “[i]n the Pentagon everyone fancies themselves a strategist. Every graduate of professional military education, every contractor with a new weapon system, every think-tank or consultancy pundit: all feel that if they were only given the chance, they could impose order with the right ‘big idea.’ Meanwhile, . . . ‘the programmers’ smile, content in their view that the budgets they build are the real strategy.”

The staffing process dulls all strategies. This reality is in keeping with observation 1. Although innovative ideas start with the individual strategist, the addition of others during the staffing process necessarily affects those ideas. At best, the staffing process knocks off the rough edges and protects the interests of the decision makers from dangerous currents, ensuring that the strategy is more in keeping with their objectives; at worst, the tumbling and polishing of the ideas wear them down to almost nothing. As much as the individual strategic thinker might bewail the staffing process, this is the reality for many such projects.

Many of what pass for service strategies are really plans. Owing to the Goldwater-Nichols Act defense reforms (1986), the Naval Services no longer produce strategies such as the famous Maritime Strategy of the 1980s, which drove war and operations planning. Here I must confess that I disagree with the author of the introduction, who believes that such production is still possible. Yes, the services still must articulate how they intend to fight their service, but that articulation is more for force-development purposes than for actual
force-employment purposes. Consequently, what passes today for Naval Service strategies are more in keeping with strategic plans or strategic concepts than pure military strategies that define the required military conditions for achieving national objectives.

Observation 3

3. Assess the five Ws before you plunge into drafting strategy.

“I’ve been scarred by rereading a quote from Einstein, who said if you have an hour to save the world, spend 55 minutes of it understanding the problem and five minutes of it trying to solve it. And I think sometimes, in particular as a military culture, we don’t have that ratio right. We tend to spend 55 minutes trying to—how to solve the problem and five minutes understanding it. That’s one of the big lessons for me in developing leaders for the future, not only in the Army but, if confirmed, in the joint force.”

Gen. Martin Dempsey, Chairman, JCS, 2011–15

Before you immediately plunge into drafting a strategy, you need to spend your time answering the five basic W questions of journalism: who, what, where, when, and why. This will ensure a solid foundation as you go forward. “[D]efining the 5Ws first [will open] more avenues to talk about the ideas and concepts and also [result] in more buy-in from the [staffs]. . . . It sounds simple, but Simon Sinek is right: start with why.” Analyzing the who, what, where, when, and why allows for identifying the problems that create the need for a strategy, the knowledge of which is the starting point for framing the strategy’s objectives and determining the best way to craft it.

Former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS) Gen. Martin E. Dempsey, USA (2011–15), drove home this point at his 2011 confirmation hearing with his reference to a quote attributed to Einstein. “[I]f you have an hour to save the world, spend 55 minutes of it understanding the problem and five minutes of it trying to solve it. And I think sometimes, in particular as a military culture, we don’t have that ratio right. We tend to spend 55 minutes trying to [figure out] how to solve the problem and five minutes understanding it.”
I advise all teams of crafters to start their project with an inclusive session to hammer out agreement on the five Ws. The dividend on this investment will pay out in almost every later phase of the project. It is a very effective means of building an initial framework.

**Observation 4**

4. **Agree on a definition for strategy.**

“Strategy is defined here as the art of creating power. . . . When very little is at stake, this barely counts as a strategy. By and large, *strategy comes into play where there is actual or potential conflict, when interests collide and forms of resolution are required.*”


“A leader’s most important responsibility is identifying the biggest challenges to forward progress and devising a coherent approach to overcoming them. In contexts ranging from corporate direction to national security, strategy matters. *Strategy is about how an organization will move forward.*”


*Strategy* is one of the most misunderstood leadership concepts today. There are countless definitions. Here are just two:

- In the academic model, *strategy* can be about creating power. Sir Lawrence D. Freedman asserts that, to be a true strategy, there must be a dynamic challenge to overcome. “Strategy is required when others might frustrate one’s plans because they have different and possibly opposing interests and concerns.” In differentiating between *plans* and *strategies*, Freedman maintains that “a plan supposes a sequence of events that allows one to move with confidence from one state of affairs to another”—that is, being able to carry out an action without opposition. Strategies are needed because, as Freedman quotes boxer Mike Tyson, “everyone has a plan ’til they get punched in the mouth.” Effective strategy anticipates the punch and has a plan for deflecting it (or recovering from it, or both) and continuing one’s intended action.

- In the business model, a *strategy* can be about moving an organization forward in a shifting environment. A strategy is required because a change in the operating
environment (emergence of competition, changing regulations, etc.) will not allow operations to be carried out in the same manner as before with an equal degree of success. Strategy is not about “business as usual.” Richard P. Rumelt defines a “good strategy” as one that “honestly acknowledges the challenges being faced and provides an approach to overcome them. . . . Bad strategy tends to skip over pesky details such as problems. It ignores the power of choice and focus.”

The crafting of a strategy document requires choosing a definition from among the many available—a recognition that leads to observation 5.

Observation 5

5. Use this definition for strategy: based on ends, ways, and means.

A strategy integrates scarce means in certain ways to achieve selected ends

However, note that a strategy “implies an adversary who actively opposes the achievement of the ends.”

Mackubin Thomas Owens

Graphic source: U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute. Used by permission.

It has been my personal experience that the best approach in starting to draft any strategy is to use the ends-ways-means formula (others alter the order to ways-means-ends to reflect a bottom-up approach). For the purposes of developing naval strategy, it is “ultimately best understood as the interaction of three things, all within the context of risk assessment.”

These are as follows:

- **Ends**—the goals or objectives that the strategic actor seeks to achieve
- **Ways**—the strategic actor’s plan of action for using the means available
- **Means**—the resources available to the strategic actor

Constructing a strategy with ends, ways, and means provides a clear, easy-to-follow train of logic.
The risk-assessment context includes an honest assessment of the assumptions the strategists are using to initiate the ends-ways-means construct. As Colin S. Gray advises, “To this fundamental triptych of ends, ways and means, it is advisable to insist upon adding the vital ingredient of ASSUMPTIONS. This fourth element is always important and typically reigns unchallenged as the greatest source of mischief for entire strategic enterprises.”

The ends-ways-means formulation has become the semiofficial approach of DoD, reflected in joint documents and echoed in professional and policy journals. It is logical; it is easy to understand; it is not dependent on the elegance of the narrative; and it makes decision makers feel they are in charge of the effort (since, presumably, they have set the ends). “[A]ny strategy worth the name should articulate a clear set of achievable goals; identify concrete threats to those goals; and then, given available resources, recommend the employment of specific instruments to meet and overcome those threats.”

As then–CJCS Adm. Michael G. Mullen, USN (2007–11), wrote in the foreword of the public National Military Strategy of the United States 2011, “The purpose of this document is to provide the ways and means by which our military will advance our enduring national interests as articulated in the 2010 National Security Strategy and to accomplish the defense objectives [ends] in the 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review.”

Some critics question the ends-ways-means formula because the development of the means—in this case, defense acquisition—appears disconnected from the identification of the ends. A dismissive saying in DoD is that “amateurs discuss strategy; professionals discuss resources.” Arguably, defense acquisition programs do tend to take on lives of their own, seemingly regardless of changes in strategy. However, the largest defense programs take up to a decade to produce a system, making it logical that they survive incremental changes in strategy. Despite changes in presidential administrations and Congresses, American objectives do not swing wildly enough that most of these programs become irrelevant during their period of initial development.

Other critics charge that changes in technology drive strategy, not the other way around. Indeed, emerging technology would seem to be another factor that would influence the crafting of strategy, along with changes in the nature of the threat and the overall security environment (which would include diffusion of emerging technologies). Technology is thereby a driver in the same sense that all other geopolitical or geoeconomic factors are drivers.

Another criticism centers on the observation that “the United States goes to war with the forces it has, not the forces it would like.” The implication is that changes in a strategy rarely leave decision makers time to tailor the forces for its execution. However, that assumes that strategic visions last only for the short term; this mistakes the words
of (new) strategy documents for the strategies themselves. The United States produced many strategic documents during the Cold War period, but the overall strategy rarely swerved.

My view is that these criticisms do not invalidate ends-ways-means as an initial approach. The strategy must connect available means to desired outcomes in creative ways, and reduce the sought-after outcomes if ways cannot be found. A good strategy avoids mismatches among the ends, ways, and means. For instance, if the means required to implement a strategy cannot be funded, then strategy must be revised by changing the ends or the ways to reduce the risk by managing the mismatches and ensuring alignment. As Colin Gray notes: “Even though strategists and those they sought to advise have been capable of adopting almost awesomely improbable assumptions, the game has always had to be about ends, ways, and means.”

Observation 6

6. Do not confuse strategy with planning.

*Strategy* is about understanding your environment and making choices about what you will do.

*Planning* is about making choices about how to use the resources you have and the actions you will take to achieve the choices made in your strategy.

“Strategy comes into play where there is actual or potential conflict, when interests collide and forms of resolution are required. *This is why strategy is much more than a plan.* A plan supposes a sequence of events that allows one to move with confidence from one state of affairs to another.”

Sir Lawrence Freedman

We tend to conflate strategy and planning. The essence of strategy is about making choices and setting priorities, such as the famous Allied strategy of “Germany first” in the Second World War. *Strategy* is what you want to do; your *plan* is how you actually will do it. As U.S. Army War College professor Harry R. Yarger notes,

[the purpose of planning is to create certainty so that people and organizations can act. The purpose of strategy formulation is to clarify, influence, manage, or resolve the [volatility, uncertainty,
complexity, and ambiguity] of the strategic environment through the identification and creation of strategic effects in support of policy goals. Strategy lays down what is important and to be achieved, sets the parameters for the necessary actions, and prescribes what the state is willing to allocate in terms of resources. Thus, strategy, through its hierarchical nature, identifies the objectives to be achieved and defines the box in which detailed planning can be accomplished—it bounds planning.¹⁴

Columbia Business School professor William G. Pietersen cautions, “To be clear, planning is also important. But it is not a substitute for strategy. We don’t create a strategy with a plan. We execute it with a plan. For example, your budget should be the financial expression of your strategy, not the reverse. The right sequence is essential: strategy first, planning afterwards.”¹⁵ As noted in observation 5, however, there are those involved in DoD resource planning who might dispute that “your budget should be the financial expression of your strategy, not the reverse.” They would be wrong, of course.

This is why I raise what might seem to others merely an “issue of semantics.” There will be those outside the strategy-crafting process who will want to ensure that their “plan” (such as an acquisition proposal to solve a particular war-fighting problem) is incorporated into the strategy. A firm insistence on the difference between strategies and plans might help mitigate such assaults.

Observation 7

7. Determine the purpose of your strategy.

Three overarching purposes:
- Explain the need for the Navy
- Explain how the Navy meets that need
- Explain where the Navy is heading

Other purposes:
- Address a changing world
- Implement specific ideas of leaders
- Advocate CNO priorities
- Codify current thinking
- Advocate new directions
- Influence and respond to higher authority
- Strengthen budget arguments
- Send signal to potential competitors

Peter M. Swartz and Karin Duggan, CNA

In their analysis of past Navy strategies, Capt. Peter M. Swartz, USN (Ret.), and Karin Duggan of CNA maintain that “there are a range of reasons why strategies are written.” (Some of them are listed on the slide above.) Historically, we have written Navy strategies for the three overarching purposes: to explain the need for the Navy, how the Navy meets that need, and where the Navy is heading. The “other purposes” actually are subsets of the big three; however, they can be examined individually to ascertain the quality of a draft strategy. In fact, they collectively constitute an informal checklist that crafters should use to analyze potential support for the draft strategy.

There is nothing nefarious about any of the individual other purposes. A naval strategy (like all military strategies) must conform in its basics to the guidance of civilian authorities, as exemplified by the National Security Strategy (NSS). As I argue later, the CNO is the Navy’s chief strategist, so advocating for his (or, eventually, her) ideas and priorities clearly is part of the process leading to implantation of the strategy. This requires the ideas to be translated into budget decisions.

Notably, one of the other purposes—signaling to potential competitors—has not been prominent in recent years, yet it was one of the more significant purposes of the public version of the Maritime Strategy of the 1980s. Arguably, the very existence of that particular strategy played a role in deterring the Soviet Union.

Observation 8

8. Determine your primary audience and focus on it.

- **Primary audiences for Navy strategies are EOP, OSD/JS, and Congress**
  - These are the policy and resource decision makers that affect Navy funding . . . and the Navy’s future

- **Major budget influence is in the executive branch**
  - EOP and OSD have their hands on major policy levers
  - Congress can’t really change budget dramatically—influence at the margin (3 to 5 percent)

- **Naval senior leaders are part of this high-level audience**

- **These are not strategies for the audience of deck-plate sailors**

Images source: DoD Imagery Library.
Despite the potential for the strategy to serve multiple purposes, you ultimately must focus it on your intended primary audience. Most naval strategies are written primarily for Congress; the Joint Staff (JS) / the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD); and the Executive Office of the President, particularly the Office of Management and Budget and the staff of the National Security Council (NSC). The Navy wants these organizations to understand the need for the Navy, the challenges it faces, and what it requires to support national defense. We want to ensure that the Navy’s contribution to national security is understood, accepted, and supported by national-security decision makers and policy makers, and by public national-security thought leaders (both inside and outside government), so they will (1) make informed resource and policy decisions, and (2) generate informed discussions concerning future decisions.

Sometimes Navy leadership will authorize other versions of the strategy, focused for different audiences. Classified versions are tailored for Navy commands that need to implement the requirements; unclassified versions may be tailored for sailors in the fleet, the overall American public, or allies and partners; and other documents may be used for these purposes as well. Meanwhile, the strategy can be publicized using public-relations tools and public media.

Observation 9


Example 1: Force-employment problem

The paramount importance of understanding the dominant strategic problem is underscored by the following statement by Carl von Clausewitz: “The first, the supreme, the most far-reaching act of judgment that the statesman and commander have to make is to establish by that test [i.e., the fit with policy goals] the kind of war on which they are embarking, neither mistaking it for, nor trying to turn it into, something that is alien to its nature.”  

Professor Turner of the U.S. Air War College offers some very useful insights on the value of a problem-based approach to strategy.

- A key to developing a strategy is to focus on the dominant military problem.
- “A problem-based approach to strategy offers several advantages.” A properly defined military problem forces the Navy to decide what is important in the future war-fighting environment. “In the absence of a clear problem to solve, the future environment can become unwieldy.”
- First, a “well-thought-out military problem constrains . . . intellectual wandering,” keeping the Navy focused on what is important. “With a clear problem, it’s easier to decide how the [Navy] orients itself.” In short, the military problem keeps the Navy “grounded in reality, preventing bureaucratic inertia from overwhelming [it].”
- “Second, while aspirations are important, they must be backed by more[-]-concrete, specific objectives” and coherent solutions “to win public and congressional support in the form of budgets.”
- “Third, military problems force technological solutions into a supporting role. . . . [A]s Colin Gray notes . . . , ‘Weaponry does not equal strategy.’ . . . When the problem comes first, however, the technology can come second.”
- “Fourth, solving military problems harnesses the talent already on staff and their recent operational experience. . . . With a clearly defined problem the inputs from recent warfighting are much easier to capture or, when necessary, discard.”  

Two related but distinct problems on which strategies may focus are (1) force employment (such as in war plans) and (2) force development (such as resource decisions, training, and acquisition).

The slides above and below (examples 1 and 2) illustrate force-employment problems. If China decides to use force against Taiwan or Russia assaults its Baltic neighbors, American forces likely would find themselves attempting to defend exposed territories on the adversary’s doorstep. The United States would have to project decisive power over thousands of miles, into areas where China and Russia can bring to bear capabilities
more rapidly. Joint forces must be ready to fight large-scale combat operations in a joint, multinational, multidomain environment, under the most demanding conditions. Maritime formations must be capable of fighting through layers of enemy antiaccess systems while operating in a degraded communications environment and under constant surveillance.

Obviously, force-deployment strategies must be based on the capabilities and employment of joint forces, even if they describe only the naval component. Ultimately such strategies require integration with joint planning and must be designed with that in mind. Additionally, they must be compatible with the projected contributions of allies and partners.

**Example 2: Force-employment problem**

Although the ultimate goal of service strategies is the solution of real-world strategic force-employment problems, they necessarily focus on force-development problems—that is, how to man, train, equip, and prepare the forces necessary for the potential employment. As noted before, the services are creating the means by which force-employment problems can be solved—which actually requires a more complex, intricate, nuanced, persuasive, and politically savvy strategy than the employment problem, which assumes that the forces already exist and the decision to carry out the action already has been made. Crafting a force-development strategy calls for the greatest level of creativity.
An effective strategy is designed to solve an overarching problem in the international environment. That may be the rise of a potential aggressor or—as portrayed by the unusual, triple-sided chessboard—two. But, along with the overarching problem, there also are specific problems or issues. The problem, for the crafters of strategy, is to be able to consider and, as necessary, address these subproblems while keeping the overarching problem (and your goal) always in mind. In other words, one should not let oneself become exhausted by an effort to solve every detail. Brig. Gen. Huba Wass de Czege advocates the articulation of a \textit{theory of victory}—a statement of the final outcome of the strategy—to avoid being overwhelmed by the subproblems. He maintains that, without such a theory of victory, “readers must infer a complex leap of logic to grasp the concept’s \textit{military problem}.”

The term \textit{theory of victory} is being used more frequently in defense literature, although its definition remains vague and without common acceptance. Its users intend to describe victory in terms of desired favorable political conditions \textit{after} (and as a result of) a military victory on the battlefield. Its prominence stems from the criticism that in conflicts such as those in Iraq and Afghanistan the United States and its allies achieved a military success but did not achieve their expressed political objectives (promotion of democracy, a peaceful Middle East, an end to terrorism, etc.). Presumably, a detailed
theory of victory would help develop the full political-military strategy. For it to do so, it has been argued, the force-employment strategy must rest on a very firm force-development strategy so decision makers can understand what means (and limits) they will have to achieve the political ends, as well as the military conditions needed to secure those ends. The force-development strategy must come first; however, it too must be crafted with future operational problems in mind, and it must rest on a full assessment of the future strategic and operational environment.

Observation 11

11. Examine historical examples: e.g., WWII dominant operational problems.

WWII major operational obstacles to victory:

- Getting Allied convoys across the Atlantic
- Defeating Germany’s ferocious blitzkrieg assaults
- Sustaining a campaign over vast distances in the Pacific
- Achieving command of the air over Germany
- Conducting an opposed landing

Professor Paul M. Kennedy of Yale came to public attention with the publication of his 1987 book *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000*, in which he argued that the United States was overreaching its capabilities in the late Cold War; he predicted it would need to retrench. Of course, the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, making Kennedy’s thesis seem less than prescient.

However, much of Kennedy’s earlier work was on the history of the Royal Navy and the link between navies and geo经济学. In *Engineers of Victory* (2013), Kennedy rightly elevates the importance of technology and innovation (and innovators), but—on a grander scale—he fully appreciates that “the winning of great wars always requires superior organization.” Superior organizations “allow outsiders to feed fresh ideas into the pursuit of victory.” An ingredient badly missing from the centralized systems of
imperial Japan and Nazi Germany was the willingness—demonstrated again and again by top Anglo-American military and political leaders—to share decision-making with those of more modest rank who had greater expertise in tackling a particular problem and were closer to the action. The result was that Allied military leaders “solved problems” of strategy; they did not simply fight battles. Arguably, they developed an effective theory of victory.

One should adopt this problem-solving spirit in crafting strategy as well. If strategy, as Freedman defines it, is a plan that needs to overcome opposition, then the crafters of strategy need to take into consideration the obstacles the opposition creates and will create. The analysts of the Allies were able to do this most effectively (and more quickly) when the strategists had foreseen these obstacles. To develop a sense of what future obstacles may be, the initial step is to examine the problem presented in military operations of the past.  

Observation 12

12. Recognize the enduring operational challenge.

Although the character of naval warfare may change over time, a fundamental challenge—particularly for surface warships—remains the same: How can naval forces conduct effective operations while dispersing widely and minimizing communications to avoid detection and attack?

1941 Battle of Crete

“RN losses: sunk—two cruisers and four destroyers; severely damaged—one battleship, two cruisers, four destroyers. . . . [Without the benefit of air cover,] sea control in the Eastern Mediterranean could not be retained after another such experience.”

Adm. Cunningham, CINC, Mediterranean Fleet

2006 Israel-Hezbollah War

During blockade operations off Beirut, INS Hanit was hit by an antiship cruise missile (C802/Noor) while providing air defense and C2 support to other Israeli naval units shelling targets in Beirut.

Crafters need to remember that enduring operational challenges are created by the very environment that determines the physical as well as the strategic limitations on naval
forces. These must be accounted for in both force-development and force-employment strategies.

Asymmetries in magazine capacities between shore bases and surface warships make it challenging to project naval power against a first-class military power’s land-based scouting and strike forces. This is so especially if the terrestrial forces are dispersed and mobile, even if the fleet possesses its own extended-range air and missile forces. But that does not mean it is impossible.

The extended ranges and high accuracies of shore-based weapons make surface ships vulnerable to such missiles at distances ranging up to thousands of miles. In wartime, a surface fleet may spend most of its time operating outside the range of the enemy’s antiaccess/area-denial (A2/AD) maritime systems, then conduct periodic short-duration dashes inside the A2/AD perimeter to launch strikes.

This is a situation—and operational advantage—that navies have possessed throughout the history of naval operations projecting from the sea onto the land, and but one of a number of enduring operational challenges (and advantages) that the crafter of strategy needs to keep in mind. Strategies—of both development and employment—can incorporate these factors best by assigning to them comparative measures. In the situation described, such comparative measures could include (1) the length of time a surface-strike system can operate within the enemy’s A2/AD defenses before detection, (2) the distances traveled into the enemy’s A2/AD zone before detection occurs (longer distances yield a greater area that can be subjected to maritime strikes), and (3) the ranges of U.S. strike aircraft and missiles (greater ranges yield shorter times and distances for the ships to transit to accomplish their missions).

Comparative measures are effective tools for determining the ways of the ends-ways-means approach, and help remind crafters to incorporate recognitions of the enduring challenges and opportunities.
Observation 13

13. Have a theory of victory (or success) for force employment.

An analytical framework of the “assumptions that strategists make about how the execution of the military operations that they are planning will translate into the achievement of the political objectives that they are pursuing.”

Bradford Lee

“Strategy is a theory of success . . . an explanation of how and why a given set of actions will cause a desired outcome to occur.” “If you do not have a theory of success, you do not have a strategy.”

Jeffrey W. Meiser and Sitara Nath

“Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Won’t he first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand?”


As previously noted, the term theory of victory can be somewhat confusing. There is no formal DoD definition for it, but broadly it is a hypothesis of how a nation intends to achieve strategic objectives during a conflict. It articulates how and why we think our actions will work. Ultimately, we use military force to change other nations’ will or wills. A theory of victory describes how we think our tactical- and operational-level actions will lead to achieving our strategic-political objectives.

The United States was supreme at the tactical and operational levels in Vietnam, but that dominance did not lead to a strategic or political victory. We had no successful theory of victory to link tactical- and operational-level successes to political victory.

A theory of victory is the conceptual means of establishing clear ends in the ends-ways-means equation. “Defining strategy in this manner gives us a tool for identifying a strategy, analyzing the conceptual clarity and logic of the strategy, and assessing the quality of the strategy. It provides a broad foundation from which all types of strategy can be defined, analyzed, and assessed, including corporate strategy, grand strategy, and military strategy.”

21
Observation 14

14. Have a central idea to express the strategy.

- Its importance is often overlooked
- It binds the ends, ways, and means
- It inspires
- It encapsulates the essence of a strategy—the “big idea”—in a single line
- Brevity and simplicity force clarity of thought and expression, and economy of action

Example of a central idea: A fleet built and ready for war . . . operated forward to help preserve the peace and protect American, allied, and partner interests

The kernel of this idea: Providing freedom of access in peace and war

In addition (or perhaps as an alternative) to beginning with a theory of victory, drafters of strategy should identify the central idea around which the document is to revolve. A very valuable treatise on strategy issued by the United Kingdom’s Ministry of Defence states as follows:

- “The innovative and compelling ‘big idea’ is often the basis of a new strategy.”
- “A strategy which has no unifying idea is not a strategy.”
- The central idea must bind the ends, ways, and means—and inspire others to support it.
- “In practice, the intent of all good strategies can be summed up in a page if not even better—in a paragraph.”

This is the most concise summary I have found concerning the need for a central idea in any drafting of strategy.

Hollywood movies provide outstanding examples of how an entire production can be built around a concisely stated central idea. The movie industry refers to a statement of the central idea as a log line, as in the example below.
Example: Hollywood’s central idea—the log line

Log line

A police chief with a phobia for open water battles a gigantic shark with an appetite for swimmers and boat captains, in spite of a greedy town council that demands the beach stay open

This log line for the movie *Jaws* is one of the greatest of all time. It depicts the overarching story line in an interesting, straightforward way, rather than focusing on details that might seem meaningless without the context of the bigger picture. It captures the entirety of the plot—and thus the essence of what the audience will experience—in a single sentence.

In communications, the human brain craves meaning before details. If the core message of a strategy can be captured in a single sentence, there is a higher probability the strategy will be effective. As noted in one of the endnotes to the introduction, the overarching American strategy during the Cold War can be summarized in one sentence: “to contain the expansion of the Soviet Union (and its influence) until the internal contradictions within communism bring about its own demise.” And that was what was achieved.
In recent years, access to the CNO for strategy development has been limited to the Deputy CNO (DCNO) responsible for strategy and the CNO’s immediate personal staff (which for strategy is OPNAV N-00Z, which functions like a commander’s action group). Unfortunately, this relatively restricted access has a negative effect on the CNO’s dissemination of his own central idea to his strategy staff. In reality, none of the three CNOs whom I have had the pleasure of serving ever directly handed me his central idea for a capstone strategy. Indeed, my office provided (often in retrospect) the central idea, along with the ends, ways, and means, for each of the three capstone Navy strategies that we developed. We actually received very little of what is commonly called “commander’s guidance” at the initial stages of any strategy production.

Professor Turner of the Army War College has commented on the need for the service chief to play an active role. “[T]he process of producing strategic documents [can] be inherently self-defeating. Even within a single service there are too many diverse views and interests to overcome. Thus, we are left with the unappealing choice between a worthless lowest-common denominator or substance doomed to immediate, reflexive resistance from some segment of the institution.” He is right. If the CNO does not play this role, then we do a lot of “rock management”—by which I mean that we haul forward many “rocks” until one is identified as suitable for further sculpting.\(^\text{23}\)
The need for a central idea that emanates from an organization’s top decision maker leads me to my next observation and example, about what happens if strategy crafting begins with no central idea. In that case, one must be discovered after the fact, if the strategy is going to be disseminated at all.

Observation 16

16. A strategy with no explicit central idea remains incomplete and difficult to implement.

Example: CS21R was a naval strategy with no explicit central idea

Drafters of the 2015 Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower (CS21R) developed—ex post facto—six themes as the de facto central idea.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Buried Ends, Ways, Means</th>
<th>Organized in Four Chapters</th>
<th>Unwritten, but Six Ex Post Facto Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ends:</strong> 7 Navy Missions</td>
<td>1. “Global Security Environment”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Defend the homeland</td>
<td>2. “Forward Presence and Partnership” (force employment)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Defeat aggression</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Protect the maritime commons</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Strengthen partnerships</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Provide HA/DR</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ways:</strong> 5 Essential Functions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. All-domain access</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Deterrence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Sea control</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Power projection</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Maritime security</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Means:</strong> Forces</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The production of the 2015 Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower (CS21R) posed two significant challenges for the crafters. (I know—I was one of them.)

- First, no one—from the four-stars to the mess cooks and all those in between—initially offered a central idea. It was developed ex post facto when the writing team was attempting to communicate the strategy. Consequently, CS21R has no explicit central idea.

- Second, the guidance for developing the framework for CS21R prevented the strategy from receiving a three-chapter construct, with a chapter each dedicated to ends, ways, and means—to work around the CNO’s prohibition against using the ends-ways-means construct explicitly. It was acceptable to use ends-ways-means as the approach, but it was unacceptable to employ it publicly.
Therefore, the writing team developed a construct around a four-step sequence, and “buried” the ends, ways, and means in four chapters with the following themes:

- The security environment
- How to employ the force in response to the security environment
- The Sea Services’ value and contribution to national defense
- How to develop the force in response to the security environment

Reading through the document, one notes that there is no attempt to set priorities, with the exception of the statement that the replacement program for the Ohio-class nuclear ballistic-missile submarines, considered the nation’s most secure strategic deterrent, was the U.S. Navy’s top acquisition priority. This sort of explicit statement is missing from all other elements of CS21R. Therefore the document ended up constituting more a list than a strategy.

This leads directly to the next observation, and another example of a difficult-to-implement strategy.

Observation 17

17. Avoid making numerous lists and mistaking goal setting for strategy.

2018 National Defense Strategy blurred its clarity and focus with too many lists, as well as obscuring its central idea; this was compounded with publication of 2020 Defense Planning Guidance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Defense Objectives (12 Ends)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strategic Approach (3 Ways)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Build a more lethal force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Strengthen alliances, attract new partners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Reform the Department</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Force Application and Management (Multiple Means &amp; Actions)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Strategic approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Force-management and force-planning construct</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Force-posture and force-employment guidance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Capability-development priorities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• List: 6 Critical Challenges Classified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• List: 8 Key Operational Problems Classified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• List: 10 Capability-Investment Pathways Classified</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2020 Defense Planning Guidance (unclassified sections)
SECDEF’s UNCLAS top 5 priorities:
• Implement the 2018 NDS
• Reform to free up time, money, and manpower
• Take care of our servicemembers and their families
• Advocate and tell our story to core audiences
• Obtain the funding, authorities, and support we need to be successful

SECDEF’s UNCLAS 3 LOEs:
• Build a more lethal force
• Strengthen alliances and attract new partners
• Reform for greater performance and accountability

SECDEF’s UNCLAS 3 LOEs from the 2020 DPG are the 3 “Ways” from the 2018 NDS
The slide above illustrates the construct used for the unclassified *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy (Summary NDS)* signed out by the Secretary of Defense (SECDEF). Although its language is unusually clear, the *Summary NDS* identifies twelve objectives, six critical challenges, eight operational problems, and ten investment priorities requiring Department of Defense—and Navy—attention. With so many imperatives from which to choose, attempting to prioritize a Navy budget on the basis of these broad and sometimes competing priorities can resemble traversing a minefield. The profusion of priorities allows the process of developing a budget to devolve into a “buzzword bingo” justification of desired capabilities, or the “cherry-picking” of desired imperatives. The twelve objectives are as follows (shortened for brevity): defending the homeland from attack; sustaining joint-force military advantages; deterring adversaries from aggression; enabling U.S. interagency counterparts to advance U.S. influence and interests; maintaining favorable regional balances of power; defending allies and fairly sharing responsibilities for common defense; bolstering partners against coercion; dissuading, preventing, or deterring actors from acquiring weapons of mass destruction; preventing terrorist operations; ensuring that common domains remain open; continuously delivering performance with affordability and speed as we change the departmental mind-set, culture, and management systems; and establishing an unmatched twenty-first-century national-security innovation base.

Note that the twelve objectives are themselves somewhat confused, blending together as they do force-development and force-employment objectives, as well as objectives that range from nuclear deterrence to the establishment of an innovation base. Moreover, while the unclassified ends use the verbs *defend* and *deter*, none of the objectives uses the verbs *defeat* or *destroy*, despite the fact that they are implied throughout the document. The *Summary NDS* tends to be a little short on explaining the sourcing of resources to achieve its objectives, and the later publication within the Pentagon of the 2020 *Defense Planning Guidance*—the document intended to link strategy to capabilities (i.e., to develop the means)—only adds to the confusion.

The results of such a process are lists of goals, not an effective strategy.
Observation 18

18. Explain the Navy’s value proposition.

- “The fundamental element of a military service is its purpose or role in implementing national policy.”
- “The statement of this role may be called the strategic concept of the service.”
- “Basically, this concept is a description of how, when, and where the military service expects to protect the nation against some threat to its security.”
- “If a service does not possess a well-defined strategic concept, the public and the political leaders will be confused as to the role of the service, uncertain as to the necessity of its existence, and apathetic or hostile to the claims made by the service upon the resources of the society.”

Samuel P. Huntington
1954 USNI Proceedings essay:
“National Policy and the Transoceanic Navy”

According to Samuel Huntington, the strategy—or, in Huntington’s words, the strategic concept—must explain the Navy’s role in implementing national security. It must describe how, when, and where the Navy expects to protect the nation. Without a strategy or a strategic concept of the Navy’s role, the public and political leaders will be (1) confused about the role of the Navy—uncertain whether its existence is necessary—and (2) apathetic to Navy requests for additional resources.

Note again Huntington’s use of the term strategic concept, not strategy. As Huntington uses it, strategic concept is similar to the term value proposition, and relates to what the introduction describes as the strategic vision. Again, this is much different from what the Joint Staff considers to be a concept.
What follows below is an expanded description of the Navy’s value proposition.

U.S. naval forces can be visible or invisible, large or small, provocative or peaceful, depending on what serves American interests best. The sight of a single U.S. warship in the harbor of a friend can serve as tangible evidence of close relations between the United States and that country or their commitment to each other. American naval forces can modulate their presence to exert the kind and degree of influence best suited to resolve the situation, whatever it is, in a manner compatible with U.S. interests. In a crisis in which force might be required to protect U.S. interests or evacuate U.S. nationals, but where visibility could provoke the outbreak of hostilities, American naval forces can remain out of sight, over the horizon, but ready to respond in a matter of minutes.

U.S. naval forces do not have to rely on prior international agreements before taking a position beyond a coastal state’s territorial sea in an area of potential crisis; U.S. naval forces do not have to request overflight authorization or diplomatic clearance. By remaining on station in international waters, for indefinite periods, naval forces communicate a capability for action that ground or air forces can duplicate only by landing or entering sovereign airspace. U.S. naval forces can be positioned near potential trouble spots without the political entanglement associated with the employment of land-based forces.

Although bases on foreign soil can be valuable, U.S. naval forces do not require them in the way that land-based ground and air forces do. Ships are integral units that carry with them much of their own support, and through mobile logistics support they can be maintained on forward stations for long durations. U.S. naval forces, moreover, are
relatively immune to the politics of host-nation governments, whereas those governments can constrain operations by land-based forces significantly. As the U.S. military base structure overseas has diminished over recent decades, the ability of naval forces to arrive in an area fully prepared to conduct sustained combat operations has taken on added importance.

Observation 19

19. Keep your strategy simple.

“\textit{The strength of any strategy lies in its simplicity. ‘Simplicity in planning fosters energy in execution. . . . The winning simplicity we seek, the simplicity of genius, is the result of intense mental engagement.’ A strategy must be distilled into the simplest language possible so that everyone in an organization can follow it. Complexity paralyzes. Simplicity empowers. Simplicity is not a short cut; it’s hard work—requiring the kind of intense mental engagement Clausewitz emphasizes.”}"

\begin{quote}
Willie Pietersen, quoting Carl von Clausewitz
\end{quote}

We all know the military dictum to “keep it simple” (the KISS principle). “The strength of any strategy lies in its simplicity,” Professor Pietersen notes, before quoting Carl von Clausewitz: “Simplicity in planning fosters energy in execution. Strong determination in carrying through a simple idea is the surest route to success. The winning simplicity we seek, the simplicity of genius, is the result of intense mental engagement.” “A strategy,” Professor Pietersen continues, “must be distilled into the simplest language possible so that everyone in an organization can follow it. Complexity paralyzes. Simplicity empowers. Simplicity is not a short cut; it’s hard work—requiring the kind of intense mental engagement Clausewitz emphasizes.”

Graphic source: Inc. This Morning. Used by permission.
Observation 20

20. Make hard choices—the sine qua non of strategy.

- State challenges confronting Navy and identify essential choices
- Identify Navy’s advantages and adversary weaknesses
- Explicitly link means available for achieving ends
- Make choices and set priorities
  - Capacity vs. capability
  - Near-term vs. long-term risk
  - Current readiness vs. recapitalization
  - Diverse, accumulated tasks vs. core missions
  - A sea-control Navy vs. a power-projection Navy

There’s no such book to guide you!

The essence of strategy is the making of hard choices. Unfortunately, most strategies, especially at the unclassified level, studiously avoid making hard choices; however, the reality of finite resources forces us to make these choices.

Listed below are several classic choices that strategists face that you should address early in your production process:

- State which objectives are not going to be pursued
- Describe how and where risk will be accepted
- Establish a pecking order for resources to achieve objectives

Observation 21

21. Senior leaders are burdened—count on getting precious little of their time.

Crafting and implementing a workable strategy to achieve goals is a very difficult undertaking for senior leaders

- Demanding workload
- Limits of experience
- Tyranny of the present
- The urgent displacing the important

Senior leaders must make sufficient time to think through all the problems

Graphic source: Deposit Photos, Inc. Used by permission.
Naval senior leaders tend to spend their days in meetings, at conferences, giving testimony, speaking at engagements, on travel, and so on. This is not by choice—their positions demand it. Our leaders are burdened with such busy schedules that they frequently cannot dedicate the time necessary to apply their years of experience to thinking big, strategic thoughts.

Therefore, you need to find white space for your bosses to reflect on big, strategic thoughts. They want it, and they will thank you for it (eventually!). At the same time, these leaders need to make time consciously to meet with and give guidance to their crafters (providing them with the central idea, at least)—that is, if they want to have an impact on the Navy beyond the day-to-day management of their assignment.

Observation 22

22. Omit doctrine from strategy.

Doctrine: Fundamental principles by which the military forces or elements thereof guide their actions in support of national objectives. It is authoritative but requires judgment in application.

“I am tempted indeed to declare dogmatically that whatever the doctrine the armed forces are working on now, they have got it wrong. I am also tempted to declare that it does not matter that they have got it wrong. What does matter is their capacity to get it right quickly when the moment arrives.”

Michael Howard

Doctrine provides fundamental principles that guide military forces, it tends to be enduring—and it is not relevant to a strategy document. From 1970 to 2018, naval strategies included doctrinal descriptions of naval core functions. This is no longer the case, as these core functions, along with attributes, have been published in the 2020 Naval Doctrine Publication 1. Preferred now is an emphasis on current force-employment problems in the context of the joint force—which precludes, or at least crowds out, much emphasis on describing core attributes.
However, those who prefer to see Navy strategy as a strategic vision or a strategic concept argue that key elements of doctrine must be included.\textsuperscript{25} Doctrinal functions that have been used in previous Navy strategies are listed in the figure below.

**Example: doctrinal functions used in naval strategies**

- **1970 Project Sixty**
  - Assured second strike
  - Sea control
  - Power projection
  - Presence

- **1974 Missions of the U.S. Navy**
  - Deterrence
  - Sea control
  - Power projection
  - Presence

- **1978 Naval Warfare Plan 1A**
  - Deterrence
  - Sea control
  - Power projection

- **1986–90 The Maritime Strategy**
  - Deterrence
  - Sea control

- **1991 The Way Ahead**
  - Nuclear/conventional deterrence
  - Power projection

- **1992 The Navy Policy Book**
  - Deterrence
  - Forward presence
  - Crisis response
  - Reconstitution

- **1994 Forward ... From the Sea**
  - Deterrence
  - Sea control
  - Power projection
  - Forward presence
  - Seafight

- **1997 Anytime, Anywhere**
  - Deterrence
  - Sea control
  - Power projection
  - Forward presence

- **2002 Seapower 21**
  - Deterrence
  - Sea control
  - Power projection
  - Forward presence

- **2006 Naval Operations Concept**
  - Deterrence
  - Sea control
  - Power projection (expeditionary)
  - Forward presence
  - Crisis response
  - Maritime security

- **2007 Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower**
  - Deterrence
  - Sea control
  - Power projection
  - Forward presence
  - Maritime security
  - HA/DR

- **2015 Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower (Revised)**
  - Deterrence
  - Sea control
  - Power projection
  - Forward presence
  - Maritime security
  - All-domain access

It is apparent that functions remained largely the same, regardless of the details of our strategy. Note also that the enduring functions are deterrence, sea control, power projection, and forward presence, although there were changes at the following key inflection points:

- 1992: fall of USSR, drawdown
- 2006: counterterrorism emphasis
- 2015: increasing proliferation of A2/AD technologies
Observation 23

23. Acknowledge and account for uncertainty—can’t predict the future.

“The core problem for those who are charged . . . is the need to prepare prudently for a future about which almost everything in general is known, but nothing is known in reliable detail.”

“One has to emphasize, develop, and maintain capabilities sufficiently adaptable to cope with a range of security challenges, since particular threats and opportunities cannot be anticipated with high confidence.”

Colin Gray

“What we anticipate seldom occurs; what we least expect generally happens.”

Benjamin Disraeli

Nevertheless, the strategist, military or civilian, must peer into the future as best as he or she is able

Forecasting the future is extremely difficult; much is unknown and even unknowable. Yet it is a task that strategists must embrace, since, in military matters, the expected—precisely because it is expected—is not to be expected. Colin Gray’s advice is relevant. What we expect, we plan and provide for, and thus deter. What does happen is what we did not deter, because we did not plan and provide for it, because we did not expect it. Hence the need for flexible and adaptable strategies to address the so-called black swan event, such as the coronavirus pandemic we faced in 2020 and now in 2021.

Example: Perils of forecasting 2070 from 2020

1970: Future Shock*
- “Computer” appears only 54 times
- “Software” appears only once
- “AI” never appears, despite 15 years of existence
- ARPANET, the precursor to the Internet, never mentioned, despite its 4-year existence as a concept

2020: After Shock*
116 essays promising “extraordinary insights of the world’s foremost thought leaders”—a collection of predictions for the next 50 years
- Lots to say about pre-31 Jan 2020 problems, from climate change and energy to transportation
- But barely 6 contributors have anything to say about health care or pandemics

“But forecasting is useful, in no small part because much about the future is still determined by what we choose to do. For the discerning, there is thus one overarching pattern that emerges from books like After Shock. It’s that there are three classes of forecasters: those who are paid to entertain, those who are paid to be right, and those who have an agenda.”

Here is another penetrating quote from Colin Gray.

You cannot predict the future, so do not try, and do not be tempted to believe that there is some wonderful methodology that will enable you to see into the twenty-first century. There is not. How do you prepare for, perhaps against, future warfare? It needs to be done, so complaining about the impossible is of little use. Often a nation’s geography and recent past provide reliable guidance as to its future enemies. The domain of uncertainty can be distressingly large, however. If you are not blessed, or cursed, with a dominant enemy, the path of prudence is to cover all major possibilities as well as possible, without becoming overcommitted to one particular category of danger. The temptation is to assert that flexibility and adaptability are not policies, certainly not strategies. Nonetheless, they are often the basis for defense planning when the time, place, and identity of enemies are unknown, or at least uncertain.

Expect to be surprised. To win as a defense planner is not to avoid surprise. To win is to have planned in such a manner that the effects of surprise do not inflict lethal damage. The fundamental reason why we can be surprised tends not to be the sudden emergence of novel factors of menace—for example, an asteroid that threatens to extinguish life on Earth—but rather the consequences of known trends that interact in unexpected ways, resulting in unanticipated consequences.26

Example: Predicting the 1950 security calculus from 1940

June 1940:
Nazi Germany forces BEF to evacuate from the continent via the Dunkirk beaches; imperial Japan yet to attack; U.K. alone

June 1950:
Nazi Germany, imperial Japan, and Fascist Italy defeated and on the road to becoming U.S. allies; U.S. and UN at war in Korea; world has entered nuclear age

“The basic point is that the future is inherently uncertain; the only certainty is uncertainty, and one rejects this fundamental truth at one’s peril.”

Eric Grove

The Ministry of Defence’s strategy treatise also notes the following:

[S]trategist[s] will never know everything about the environment in which their strategy is designed to achieve [its ends]. Nor will they be able to predict the unintended consequences once their strategy starts to be implemented. It therefore follows that strategists need to be comfortable planning on the basis of incomplete information. Because of this, they need to recognise that, despite their best efforts, outcomes are far from certain and therefore good feedback loops to ensure they are sighted on what is happening once a strategy has entered the implementation phase are important, as is being prepared to adapt the strategy as necessary to achieve the desired end-state. . . .
Because we cannot anticipate every eventuality or predict the unexpected, strategists should aim to keep a reserve of everything (effort, resources, time). Even after considering all the risks, being prepared for events to take an entirely unexpected turn is the embodiment of strategic flexibility and adaptability.

One way of helping to overcome this issue is the establishment of a formal “red team” with the remit of testing a fledgling strategy against a range of potential scenarios, including the “unthinkable” ones. To be effective, the leader of the “red team” needs to have direct access to the strategy owner and the confidence to speak honestly.

Including experts from outside government in the “red team” (including academics and other subject matter experts) should be considered.

Observation 24

24. Illustrate your strategy with maps—geography drives strategy.

**Challenges on the Eurasian continent, coupled with the continent’s physical contours, underscore Navy’s relevance**

“Eye candy” images of ships and aircraft are for “coffee-table” strategies

Images source: DoD Imagery Library.

Well-articulated spatial content, with geographic arguments supported by charts, helps strategists present a more effective case to their audience. In a strategy document, always choose to use maps rather than images of ships, aircraft, and personnel. Many of the latter type of images, often used in “slick and glossy” versions of Navy strategy documents, bear little direct relationship to the accompanying text. Maps, on the other hand, are explanatory tools that clarify the text directly. Two historical examples illustrate their efficacy.
Example: First and second island chains from China’s perspective

“Because the geographic characteristics of states are relatively unchanging and unchangeable, the geographic demands of those states will remain the same for centuries. . . . Thus at the door of geography may be laid the blame for many of the age-long struggles which run persistently through history while governments and dynasties rise and fall.”

Nicholas J. Spykman

Map image provided by Office of Naval Intelligence (ONI).

Charts displayed from unique perspectives, such as this one of the first and second island chains from China’s perspective, can give a greater appreciation of geography, distances, and proximity.

Example: Globes for Roosevelt and Churchill

Generals Marshall and Eisenhower wanted President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill to grasp fully the true implications of the tyranny of distance and the key geographic relationships of the Pacific theater—so General Marshall sent each of them an oversized globe to help them do so.

“Only statesmen who can do their political and strategic thinking in terms of a round earth and three-dimensional warfare can save their countries from being outmaneuvered on distant flanks.”

Nicholas J. Spykman

Images source: Library of Congress.
This second example points to the importance of being able to visualize geography, to understand its implications better. “In December 1942 U.S. Army Chief of Staff George Marshall [1939–45], acting on a suggestion from General Dwight Eisenhower, sent identical fifty-inch, 750-pound globes to [Winston S.] Churchill and [Franklin D.] Roosevelt as Christmas presents. During the war [the globes were] especially useful to Roosevelt, Churchill, and others for gauging relative distances over water, a crucial factor in allocating scarce shipping resources while planning grand strategy.”28 As writer on geopolitics Nicholas J. Spykman reminds us, “States cannot escape their geography. However skilled the Foreign Office, and however resourceful the General Staff, a state’s foreign policy must reckon with geographic facts. It can deal with them skillfully or ineptly; it can modify them; but it cannot ignore them. For geography does not argue. It simply is.”29

Observation 25

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>25. Gain access to the CNO for your strategists.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Developing and communicating Navy service-level strategies require the strategy office to have a close relationship to CNO—without interlocutors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ Crafting CNO’s strategic priorities and long-term strategic concepts requires significant CNO involvement, visibility, and signature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• It is a one-on-one relationship between CNO and chief strategist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Frequent and unimpeded access is needed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“I will be personally involved in this effort (to craft the NDS).”

Secretary of Defense James N. Mattis

Almost every book on strategy insists that the crafters need to meet with the top leadership / chief executive officer (CEO) to ensure that guidance is direct and clear. As discussed earlier, this often is difficult. Yet it is imperative that the strategists have some degree of direct access if their efforts are to yield an approved, effective result.
that the leadership is committed to executing. An initial meeting should be held at the beginning of the project. Frequent and unimpeded access is needed to accomplish the following:

- Implement CNO guidance—not guidance altered by the agendas of the OPNAV directorates
- Provide unfiltered advice to the CNO, especially alternative views
- Proceed quickly and with a minimum of interference from others
- Ensure linkage between the strategy and the program objective memorandum (known as a POM), other elements of the resource-development, force-capabilities, and force-development processes, all of which the CNO directs (the strategists/crafters need to remind the CNO of this necessary linkage)
- Ensure that the CNO receives Navy strategy products that reflect a consistent and aligned set of principles, concepts, and tenets regarding the Navy’s fundamental role in implementing national policy

In his guidance to the drafters of the 2018 *National Defense Strategy*, then-SECDEF James N. Mattis (2017–18) stated, “As a practical matter, strategy cannot be built by a large group process. [OSD and the JS will lead a small team reporting directly to me.] … I will be personally involved in this effort. … The team will provide interim products. … These products may be provocative, as any good strategy requires hard choices. I expect you to review these as a means to genuine debate.”

Almost every defense official has expressed and expresses similar sentiments, but that does not mean they are translated into direct meetings with their strategists. Given the time constraints the senior leader (in this case, the CNO) faces, as previously discussed, the “front office” (which manages time and appointments) is unlikely to initiate an invitation. So the initiative to meet with the CNO must come from the crafters themselves (or their immediate boss), and they figuratively may have to “fight for it.” However, such fighting is necessary if the crafters are to do their work efficiently and avoid becoming overwhelmed by frustration and cynicism.
Observation 26

26. Define your terms; build a glossary.

“It is essential to settle on clear definitions of all these terms, because that is the only way to make coherent arguments about how they relate to each other and how they interact to influence international politics. Precise definitions allow scholars to impose order on a messy and complicated body of facts. They also help readers decide whether an author’s arguments are compelling, and if not, where and why not.”

John Mearsheimer

Words count, and words convey concepts. Crafters of strategy need to strive for clear and precise terminology that all can understand easily, and to avoid using the buzzwords of the day—which usually become dated rapidly.

Additionally, crafters need to define the terms they emphasize, either within the context of the document or by attaching a glossary. If terms are not defined, their usage cannot be clear. Lack of definitions causes ambiguity and confusion. For example, a naval definition of presence can be interpreted by others as posture.

Therefore, be precise in your language, choose your words carefully, and define your terms to avoid confusion. Never assume that anyone will read the document with a copy of the DOD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms (JP-1) opened alongside. (In any case, JP-1 barely scratches the surface of the totality of such terms.)
The first example for this observation is a strategic choice that led to victory. Prior to the outbreak of the Second World War, the Royal Air Force (RAF) developed an air-defense network that would provide it a critical advantage in the Battle of Britain—with global strategic consequences. RAF Fighter Command brought together technology that included radar, ground defenses, observers, antiaircraft artillery, fusion/directional centers, and fighter aircraft into a unified system of defense. Despite extreme resource limitations, the RAF got its force-employment and force-development strategies right by concentrating on a system of systems for air defense versus offensive-bombing force-employment and force-development strategies. The defeat of Germany’s Luftwaffe in the Battle of Britain ensured the preservation of a secure base for future offensive operations, which had profound strategic consequences. Colin Gray notes the following:

Tactical mistakes may kill you today, while operational error may prove fatal in days or perhaps weeks. The contrast with strategic error can hardly be clearer. A strategic error in statecraft or strategy may take years to reveal itself in its full horror. . . .

... [T]he Battle of Britain [was] waged briefly in the sky largely over southern England in August and September 1940. This battle, the first of its kind in history, was tactically and operationally momentous, but its ultimate significance has to be judged strategic. This battle, which of course
Germany lost, required Hitler to leave Britain unininvaded in 1940, and, given his race against his own mortality, to make the conquest of the USSR the next task on Nazi Germany’s path of conquest. Failure in a single campaign in 1940 was to have consequences in shaping the entire rest of the war. This fact highlights admirably what is meant by the adjective strategic. The sequence of events from 1941 until 1945, and then the East-West political and military standoff until as late as 1991, was all in traceably logical part a result of German failure over England in Fall 1940.31

Example: Enemy navies got it wrong

- Imperial Japanese Navy squandered its budgets on monstrous battleships
- Nazi Germany’s Kriegsmarine also pursued useless and wasteful battleships

What the Japanese needed:
- Sufficient aircraft carriers for strike
- Destroyer escorts for convoy protection

What the Germans needed:
- True transoceanic submarines, like the U.S. Navy’s Gato and Balao classes, for decisive Atlantic SLOC intervention

Make the right investments that provide enduring support to your strategy

Two naval examples from the Second World War reveal strategic choices that were made to ensure peacetime prestige but resulted in wartime defeat. We have only to look at this historical record to underscore the value of getting the strategy right.

- The Imperial Japanese Navy squandered its budget on monstrous battleships, such as the oil-guzzling Yamato and Musashi, instead of building destroyer escorts for convoy protection. The result was that the USN submarine force shut down the transport of raw materials to Japan.
- Nazi Germany’s Kriegsmarine pursued useless and wasteful battleships, such as Tirpitz and Bismarck, instead of a true transoceanic submarine for interdiction of Atlantic sea lines of communication.

These were colossal strategic failures—they produced forces irrelevant to the fight and unaffordable to the budget. Planning requirements for thirty years down the road may seem unrealistic; however, in many instances, tomorrow’s requirements resemble
today’s. A hedge against changes in technology and the geostrategic environment is ensuring a degree of flexibility in your platforms.

Example: U.S. Navy got it right

USS Midway: The Enduring Warrior, 1945 to 1992

“One has to emphasize, develop, and maintain capabilities sufficiently adaptable to cope with a range of security challenges, since particular threats and opportunities cannot be anticipated with high confidence.”

Colin Gray

Provide for platform versatility and adaptability

According to military historian Sir Michael E. Howard, everyone usually gets it wrong at the beginning of a war. He observes, “In 1914, every army of all the belligerent powers shared a common doctrine of the dominance of the offensive and the inevitability of rapid and decisive campaigns. All navies believed in the dominant role of the capital ship.” Yet the war on the ground developed into a defensive stalemate, and it was the U-boat, not capital warships, that dominated the naval war and affected the resupply of Britain and Russia.

The point, Howard continues, is not to be right at the outset—an almost impossible task—but to be able to change as a war unfolds. “In these circumstances where everybody starts wrong, the advantage goes to the side which can most quickly adjust itself to the new and unfamiliar environment and learn from its mistakes.” The goal is to develop the “capacity to get it right quickly when the moment arrives.”

In my view, the U.S. Navy’s choice to continue post-WWII development and upgrades of aircraft carrier aviation ensured its global dominance. Symbolically, USS Midway (CV 41) was an example of getting it right and being able to adjust capabilities as the character of war changed. The ship operated for an unprecedented forty-seven years, spanning from World War II to Desert Storm, from a straight flight deck with piston
aircraft to an angled flight deck with jet aircraft. Like the follow-on large-deck carriers, it was versatile and adaptable.

Observation 28

28. Don’t do strategy by PowerPoint—“PowerPoint makes us stupid.”

A PowerPoint diagram meant to portray the complexity of American strategy in Afghanistan

“When we understand that slide, we’ll have won the war.”
Gen. Stanley A. McChrystal, Afghanistan, 2009


General Mattis was spot-on when he stated that “PowerPoint makes us stupid” at a 2010 military conference.

Elisabeth Bumiller wrote the following in the New York Times in 2010:

Gen. Stanley A. McChrystal, the leader of American and NATO forces in Afghanistan, was shown a PowerPoint slide in Kabul last summer [2009] that was meant to portray the complexity of American military strategy, but looked more like a bowl of spaghetti.

“When we understand that slide, we’ll have won the war,” General McChrystal dryly remarked. . . .

. . . Brig. Gen. H. R. McMaster, who banned PowerPoint presentations when he led the successful effort to secure the northern Iraqi city of Tal Afar in 2005, . . . liken[ed] PowerPoint to an internal threat.

“It’s dangerous because it can create the illusion of understanding and the illusion of control,” General McMaster said in a telephone interview [in 2010]. "Some problems in the world are not bullet-izable."
In General McMaster’s view, PowerPoint’s worst offense is not a chart like the spaghetti graphic . . . but rigid lists of bullet points (in, say, a presentation on a conflict’s causes) that take no account of interconnected political, economic and ethnic forces. “If you divorce war from all of that, it becomes a targeting exercise.” . . .

. . . Imagine lawyers presenting arguments before the Supreme Court in slides instead of legal briefs.34

Unfortunately, PowerPoint briefings have become the required means of dialogue in the Department of Defense. Yet the crafting of strategy must go far beyond that medium, even if the crafters are required to prepare progress reports in its format.

Observation 29

### 29. Develop a strategic communications plan.

- Base your communications on the central idea
- Plan a multimedia approach for rollout and distribution
  - Interviews, briefings, professional journal articles, brochures, conferences, key leader engagements, blogs . . .
- Have a consistent, scalable message for any venue
- Continue to refer to the strategy well after publication

**Writing the strategy is only half the battle; implementation starts by communicating effectively**

A strategy that cannot be communicated effectively is an ineffective strategy. The crafters of strategy not only bear a responsibility to make it understandable but must take the lead in building a strategic communications plan. You never can rely wholly on outside specialists (such as public affairs officers) to come up with a strategic communications plan. They simply do not know the strategy as intimately as the crafters do; thus they may not be able to capitalize on the nuances and internal messaging.

Build your strategic communications plan around the central idea. Have a clear core message. Your rollout plan must engage across multiple media venues. Have a scalable message suitable for any size venue. Understand that every action is a message—a
strategic communication. Synchronize the message inside and coming from OPNAV and echelon components.

Observation 30

30. **Develop a single core message.**

- Develop a strategic core message based on the central idea of your strategy, for clarity, focus, and consistency
- Core message has two purposes: one for force development, one for force employment
- Use the President Reagan model—brilliant:

  President Reagan’s “smaller government, less taxes, strong defense” was simultaneously:

  - Vision
  - Lines of effort
  - Objectives
  - Philosophy
  - Principles

Whether or not one agreed with President Ronald W. Reagan’s policies or decisions, no one can deny that he was a great communicator who made his goals for his presidency simple and clear. He incorporated this core message into almost all his speeches, relating specific decisions to his general goal. Through this approach, the core message became a guiding philosophy, generating corresponding lines of effort for problem solving.

The single-core-message approach makes for a tight, internally consistent strategy and a subsequent network of supporting plans. Notice, too, that President Reagan’s message confined itself to three points.

This approach deserves emulation in any crafting of strategy. Unfortunately, the recent Navy attempts at strategy have not emulated this approach, particularly in 2019.
Example: 2019—no single core message

• Three Navy documents:
  1. *Navy Communications Strategy 2019*
  2. *CHINFO Play Book 2019*

• Presented multiple CNO and SECNAV lists of priorities, themes, core messages, and LOEs:
  1. Three SECNAV priorities
  2. Three Navy core themes
  3. Six Navy core messages
  4. Four CNO lines of effort
  5. Three CNO central themes
  6. Four Navy enduring LOEs
  7. Three focus areas of the *National Defense Strategy*

No one can remember more than three points

With so many different lists of priorities, themes, core messages, and lines of effort (LOEs) in 2019, it was difficult for the Navy to communicate its strategic policy goals with a single voice, so it could stay on message and be understood. There never was a real agreement on the Navy’s mission and desired end state.

The mission:

• From the Secretary of the Navy (SECNAV): “The Department of the Navy will recruit, train, equip, and organize to deliver combat-ready naval forces to win conflicts and wars while maintaining security and deterrence through sustained forward presence.”

• From the CNO: “The United States Navy will be ready to conduct prompt and sustained combat incident to operations at sea. Our Navy will protect America from attack, promote American prosperity, and preserve America’s strategic influence.” (Note that this is just the first two sentences of the four-sentence mission statement in the CNO’s *Design 2.0* directive.)

The vision (or end state):

• From the SECNAV: “A combat-credible Navy and Marine Corps Team focused on rebuilding military readiness, strengthening alliances, and reforming business practices in support of the *National Defense Strategy.*”
• From the CNO: “A Naval Force that produces leaders and teams, armed with the best equipment, who learn and adapt faster than our rivals to achieve maximum possible performance and is ready for decisive combat operations.”

Given that these lists, missions, and end states all reflect SECNAV and CNO direction, not much could have been done to align and simplify the Navy’s overall strategic message. There simply was too much divergence in language.

Observation 31

31. Use a narrative.

The narrative connects your audience to your strategy

• Narratives are compelling story lines, creating an emotional tie that conjures an image

• A narrative acts as an institution’s brand, guiding decision-making to ensure institutional coherence

• It provides context, reason/motive, and goal/end

Authors Peter W. Singer and Emerson T. Brooking write the following about the importance of narrative in today’s world.

Narratives are the building blocks that explain both how humans see the world and how they exist in large groups. They provide the lens through which we perceive ourselves, others, and the environment around us. They are the stories that bind the small to the large, connecting personal experience to some bigger notion of how the world works. The stronger a narrative is, the more likely it is to be retained and remembered.

The power of a narrative depends on a confluence of factors, but the most important is consistency—the way that one event links logically to the next. . . . As narratives generate attention and interest, they necessarily abandon some of their complexity. . . .
By simplifying complex realities, good narratives can slot into other people’s preexisting comprehension. . . . The most effective narratives can thus be shared among entire communities, peoples, or nations, because they tap into our most elemental notions. . . .

These three traits—simplicity, resonance, and novelty—determine which narratives stick and which fall flat. It’s no coincidence that everyone from far-right political leaders to women’s rights activists to the Kardashian clan speaks constantly of “controlling the narrative.” To control the narrative is to dictate to an audience who the heroes and villains are; what is right and what is wrong; what’s real and what’s not. As jihadist Omar Hammami, a leader of the Somali-based terror group Al-Shabaab, put it, “The war of narratives has become even more important than the war of navies, napalm, and knives.”

The big losers in this narrative battle are those people or institutions that are too big, too slow, or too hesitant to weave such stories. These are not the kinds of battles that a plodding, uninventive bureaucracy can win. As a U.S. Army officer lamented to us about what happens when the military deploys to fight this generation’s web-enabled insurgents and terrorists, “Today we go in with the assumption that we’ll lose the battle of the narrative.”

Since we do not want to “lose the battle of the narrative,” it is imperative that we apply a narrative approach to the crafting of naval strategy, as in the example below.

**Example: Narrative construct**

Using a narrative connects the Navy audience to its strategies.

**Narrative approach to expressing Navy strategy:**

The strategic balance in the First Island Chain is becoming more problematic; China is building a big navy beyond any reasonable defense requirement and is shifting from a coastal focus to a global focus; this is changing the strategic balance in the western Pacific; we have a strategic choice to make; the Navy can do these four things (1) ____ (2) ____ (3) ____ and (4) ____ to turn this around.

**Bureaucratic-staff approach to expressing Navy strategy:**

Defending our Nation and winning its wars is the core task of the U.S. Navy. The Navy’s fundamental mission is war fighting. Should diplomacy or deterrence fail, the Navy must have the capabilities and capacities to defeat any adversary and defend the homeland and our allies and friends worldwide. The Service’s number one responsibility is to deter aggression and, if deterrence fails, to fight and win our Nation’s wars.

My own awareness of the power of the narrative approach started with an e-mail from Andrew F. Krepinevich Jr., a retired U.S. Army colonel, author, and CEO of the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, in February 2016. Krepinevich suggested that we not use the core attributes or characteristics of the Navy in isolation as the foundation of our message. Instead, he recommended that we attach a relevant, understandable purpose to each attribute by answering the question “To do what?” He gave an example
from a conversation he had with a congressman, who stated, “I kinda get a 30-slide, high density, small font brief when it’s presented, but a week later, I can’t give you the logic train behind the brief.”

So Krepinevich suggested using the text shown here. The kernel of his suggested narrative is crystal clear and easy to remember: “China is building a big navy that is changing the strategic balance in the western Pacific.” In contrast, the bureaucratic staff approach simply does not grab the reader’s attention; it lacks specificity and real-world logic, and generally is too abstract—which is fairly representative of military staff writing.

**Observation 32**

**32. Overcome individual, staff, and institutional biases.**

*Internal staff interests make the development of strategy difficult*


When working with OPNAV staff to produce capstone naval strategies, I shared the same experiences as Professor Turner of the Army War College. Turner noted the following:

In our case, the strategic document became a mirror image of the views of those whom we briefed. For example, officers and civilians dealing with the budget always circled around to a discussion of how the document could shape future outlays of money. This process repeated itself with each organization and resulted in a large time and intellectual commitment expended on definition and education rather than ideas and concepts. Added to this, each organization had its own view of what had to be in the document and how it should be structured, which at times made it resemble a dish prepared by too many cooks.
Observation 33

33. Be wary of timing.

- CNO Greenert released CS21 in March 2015, six months before ADM Richardson became CNO; this limited Richardson’s decision space

- Development of the 2015 CS21 took almost 3 years; impacted by 2014 QDR

- Meanwhile, CNO Greenert’s Sailing Directions and Navigation Plan served as the Navy’s de facto strategy

- Development of the 2018 Navy Strategy took almost 15 months; released 10 months after the 2018 National Defense Strategy

Obviously, the crafting of strategy takes time. What may not be obvious is that the timing of issuing a strategy plays a major role in its overall effectiveness, let alone its effective dissemination. Similar to policies issued in the final months of a lame-duck presidency, those strategy documents issued shortly before a change of Navy or DoD leadership rarely have significant impact or lasting effect.

Strategy documents ultimately reflect the desired policies of the chief strategist (the CNO); thus their implementation is dependent on the tenure of the strategist, or on the willingness of his successor to maintain the same strategy without significant revision. In a competitive environment in which hyperbole-laced debates over resources take place, the thirst for a “new” strategy with new, “innovative” terminology and arguments is always present. Leaders feel pressure to sign off on their own strategy documents. This creates a churn in which strategies appear credible only as long as the chief strategist / leader remains in that position. Strategies issued early in the leader’s tenure have a chance to gain effect, whereas those issued late in the tour indeed are viewed as lame ducks.

In recent years, continuity has become very artificial. Instead of attempting to replace an existing official strategy document, SECNAVs and CNOs have issued guidance papers and directives that reinterpret or supersede some part of the existing strategy.
Often this has been done for the sake of speed and to avoid a laborious crafting of strategy. Sometimes, however, it is done to avoid public debate about or external involvement in any obvious shift in Navy strategy.

Meanwhile, new strategies from higher authorities may or may not be issued on any firm schedule. Such schedules may exist, particularly as concerns joint documents, but often they are overtaken by events. Congress has put in place (legal) time requirements for the issuance of the president’s National Security Strategy, but recent administrations have ignored these time requirements without consequence. Presumably, Navy strategies should incorporate all the guidance from the NSS, the SECDEF’s National Defense Strategy, and the CJCS’s National Military Strategy, but rarely do they align in sequence or terminology. Crafters of strategy must be wary of timing, but there are no hard-and-fast answers except that any strategy issued late in a CNO’s term is unlikely to have any significant effect.

Observation 34

34. Select optimal release date (but there may be none!).
As a corollary to the last observation, releasing a Navy capstone strategy approximately three months prior to a presidential election is not prudent, for obvious reasons. After the presidential election, many consider it imprudent to release a strategy until the new administration publishes its NSS, as well as its NDS (which is a more recently established document). In the 2017–18 time frame, SECDEF Mattis made it abundantly clear to CNO Richardson (2015–19) that there would be “no daylight” between the NDS and the classified 2018 Navy Strategy. Indeed, the full and formal subtitle of the Navy Strategy published in November 2018 is “The Navy’s Contribution to the Joint Force,” whereas at one time the subtitle read “The Naval Component of the National Defense Strategy.”

However, with a plethora of higher guidance generally arriving at times not in keeping with anticipated schedules, there may be no optimum time to issue a new, overarching Navy Strategy. Therefore, the Navy uses work-arounds. For reasons of continuity between CNOs, CNO Adm. Michael M. Gilday (2019–) elected to retain CNO Adm. John M. Richardson’s Design 2.0. However, Gilday’s 2019 FRAGO (fragmentary order) is a governing directive that implicitly takes precedence over Design 2.0. As previously noted, Design 2.0 had taken precedence by effectively rescinding what at the time remained the official tri-Sea Service strategy, CS21R.

Observation 35

35. Understand that technology is not a substitute for strategy.

“While emerging technologies are essential for military effectiveness, concepts that rely only on those technologies, including precision strikes, raids, or other means of targeting enemies, confuse military activity with progress toward larger wartime goals. We must not equate military capabilities with strategy. Achieving our aims in war will demand forces who can reassure allies and protect populations, as well as identify and defeat elusive enemies.”


Most defense debates are not about strategy, but instead about the adoption of new capabilities—of which emerging technologies have become a driving factor. This has given many of the debaters the impression that the emergence of new technologies
automatically overturns existing strategies and that technological development and acquisition is an effective strategy in itself. This impression violates the very definition and theory of strategy, because the conflation of technology and capabilities with strategy ensures that the ends are defined by the means. As the old saying goes, “To a hammer, everything looks like a nail.” Driving a nail into the wrong place at the wrong time simply because the hammer exists—even if it is the most technologically advanced hammer ever conceived—is not good strategy. In fact, it is not strategy at all.

Observation 36

36. Recognize that CNO responsibilities require one Navy strategy with two components.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responsibility</th>
<th>Type of Strategy</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>As a member of the JCS, CNO is a military adviser to the Chairman and provides advice to POTUS, NSC, and SECDEF on request (the Chairman is principal military adviser)</td>
<td>Navy force-employment strategy (i.e., the Huntington prescript)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As a service chief, CNO is responsible to SECNAV to prepare for the Navy to conduct prompt and sustained combat at sea (Title 10: man, train, and equip)</td>
<td>Navy force-development strategy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The CJCS is the principal military adviser to the president, SECDEF, and NSC. All Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) members have a responsibility to provide advice or opinions, when requested or on their own initiative, via the CJCS, to the president, SECDEF, and NSC. Therefore, in addition to the CNO’s Title 10 responsibility to develop the Navy, he has a responsibility to describe to the JCS how the Navy will be employed. This requires two distinct strategies, one to develop the force and the other to employ the force. The two strategies require different components.
The graphic above conveys an important point illustrated by the famous 1980s Maritime Strategy and the equally famous objective to reach a six-hundred-ship Navy. The former was a Navy force-employment strategy with a central idea of offensively attacking the Soviets’ Barents Sea bastions to deprive them of a maritime sanctuary, while the latter was a Navy force-development strategy to build a Navy that could deter and, if necessary, defeat the Soviets. Depending on the strategy, the forces and capabilities are either the means or the ends.

Note that, in this post-Goldwater-Nichols era, the force-employment component is not a strategy to fight. LOEs, phasing, and other tools for fighting are not best addressed in a service capstone strategy. Today and into the future, the Navy mans, organizes, trains, and equips its future force for the fight, but does not fight by itself. Therefore the force-employment-strategy component is more an expression of how the Navy will fight and how a conflict may unfold. This allows the OPNAV staff to pursue solutions for maintaining the current force and building the future force.
Observation 37

37. Ensure your strategy informs resource allocation.

- Number one lever is to make budgeteers and programmers happy with categorization scheme in the strategy, so they will use it (the “form”) and therefore adopt the “substance” of the document.

- Navy’s 2007 and 2015 versions of the Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower categorizations got lots of pushback from budget programmers for NOT being useful in Navy’s programming process. Therefore the strategies were ignored, lowering the impact of the entire documents.

Describe your ways and means in terms that Navy programmers can use to shape their budget proposals


Your strategy must be capable of informing resource allocation for force development. Navy budget programmers considered the 2007 Cooperative Strategy to be “not useful” for articulating requirements and defending budgets; the 2015 version of this strategy (CS21R) likewise was not considered particularly useful. Indeed, CNO Jonathan Greenert (2011–15) did not construct three of his annual posture statements for Congress around this strategy.

While there is no hard-and-fast rule for how to design a strategy document so that it informs resource allocation, starting the crafting of a strategy without a firm recognition that part of its purpose is to give guidance to budget programmers is a mistake.
Drafting a strategy is only a first step, albeit a difficult one. The crafter needs to develop the strategy with implementation in mind. Here is how to institutionalize strategy.

- Begin by inserting high-level implementation taskers into the body of a Navy strategy to signal that the strategy is real, relevant, and significant—not to be ignored.
- Produce an implementation plan that specifies measurable objectives.
- Translate the ends of a Navy strategy into measurable implementation objectives linked to DCNO and subordinate organizational goals.
- Assign owners to each objective and initiative, for clear responsibilities and accountability.
- Conduct periodic progress reviews of implementation to monitor execution.
- Oversee execution by active senior leadership and drive implementation across the Navy by dedicated operational planning teams.
- Communicate strategy repeatedly to explain its logic and achieve buy-in.

“The quickest way to discredit a good idea is to execute it incompetently. Human nature will blame the idea along with those who botched it.”

Ralph Peters
Leaders habitually underestimate the challenge of implementing strategy. Follow-up procedures are needed to ascertain whether implementation is being carried out effectively. The follow-up should include the actions listed below:

- Conducting periodic progress reviews of implementation to determine whether the strategy is relevant to the Navy’s purpose. Since the Navy operates in a very dynamic environment, the reviews are essential to know whether the strategy is meeting the Navy’s needs.

- Assigning objectives and initiatives to individual “owners.” Accountability drives implementation. The implementation plan requires that clear and specific tasks be defined to implement the strategy. Everyone with implementation responsibilities needs to know what to do and what to achieve.

- Selecting the correct strategic metrics to track progress on the objectives or initiatives identified in the implementation plan. Measurable objectives provide an effective basis for management control of the implementation.

- Ensuring that senior leaders actively manage the execution of the strategy and guide implementation across the Navy. The focus should be on ensuring that the strategy is understood throughout the Navy.

The quote by retired Army colonel Ralph Peters is an appropriate description of strategies that are executed poorly.\(^{38}\) No matter how simple, logical, and eloquent, they amount to little if they do not have a positive result; hence the need for crafters of strategy to be concerned with—and involved in guiding—their execution.
Observation 39

39. Try to be consistent.
Two CNOs—two very different Navy mission statements.

| Navy Mission |
| "Deter aggression and, if deterrence fails, win our Nation’s wars.¹ Employ the global reach and persistent presence of forward-stationed and rotational forces to secure the Nation from direct attack;² assure Joint operational access, and retain global freedom of action. With global partners, protect the maritime freedom that is the basis for global prosperity. Foster and sustain cooperative relationships with an expanding set of allies and international partners to enhance global security.” |

| Navy Mission |
| “The United States Navy will be ready to conduct prompt and sustained combat incident to operations at sea. Our Navy will protect America from attack and preserve America’s strategic influence in key regions of the world. U.S. naval forces and operations—from the sea floor to space, from deep water to the littorals, and in the information domain—will deter aggression and enable peaceful resolution of crises on terms acceptable to the United States and our allies and partners. If deterrence fails, the Navy will conduct decisive combat operations to defeat any enemy.” |

In a world in which new ideas are championed whereas older ideas are viewed as worn-out “legacy,” leaders are inclined to try to put distance between their statements and policies and those of their predecessors, even when the policies are essentially the same (because they are working). This is true of leadership in DoD, in which competitive careers are rewarded with advancement for establishing new programs or new methods of operation (sometimes more efficient, sometimes not), not for simply carrying out established practices well. The buzzword transformation once dominated DoD, and it still does to a certain extent. Often it is assumed that to be transformational one needs to generate new terminology for emerging (or even continuing) concepts, and existing strategies need to be rewritten, even if the changes are slight in reality.

This tendency may provide routine employment for the crafters of strategy, but often it generates confusion among members of the audience of those who carry it out. By its nature, strategy—unlike immediate plans—is inherently a long-term approach to problem solving amid opposition. The need for long-term implementation requires a degree of continuity in terms as well as in direction. The need to be a champion of “new” concepts, reform, or transformation chafes against the requirement for a degree of continuity.
The crafters of strategy must seek a balance between incorporating new terminology and maintaining an appearance of continuity. Every new term incorporated must be defined—clearly, and often repeatedly—for the audience. Doing this in any one document requires great eloquence—as stated before, a glossary may be the key to that—but the repeated defining of new terms often must be performed throughout the dissemination phase.

The example shows two different Navy mission statements from two different, albeit sequential, CNOs. Although it is a CNO’s perquisite to define the mission of the organization, changes always entail cost—in the resultant need for redefinition and dissemination, if nowhere else. Crafters of strategy need to make the CNO aware of these costs, particularly when new terms are introduced that essentially are a repackaging of concepts already understood.

When terms newly introduced by previous leadership—such as joint operational access in the above—are dropped, those implementing strategy may interpret that as a significant change, even if it actually is less an operational change than a preference for a new expression. Crafters of strategy must be attuned to these interpretations and help mitigate them when appropriate. If a significant change is not an imperative, continuity pays dividends.

Observation 40

How realistic is the vision of the future Marine Corps suggested by Force Design 2030, and how effective would it be? Seeking ground truth is very challenging

**FORCE DESIGN 2030** proposes a new structure centered on smaller, more-mobile, and less-detectable formations equipped with an array of advanced, long-range, precision weapons, unmanned vehicles, and cyber capabilities; moving frequently, with heavy reliance on expedient basing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CON (by Dan Gouré)</th>
<th>PRO (by T. X. Hammes)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Will Asian allies allow access by USMC units armed with long-range weapons (likely to be early targets of China’s first wave of PGMs during a crisis)?</td>
<td>• Remember that U.S. failed to destroy Iraqi mobile-missile systems in Gulf War, even with complete air supremacy and thousands of dedicated sorties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Could we resupply those units (likely to run out of munitions and supplies quickly)?</td>
<td>• Our new focus on mobile and low-signature systems logically will lead to containerized missiles—indistinguishable from thousands of other standard shipping containers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Within a decade, Chinese military could have a formidable amphibious-landing capability backed up by firepower deployed on the mainland</td>
<td>• Container-based weapons also dramatically reduce the logistical burden, because trucks, fuel, water, clothing, and some medical care could be purchased on the open market</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• These capabilities may be quite adequate to sweep aside small Marine formations that lack means for self-defense</td>
<td>• Most important point: USMC systems will have the range to create major operational-level problems for Chinese naval forces</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“Seeking ground truth” is an admonition for thorough research among the contending ideas that constitute the defense debate. There always are contending views, and while some strategies (particularly hedging strategies) reconcile them effectively, most will be crafted around a particular argument (ultimately that of the SECNAV, the CNO, or the Marine Corps commandant, or some combination thereof). However, the crafters must research and be familiar with all the arguments concerning the concepts incorporated into the strategy.

In the example above, Force Design 2030 proposes a transformation of the Corps’s force structure and the need for the Marines to act as a “stand-in force” inside an adversary’s weapons-employment zone to provide a more potent deterrent. Is it the correct recipe for the future? To serve the commandant well, his crafters of strategy need to perform the due diligence of tracing out contending arguments and determining both what should shape the strategy and what intellectual opposition the strategy will encounter.

In a democracy, defense strategy is subject to debate; it is part of the political dialogue of the nation. Crafters of strategy must be aware that what they write will become a part of this dialogue. This is not so they can attempt to avoid it, but so they can advise their principal of what he should expect in the debate. If the strategy cannot be defended effectively by logic and explanation in the public arena, it will not be an effective strategy.

Observation 41

41. Account for risk.

- “Ultimately, Chinese and North Korean leaders were willing to risk more to change the status quo than Americans have been comfortable risking to preserve it. Over the past decade, this has frequently emboldened China and North Korea while creating a more risk-averse U.S. strategy that stood at odds with the resolve of U.S. rhetoric.” (Lindsey Ford)

- “Although the risk of nuclear war between the United States and Russia may not appear to be as much of a threat as it was during the Cold War, it is still a looming possibility. As a matter of doctrine, Russia has articulated its willingness to use nuclear weapons in response to anything it deems to be an existential threat.” (RAND Study)

“The military approach to strategy exploits risk, rather than setting out to minimize it.”

Hew Strachan

For military and naval assessments, the term *risk* is used in the following different ways:

- as a synonym for a threat itself;
- as a description that identifies chance of harm or injury from a threat;
- as an expression of the mathematical result of frequency of occurrence multiplied by consequence; and
- as an expression of whether forces can accomplish assigned missions—in other words, risk as a result of operations.

All these forms generate the famous “friction” of the unpredicted. In crafting strategy, there never will be sufficient resources or predictability to eliminate risk completely, so one must analyze the strategic environment properly and make informed decisions that both mitigate and accept appropriate degrees of risk. Unfortunately, there is no ready formula.

Risks must be listed in a context of realism, along with the means to address them. Risk to the Navy can be categorized within four dimensions: operational, force management, institutional, and future challenges.

- **Operational risk** deals with the short-term challenges facing the Navy, as well as our ability to succeed in the current fight, including preparedness for contingencies in the near term.
- **Force-management risk** deals with ensuring that the Navy is efficiently and effectively organized, manned, equipped, trained, and sustained to provide trained and ready forces to the force commanders.
- **Institutional risk** addresses the generating force’s ability to support the Navy’s operating force.
- **Future-challenges risk** deals with the Navy’s ability to address longer-term threats.

The Navy mitigates exposure to risk by ensuring that the right capabilities and sufficient capacity are balanced and available within acceptable bounds of risk to respond effectively and efficiently to challenges.

Col. Mackubin T. Owens, USMC (Ret.), notes the following:

> A good strategy also seeks to minimize risk by, to the extent possible, avoiding mismatches between strategy and related factors. For instance, strategy must be appropriate to the ends as established by policy. Strategy also requires the appropriate tactical instrument to implement it. Finally, the forces required to implement a strategy must be funded, or else it must be revised. If the risk generated by such policy/strategy, strategy/force, and force/budget mismatches cannot be managed, the variables must be brought into better alignment.39
Observation 42

42. Assess your strategy against these criteria.

Your strategy must be:

- Acceptable
- Feasible
- Suitable to the circumstances
- Sustainable, in terms of:
  - Resources
  - The common will of the members of an organization or the people of a nation to see it through
- Adaptable to changing circumstances

How can one grade a strategy document on its probable effectiveness? As with everything involved in the crafting of strategy, there are no hard-and-fast answers. However, one can evaluate the product in terms of (1) acceptability, (2) feasibility, (3) suitability to the circumstances, (4) sustainability, and (5) adaptability.

- **Acceptability** to the leadership is obvious; if—in terms of naval strategy—the product is not acceptable to the CNO, it is going nowhere.

- **Feasibility** requires an assessment of whether the Navy has or (probably) will have the resources to carry out the strategy. A strategy can be aspirational in the sense that it can be used as an argument for more resources; however, it must be adaptable enough to be implemented with a reasonable probability of success—not with no or even low risk, but with justifiable risk.

- **Suitability to circumstances** refers to the product’s conformity to national objectives. A strategy that postulates a threat that the political leadership does not recognize will be controversial, to say the least.

- **Sustainability** refers to more than supporting resources; it also encompasses whether personnel can carry out the product’s implications over the long term. A strategy that postulates substitution of autonomous systems for human control cannot be carried out if there is insufficient funding for such systems at the same time that manpower is being cut. The U.S. Navy has had previous experience with not having...
enough personnel to operate complex systems that optimistically were assumed to be “lower maintenance.” Without an honest and rigorous examination, it is possible to assume that a strategy will be easier to implement than reality dictates.

- The apocryphal quote by Field Marshal von Moltke cited in the introduction—that “no plan survives contact with the enemy”—can be translated as saying that no strategy can survive a changing security environment if adaptability is not built into its design.

Observation 43

**43. In conclusion: Avoid strategy malpractice!**

Remember:

- All strategies are political documents
- Everyone is a strategist; not all value strategy
- Senior leaders have little time to devote, yielding insufficient focus on strategy
- The staffing process dulls all Navy strategies
- Resources are scarce
- Stating goals does not make a strategy
- Implementation is part of the process
- Separate your ego from the product

With one exception, observation 43 is a collecting together of points made previously, restated as a guideline on what easily contributes to failure in the crafting of strategy. Number 43 is, in fact, the most significant observation of all in distinguishing successful efforts from failed attempts. In my experience, these are not mere suggestions; rather, failure to recognize any one of the above truths will damage fatally any effort to develop a strategy. Of course, recognition of the reality of these dangers is not enough; the crafters of strategy always must have a plan to mitigate the dangers or otherwise use and benefit from that reality.
The one point not previously discussed is the separation of the crafters’ egos from the product crafted. It is easy for writers to fall in love with their own words, for those with insight to become enamored of their own ideas, and for intermediate reviewers to be committed to their edits. Yet the final document—which will reflect the decisions of the issuing authority (the CNO)—may appear vastly different from previous versions. In such a process, pride of authorship becomes a burden, particularly when submitted drafts are returned repeatedly for additional editing. Crafting strategy is not about the strategists or their intervening chain of command; it is about the product.

This truly is hard stuff.

Observation 44

44. A truly final observation:
As an institution, the Navy places too much emphasis on reading management books . . .
“Ultimately, a real understanding of history means that we face nothing new under the sun.”

“The problem with being too busy to read is that you learn by experience (or by your men’s experience), i.e., the hard way. By reading, you learn through others’ experiences, generally a better way to do business, especially in our line of work where the consequences of incompetence are so final for young men.”

“Thanks to my reading, I have never been caught flat-footed by any situation, never at a loss for how any problem has been addressed (successfully or unsuccessfully) before. It doesn’t give me all the answers, but it lights what is often a dark path ahead.”

“Going into Iraq, The Siege . . . was [required] reading for field-grade officers. I also had Slim’s book; reviewed T. E. Lawrence’s Seven Pillars of Wisdom; a good book about the life of Gertrude Bell . . .; and From Beirut to Jerusalem. I also went deeply into Liddell Hart’s book on Sherman, and Fuller’s book on Alexander the Great.”

Gen. James Mattis, USMC

Former SECDEF Mattis is not one to avoid controversy. He also is admired widely as a deep thinker who has examined war strategically, operationally, and tactically. Operations he commanded as a general in the U.S. Marine Corps always met their objectives. This he consistently attributes to his reading of history. Through doing so he has learned of others’ mistakes and has pondered how to avoid them. History always entails an examination of past strategies; it also is the basis for the future events that will result. Actions that happen in the future will become history as they unfold.

The problem with the vast majority of books on management is that, in describing the management theories that their authors endorse, they pay insufficient attention to long-term history. They usually focus on recent business successes—often featuring businesses that eventually fail; Enron, Kmart, and Lehman Brothers are but three examples. The books do this instead of examining strategies that succeed over the long term, since doing the latter is not perceived as novel, dramatic, or transformational enough. Many such books at the time of publication espouse management theories that have not been applied yet and whose predicted results cannot be verified. Some exhort rapid adaptability toward changing opportunities—businesses jamming like jazz musicians—rather than adopting firm strategies, with their inconvenient “traditional restraints.” However, taking such risks with financial capital does not compare to taking risks with the lives of servicemembers or the security of the nation.
In my view, it is imperative for crafters of strategy to make themselves knowledgeable through the continuous reading of history, particularly military history, as well as of the development of strategy itself. Toward that end, we conclude this volume with an annotated bibliography of sources most useful to those who accept the challenge of crafting naval strategy.

Notes


10. Owens, "On Strategy and Strategic Planning."


20. An admonitory motto associated with the Naval War College Leidos Chair and Institute for Future Warfare Studies is "The future is history continued."


24. Pietersen, "Von Clausewitz on War."


27. Royal College of Defence Studies, Getting Strategy Right (Enough), pp. 20–21.


33. Ibid.


36. Andrew Krepinevich, e-mail to author, February 2016. Emphasis added.


Betts develops “ten critiques that throw the practicability of strategy into question,” among them the difficulty of foresight (there can be no evaluation in advance differentiating “good” from “bad” strategy), the inapplicability of hindsight (since exact situations do not repeat), psychological barriers, difficult organizational processes, and political considerations. His concern is that many “academics do not take seriously the barriers to effective strategy” and do not “learn enough about the processes of decision-making or military operations to grasp how hard it is to implement strategic plans.” He quotes Bernard Brodie that “the question that matters in strategy is: Will the idea work? . . . In that respect it is like other branches of politics and like any of the applied sciences, and not at all like pure science, where the function of theory is to describe, organize, and explain and not to prescribe.”

Betts sees strategy as tying the act of war to political ends. “Strategy is the essential ingredient for making war either politically effective or morally tenable. It is the link between military means and political ends, the scheme for how to make one produce the other. . . . Because strategy is necessary, however, does not mean that it is possible.” He states that “to skeptics, effective strategy is often an illusion because what happens in the gap between policy objectives and war outcomes is too complex and unpredictable to be manipulated to a specified end. When this is true, war cannot be a legitimate instrument of
policy.” Betts identifies himself as a skeptic, but not necessarily to the extent of believing that war cannot be a legitimate instrument of policy. Betts points to correct strategies adopted for the wrong reasons, an example of which he pins on Winston Churchill for deciding that Britain, after the fall of continental Europe to Germany and while Germany and the Soviet Union maintained a treaty, would fight on alone despite no guarantee of American involvement—a strategy that was chosen for reasons “other than strategic logic” (certainly a controversial argument, which he lightens by stating, “Thank God for bad strategy”).

Betts argues effectively on both sides of his ten critiques—one of which is that it is more difficult for democracies—characterized by the ever-present possibility of political change, and in which any strategy becomes a domestic political issue—to develop and maintain consistent, long-term strategies (an assertion that the Cold War seems to have refuted). Another critique is the observation that “there is little demonstrable relationship between strategies and outcomes in war,” and thus strategies can be “good” only in the sense that desirable results are obtained, even when it is by happenstance.

Here Betts touches on the fact that a plethora of means can overcome even the most carefully wrought opposing strategies—a variation of the nineteenth-century misquote that “God is usually on the side of the bigger battalions (or those who shoot best).” Betts’s article is not directly concerned with the practice of crafting strategy, but it is his conclusions—that the means dominate the ends-ways-means connection, and that strategy is more about the tailoring of the objective to the means than about developing the means to achieve the objectives—that are of concern to crafters. “Strategy fails when the chosen means prove insufficient to the ends. This can happen because the wrong means are chosen or because the ends are too ambitious or slippery. Strategy can be salvaged more often if peacetime planning gives as much consideration to limiting the range of ends as to expanding the menu of means.”

Betts is professor of war and peace studies and Director, International Security Policy Program at Columbia University.


Biddle states that her purpose is “to give the student of strategy an anchor point—a foothold that can be used as a foundation for further analysis and primer for work in the practical realm.” Admitting that there is a myriad of
definitions for strategy and that practitioners and scholars need to pick and define their own clearly prior to introducing their work, she maintains “that strategy demands a theory—a proposed causal explanation—that must stand up to rigorous analysis. A theory, in its most basic form, can be expressed as: ‘if x, then y.’ Thus, the strategist must be able to defend the statement, ‘If we use resource X, then we will achieve objective Y’ (‘or at least move in the direction of achieving objective Y’).” Yet “the word ‘then’ carries a heavy burden since it must be able to do a lot of work and bear intense evaluation—and this scrutiny must include, above all, the close examination of one’s assumptions since these serve as the building blocks of the causal relationship linking ends and means. Strategy rests on assumptions; if assumptions go unexamined, then one risks building a strategic edifice on a foundation of sand.” Her concern is that

such scrutiny does not take place, either because no one takes the time for it or because it would question or challenge organizational culture or individual preferences. Too often, the explanatory logic of strategy ends up being little more than an organizational mantra, or a facile assertion about the overwhelming power of a particular military instrument, or the easy opportunity presented by an enemy’s presumed frailties. When faced with an unanticipated crisis, political decisionmakers may grab for the first option that looks even vaguely plausible in order to keep domestic critics at bay—especially those who would charge them with being unresponsive and/or weak.

The author divides strategy between grand strategy (which other countries often refer to as national strategy, or more rarely higher strategy) and theater strategy, which is most exclusively the province of the military commander. This division is followed by a discussion of the hierarchy, with operations and tactics below, and of the “instruments of power—including military, diplomatic, and economic instruments.” She quotes the scholar John Lewis Gaddis—known for his studies of the Cold War—that grand strategy is “the calculated relationship of means to large ends. It’s about how one uses whatever one has to get to wherever it is one wants to go.”

Considerable effort is made to distinguish (theater) strategy from tactics. The monograph notes that “[t]heater strategy and grand strategy form the backbone of the curriculum at senior staff colleges inside the U.S. military’s professional military education system, where practitioners study the many elements shaping the highest level of their art. Faculty members at these colleges understand and use the word ‘strategy’ in roughly similar ways. They perceive its central idea as the intelligent identification, utilization, and coordination of resources (ways and means) for the successful attainment of a specific
objective (end).” However, Biddle admits that the simplicity of this ends-ways-means formulation is deceptive, since

[b]arriers to creating a straightforward linkage between ends, ways, and means are not only very real, but also multifaceted and persistent. This fact poses challenges for the way that strategy and grand strategy are taught in an academic setting. A framework that uses “ends, ways, and means” is not a bad way to enter into a discussion of strategy since it gives students a chance to gain initial traction as they begin their analysis. However, it is not enough . . . [and] the teaching of strategy in the professional military education system has been criticized on the ground that it fails to capture the complexities . . . in the real world.

Unfortunately, the monograph does not quite articulate a solution to this challenge beyond quoting a RAND study that “[c]ivilian policymakers require an active dialogue with the military and other sources of information to inform the diagnosis of the situation, as well as to develop realistic policy objectives” and advising—owing to concern for proper civil-military relations—that “officers must acquire political acumen without political assertiveness. They must understand the political environment they work in well enough to be effective while resisting any temptation toward political meddling.” The author does not clarify whether resisting “political meddling” includes passionately speaking truth to power when the grand strategy cannot be achieved given existing resources, or can be achieved only at high risk. Recommended tools to provide civilian-military collaboration in crafting strategy include the examination of historical case studies, red teaming, and tabletop exercises. Yet, given political considerations (both international and domestic), “military planners must abandon the belief that they will always be able to build a strategy that is designed or tailored to meet a well-articulated political objective. . . . [It is better to] recognize the realities than to base their expectations on an idealized form of the process that exists only in the antiseptic environment of the classroom,” although they still should “seek clarity and specific goals.” Given the all-volunteer nature of American military service, Biddle expresses concern that civilian political leaders do not have enough knowledge of military matters to recognize the “bluntness of the military instrument,” its limitation by logistics, and that a successful military operation cannot guarantee “winning the peace” (a phrase from Sir Basil Liddell Hart).

Examining whether there are “options”—alternatives to the difficult struggle of crafting strategy—“that may be valid for some actors under certain circumstances,” Biddle cites Australian scholar Peter Layton as identifying opportunism (“an option for actors who may not have the resources to shape outcomes, but instead may wish to grasp and exploit the breaks that come their way”) and
risk management. However, the monograph’s distinction between strategy and risk management remains unconvincing.

The author’s best depiction of effective strategies consists of those that can bring “triumphs out of setbacks.” Advising that the crafting of strategy requires a detailed knowledge of history, honest interaction with civilian officials, patience, empathy, good judgment, challenging of assumptions, and moral courage, Biddle’s paramount observation is that the most important quality of the strategist is the ability to “ask the right questions at the right time.”

Biddle is professor of history and national security at the U.S. Army War College.


This “wheel book” anthologizes a selection of articles and book chapters from U.S. Naval Institute publications that the editor considers to be the most significant or lasting, starting with the works of Sir Julian Corbett (early 1900s) but emphasizing more-recent writings. In this, Cutler combines selections of “successful” or impactful concepts with recommendations on how to craft strategy. In the latter category are notable contributions by Peter Swartz and John Byron, Frank Hoffman, and James Stavridis. Also included are the concepts of such naval-strategy stalwarts as Samuel Huntington, Stansfield Turner, J. C. Wylie, and Norman Friedman.

Beyond the direct recommendations represented by the Swartz and Byron, Hoffman, and Stavridis inclusions, this volume can provide a “sense of inspiration” to the crafters of strategy, in that ideas (strategic visions) matter, and particularly innovative ones tend to linger.

Cutler is a retired USN officer, naval historian, author, former U.S. Naval Academy professor and Naval War College fleet professor, and currently Gordon England Chair of Professional Naval Literature at the U.S. Naval Institute.


The Economist calls this book “magisterial,” a very apt description. Freedman addresses the use of strategy from depictions in the Bible through nuclear strategy to the revolution in military affairs, dividing the concept into strategies of force (classical military usage), strategy from below (the long-term strategies to power of political movements such as Marxism), and strategies from above (management strategies of business elites). Along the way, he tackles (from a scholarly viewpoint) such unique niches as
“the strategy of Satan,” then concludes with a discussion of the limits to rational-choice theory as the controlling element of strategy. At 751 pages, the sheer size of the book may seem intimidating; however, although it takes an academic approach, it is written for a more general reader and with an underlying sense of good humor (who else would quote boxer Mike Tyson on planning?).

As noted in this Black Book, Freedman insists that the difference between strategies and plans lies in the fact that a strategy needs to address active opposition to its objectives—hence its military roots.

Freedman’s influence stems from his previous writings on nuclear strategy; the academic positions he has held; and the official United Kingdom (U.K.) military histories he has supervised, such as that on the Falkland Islands War. Freedman is Emeritus Professor of War Studies at King’s College London.


Professor Colin Gray published extensively—possibly more than any other individual—on a variety of strategies and concepts, particularly in the nuclear and maritime realms. This article is a short summary of ideas discussed in his book The Strategy Bridge: Theory for Practice (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2010), which revolve around the argument that “strategy is neither policy nor armed combat; rather it is the bridge between them.”

Gray observes that “true strategy must be practical,” giving two examples where strategists applied “incorrectly framed questions because guesses about the future were not correct”: Nazi Germany’s Operation Barbarossa invasion of Soviet Russia and the U.S. involvement in Vietnam.

Strategists need to recall Clausewitz’s dictum that there is a “‘culminating point of victory,’ beyond which lies a decline in relative strength” and determine where this culminating point is located. The key is to design the strategy with the actions of the opponent included as a major consideration.

Additionally, “three reasons why it is difficult to do strategy well” are “its very nature, which endures through time and in all contexts”; “the multiplicity and sheer variety of sources of friction”; and the fact that “it is planned for contexts that literally have not occurred and might not occur.”

Gray’s fear for U.S. strategies is the American tendency to seek “mechanical panaceas” to victory and to include such in our strategic designs. This tendency he associates with Adm. William A. Owens, USN, former Vice Chairman
The value of this article for the crafting of strategy is in two warnings: (1) basing any strategic design on mechanical panaceas invites failure in application, and (2) strategy must account for opposition—not just from potential military opponents but from critics, the media, armed services competing for resources, and alternative concepts.

The author of over twenty-five books on national-security issues, Gray (a dual U.S. and U.K. citizen) taught at numerous universities and was a fellow at several think tanks before founding the National Institute for Public Policy in Fairfax, Virginia. He served on the Reagan administration’s General Advisory Committee on Arms Control and Disarmament. He died in 2020.


This primer is designed to provide “National War College (NWC) students with a common point of departure for consideration of national security strategy” by drawing “substantially from current joint and Service-specific doctrine as well as extant Department of Defense procedures and policy guidance.” Although it is recommended as a tool for interagency efforts at crafting strategy, the editors note that the document “is neither official policy nor doctrine. It is the product of a collaborative effort by members of the NWC faculty, staff, and student body.”

While admitting that the “strategist always operates in an atmosphere of widespread uncertainty and ambiguity,” the primer uses the ends-ways-means method of assessing strategy, identifying the following “five . . . fundamental elements of strategic logic”:

1. “[A]nalyzing the strategic situation (the challenge and its context)”
2. Identifying desired ends—“the overarching political aim” and “specific objectives required to achieve it”
3. “[I]dentifying and/or developing the means (resource and capabilities)”
4. “[D]esigning the ways to use the means to achieve the desired ends”
5. “[A]ssessing the costs/risks associated with the strategy”

Stating approvingly that the Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986 rationalized the crafting of U.S. strategy by requiring an annual National Security Strategy
as a capstone document from which all defense strategies flow, one of the editors maintains that “[t]he hierarchical nature of strategy facilitates span of control. It represents a logical means of delegating responsibility and authority among senior leadership. It also suggests that if strategy consists of objectives, concepts, and resources each should be appropriate to the level of strategy and consistent with one another.” Not mentioned, however, are the facts that NSSs also are written with domestic politics in mind and that administrations have issued them infrequently rather than annually. The primer associates the “success” of the NSS with the continuity of overarching U.S. strategy during the Cold War (which Goldwater-Nichols largely postdates) and with President Clinton’s “engagement and enlargement” strategy (which some now criticize as leading to renewed hostility with Russia).

In any event, the primer emphasizes a rigid hierarchy to be applied to the crafting of strategy. A problem with the hierarchic approach that the book understresses, however, is that a misapprehension in the capstone document can lead to a cascade of such in the subordinate documents. In describing the method of “analyzing the strategic situation,” the primer stresses the need for identifying the underlying assumptions of any strategy. It urges the drafting of a definitive problem statement in the following format: “situation threatens or presents an opportunity for interests because.” In drafting such a problem statement, the primer advises that “[w]hile the problem statement should be as fact-based as possible, because it is based at least partially on assumption, it is fundamentally the strategist’s contextual hypothesis. Even relatively minor differences in this hypothesis can drive substantial differences in the resultant strategy.” Obviously, this is a significant reason to identify the opening assumptions. This section includes a discussion of the differences among interests, threats, and opportunities, as well as effects of cognitive bias.

The primer’s following section on “defining the desired ends” is so short as to be inconsequential, perhaps under the assumption that such objectives would be defined well in the NSS. It very briefly recommends that an objective should be stated “briefly” (presumably making it clear), since “verbose objectives open the door to misperceptions and diversions.” The primer’s segment on “identifying and/or developing the means” is the longest chapter, plodding its way through course-text descriptions of the elements of power, institutions and actors, and instruments of power. Elements of power are defined by what frequently are called national characteristics, such as natural resources, geography, human capital, and national will. (Alfred Thayer Mahan’s writings
stress such characteristics.) In contrast, instruments of power are actions, such as the use of diplomacy, threats of the use of force, and economic assistance. The chapter on “designing the ways” specifies nine “fundamental strategic approaches” (observe, accommodate, shape, persuade, enable, induce, coerce, subdue, eradicate), which it juxtaposes with alternative “modes of action,” such as overt versus covert and direct versus indirect. The chapter on assessing risks is largely exhortation rather than practical recommendations, although “red teaming” is considered “essential” and strategists are advised to ignore sunk costs in evaluating whether a strategy with disappointing results should be continued. The primer’s appendix A provides the steps and concerns provided throughout in the form of a useful checklist.

The primer’s importance is that it accurately reflects—or perhaps frames—the manner of crafting strategy as currently practiced in the Joint Staff, much of which is formularized.

At the time of writing, the authors served as professors at the U.S. National War College.

Heuser, Beatrice. The Evolution of Strategy: Thinking War from Antiquity to the Present. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2010. Heuser confines her book to strategies of war, approaching the subject through the writings of influential strategists throughout history—reflecting what she calls “the evolution of the literature on strategy.” Tracing this literature from antiquity to the “return of small wars” in the first decade of the twenty-first century, she focuses on the concepts that emerge to influence leaders, such as mobilization, conscription, just war, total war, cult of the offensive, and limited wars. Amid this voyage, she introduces the reader to little-known (or, for most readers, unknown) writers on strategy, such as Christine de Pisan (of late Middle Ages France), perhaps the first woman to write extensively on the art of war. These are the people who “crafted strategy,” as opposed to those who applied it.

Heuser identifies strategies of “war taken to its absurd extreme,” such as strategic nuclear war fighting or the belief that high technology can hold wars to zero casualties. Like Freedman, she is concerned about the “frailty of human logic,” a reality that few strategies acknowledge or can overcome.

Heuser’s influence stems from her previous work in editing (and sometimes translating) the writings of little-known crafters of strategy for the modern reader and on nuclear issues in NATO and European nations, and from her
teaching appointments. She holds the chair of international history at the School of Politics and International Relations, University of Reading (U.K.).


Hoffman admits that as “a common shorthand” the ends-ways-means construct does capture “the basic building blocks and underscores the necessity of tying together the main components of a strategy in a holistic or coherent manner.” Therefore, “[m]ost [professional military education] schools teach a general and linear process model.” However, “[i]t is simplistic and formulaic, if one reduces it to an equation or mindlessly uses it as a recipe.”

To overcome this, Hoffman recommends that the crafter of strategy approach the work as “an untested hypothesis that promises to attain policy ends.” The untested hypothesis also can be understood as a “theory of victory” or “theory of success.” He quotes Jeffrey Meiser, a professor at the University of Portland (Oregon) as follows: “[D]efining strategy as a theory of success encourages creative thinking while keeping the strategist rooted in the process of causal analysis; it brings assumptions to light and forces strategists to clarify exactly how they plan to cause the desired end state to occur.” He also quotes Colin Gray that “[t]he military planner is, ipso facto, a theorist. A plan is a theory specifying how a particular goal might be secured[—]a theory of success.”

Hoffman briefly discusses several cases of applying theories of success. In the case of Afghanistan, he questions whether the theory of victory was too narrow and whether changes in conditions required and should have led to a dramatic change in strategy. In the case of the second war in Iraq, the theory was too broad for the resources allocated.

Hoffman maintains that a theory of success consists of much more than answering the now famous question, “Tell me how this ends?” He also adapts the National Defense University’s list of “causal mechanisms” (as outlined in Heffington et al. in the entry above) as mechanisms to convert a general guiding (or “big”) idea into objectives and actionable tasks.” He then broadens and expands the five assessment criteria for analyzing strategy provided by Heffington in the form of a table.

The bottom line of the article is that a concept of a theory of success should be the central idea of any strategy.
Hoffman is Distinguished Research Fellow of the Institute for National Strategic Studies, National Defense University, and a prolific writer on strategy and defense issues, with experience in the crafting of strategy within the U.S. Marine Corps and the Department of Defense overall.


Published at a time when the purpose of naval forces was being called into question owing to the focus of political decision makers on nuclear weapons delivered by land-based aviation, Huntington’s article points to the development of an enduring “strategic concept” as a method by which the Department of the Navy could (re)define itself. Huntington describes a strategic concept as “basically . . . a description of how, when, and where the military service expects to protect the nation against some threat to its security.” The alternative is that “if a service does not possess such a concept, it becomes purposeless, it wallows amid a variety of conflicting and confusing goals, and it suffers both physical and moral degeneration.”

This suggests a sociological role for the crafting of a service strategy that goes beyond a rigid ends-ways-means approach or hierarchic adherence to a top-down statement of the problem. To Huntington, the problem of crafting strategy is also a search for the enduring—a strategic vision that is adaptable to the “changing character of war” to which others allude. This is necessary not only for directing practical actions but because “the resources which a service is able to obtain in a democratic society are a function of the public support of that service. . . . [Thus] the service has the responsibility to develop this necessary support, and it can only do this if it possesses a strategic concept which clearly formulates its relationship to the national security.” A goal of such a strategic concept is to help generate the “means” to be applied—which is appropriate for the services’ Title 10 responsibilities, though not in sync with the planning methodologies of today’s combatant commands, which rely on the means the services provide.

The majority of Huntington’s article is taken up with an assessment of the situation the U.S. Navy faced in the mid-1950s and his urging of it to conceive of itself as “transoceanic” (i.e., focusing on achieving effects on land via its effects on and from the sea—a more direct role in relation to U.S. political objectives than others might perceive). The value of the article is captured in Huntington’s summary of the interlaced need for a strategic concept: “In summary, then, a military service may be viewed as consisting of a strategic concept which defines the role of the service in national policy, public support
which furnishes it with the resources to perform this role, and organizational structure which groups the resources so as to implement most effectively the strategic concept.”

Samuel P. Huntington (1927–2008) was University Professor at Harvard and former chairman of the Harvard Academy for International and Area Studies. He authored and edited more than a dozen books, of which The Soldier and the State (1957) defined the modern study of military sociology and Clash of Civilizations (1999) was the most controversial. The article discussed here is anthologized in the Cutler book listed earlier.


Owens describes strategy as “a dialogue between policy and national power.” “Real strategy must take account of such factors as technology, the availability of resources, and geopolitical realities. This last factor is critical, although in a globalized world we sometimes forget that strategy is developed and implemented in real time and space.” Owens fears that “[i]n the absence of a coherent strategy, nonstrategic factors, such as bureaucratic and organizational imperatives, will fill the void to the detriment of national security.”

After a light discussion of the history of strategy and its difference from policy and a lengthier discussion of the “levels of strategy,” the article emphasizes the responsibility of the crafters of a strategy to keep it updated in the face of changing conditions. (Sometimes they need to prompt decision makers to accept this.) “The strategy of a state is not self-correcting. If conditions change, policy makers must be able to discern these changes and modify the strategy and strategic goals accordingly.” The article combines discussion of this need for changes with the immutabilities of geopolitics, one of the latter being the “tyranny of distance.”

[The geographic position of the United States and its status as the dominant world power requires that it be able to overcome the “tyranny of distance” in order to project sufficient troops for necessary influence into a potentially hostile environment. To do so, U.S. forces must surmount such operational challenges as countering an adversary’s asymmetrical antiaccess strategy; defending its space assets, bases, ships, or even the continental United States from attack; and operating in urban terrain. Part of thinking about operational challenges is making educated guesses about the types of military competition that may take place in the future.

To this is added a tyranny of limited resources, the availability of which often wanes and waxes. The author uses U.S. strategy during the Cold War (in which the Maritime Strategy played a considerable part, as concerned naval forces) as
his most prominent example, not simply because of its apparent eventual success, but because the U.S. Navy adapted to changes in fiscal resources without losing its overall focus.

While the U.S. policy to contain the Soviet Union remained essentially constant during the Cold War, certain factors changed. Accordingly, it is possible to identify three distinct strategic periods during the Cold War, all of which had operational and force-structure implications. Similarly, the post–World War II strategic concept of the United States Navy demonstrates a remarkable continuity from its origins in the late 1940s until 1989, emphasizing forward, offensive action to secure sea control and to project power against the Soviets. The main variables during the Cold War were available resources and technology. Thus, “during periods of budgetary constraint or when the international climate was unfavorable to the application of the preferred strategic concept,” the Navy’s leadership was forced to modify the particulars of its strategy by curtailing its offensive orientation.

When resources became available, the Navy could shift greater resources toward the operational offensive while maintaining defense in depth.

This corresponds to the long-held perception that “weaker” navies need to optimize their systems for sea denial, shifting to a sea-control orientation only if and when their resources can compare favorably with those of the previously larger navies. Owens argues that the major point of strategy (once combined with policy and operational concepts) should be directing resource and investment decisions—a process he admits is “idealized.” Other critics argue that such focused direction rarely happens.

To the crafting of strategy the author adds the factor of strategic culture, bearing similarity to Huntington’s strategic concept. In defining strategic culture he cites Carnes Lord as follows: “Strategic culture constitutes the traditional practices and habits of thought by which military force is organized and employed by a society in the service of its political goals.” Strategic culture can be a useful tool in maintaining support within the service for an overall strategic vision, even while resources wax and wane. Traditional practices can be both a support and a limit to the crafter, to be “spent” wisely.

The importance of this article is that it does present the crafter of strategy with the “idealized” goals of his or her work, a viewpoint that can be modified as needed by other sources and experiences. (Bruce Stubbs’s depiction of the crafting of strategy is hardly an “idealized view,” even if it has idealistic motives.)

Owens was formerly a professor at the Naval War College and editor of the lapsed journal Strategic Review, and now is editor of the journal Orbis.

Simon Reich and Peter Dombrowski argue that military personnel are problem solvers who focus with effect on immediate challenges and remain wary, or at least skeptical, about the formulation of grand strategy. At the same time, recent presidential administrations have failed to articulate clearly the limits or end states of their “grand strategies,” the result being “that the link between values and ‘ways, means, and ends’ defies the deductive formulations about grand strategies debated by academics and formulated by policymakers.” The result has been a failure to achieve strategic goals, despite the application of increasing (albeit incremental) amounts of military power.

As their case study, the authors examine U.S. maritime activities and policies since 1991, including maintaining primacy in the Persian Gulf, promoting a follow-the-leader strategy on the high seas (the *Cooperative Strategy/ thousand-ship-navy* approach), building partner capacity, enforcing the Proliferation Security Initiative, policing drug trafficking, and ensuring Arctic navigation (with a mix of enthusiasm, reluctance, isolationism, and results). The efforts and results do not add up to a unitary grand strategy, nor are they directed in a truly coordinated, overarching manner. The authors themselves “look back nostalgically at American grand strategy during the Cold War, but its reputed coherence has been replaced by a new series of [academic] challenges.”

Their conclusion is that one specific approach cannot be applied, but that administrations need to choose policies from across a spectrum that stretches from global primacy to restraint and isolationism, which effectively describes “what America’s military actually does, day to day. They argue that a series of fundamental recent changes in the global system, the inevitable jostling of bureaucratic politics, and the practical limitations of field operations combine to ensure that each presidential administration inevitably resorts to a variety of strategies” (publisher’s description). In short, “the attempt to impose a single overarching blueprint is no longer feasible.”

Of interest to crafters of strategy are the questions (1) whether a naval strategic vision can and should follow slavishly documents that are intended to present policies as a “grand strategy,” or instead focus on practicalities that enhance national security, and (2) whether Navy strategy should reflect a unitary narrative or provide an overall progression toward the solving of current political-military issues.

Published in an odd collection for its particular topic (as the author admits), Rosenberg’s chapter examines the Navy’s institutional process of service strategy development (rather than the actual crafting of particular strategies) during the Cold War in general, and especially during the 1970s and ’80s Maritime Strategy period. Among the influential elements examined, the author particularly emphasizes two factors: the priorities of the Navy’s leadership and the influence of intelligence as a contributing factor. Rosenberg’s prime leadership example is Adm. Arleigh A. Burke (Chief of Naval Operations [CNO] 1955–61), who viewed as essential the development of a public strategy allowing the Navy to “make its voice heard in national debates over strategy and missions.” This corresponded with Huntington’s advice concerning the need for a strategic concept to guide future Navy development. Burke also pointed to the difference in opinions on whether strategy should emphasize transformation or long-term continuity. Despite the fact that Burke spearheaded tremendously innovative acquisition programs—for instance, submarine-launched (strategic nuclear) ballistic missiles—he viewed new weapons development as inclusions within ongoing incremental changes in strategy. In the ends-ways-means approach to defining strategy, such innovations changed the means but not necessarily the ways or ends.

Of comfort to crafters faced with an incremental process, Burke stated, “Naval philosophy and maritime strategy are not spectacular. They offer no panaceas. Their success depends upon long, dull hours of hard work in which no one action is clearly decisive by itself. Its final success depends upon a series of small successes.” Translating this into the crafting of strategy suggests that the inclusion of common themes in the many documents in whose preparation naval strategists participate to some degree—from the NSS to the Secretary of the Navy’s Annual Report to Congress—constitutes the small successes on which an overarching strategy can be built.
In the body of his chapter, Rosenberg identifies “seventeen topics for investigation which point the way to the kinds of information we need to understand the modern naval strategy-making process.” His list is directed at scholars attempting to analyze naval strategy in retrospect; however, it also is useful to the crafters of current and future strategy, not as a checklist for inclusion, but as factors of which they need to be aware when assessing the practicality and level of acceptance of their product. The seventeen topics are as follows:

1. The nature of training and education programs, career patterns, and professional specialization

2. The career patterns and operational backgrounds of those in senior leadership positions

3. Procurement costs, capabilities, operating patterns, and sustainment requirements of naval weapon systems

4. Changes in tactical doctrine or naval operational art, or both

5. The administrative structure, operational doctrine, strategic plans, and command-and-control organization of tactical units

6. The sources of intelligence information, including their nature, quality, and frequency

7. The process of intelligence production, analysis, and dissemination

8. The structure, organization, and procedures of naval service-wide strategic planning

9. The structure, organization, and procedures of naval service-wide program and procurement planning

10. The state of research and development in naval technology

11. The state of the nation’s scientific and industrial infrastructure

12. The character and personalities of naval service national leadership

13. The organization and procedures of national strategic military planning

14. The organization and procedures of national program and procurement planning

15. The character and personalities of national defense leadership

16. The character of the national political system as it relates to defense issues

17. The character and status of national financial and economic systems as they relate to national defense
These topics constitute the factors that both frame the effort and influence the results, and they need to be considered from the start.

A scholar and reserve naval intelligence officer, Rosenberg has drafted numerous classified histories of naval decision-making and programs for the Department of the Navy.


As the foreword states, “[t]his booklet is an updated version of an earlier text, *Thinking Strategically*, first produced for use in the College in 2010 . . . focus[ed] in particular on key themes . . . identified in the Chilcot Report, in part in an attempt to respond to the direction from the Secretary of State for Defence that we are to ‘embed the lessons of Chilcot in our DNA.’” (The Chilcot Report, released in 2016, found that British participation in the Iraq War was unjustified and that military planning was “wholly inadequate. . . . Crucially, UK strategies tended to focus on describing the desired end state rather than how it would be reached.”) “The inclusion of ‘enough’ in the title reflects the fact while the perfect strategy is likely to remain elusive, our strategies must be ‘good enough’ to compete successfully with those of our adversaries.”

“[W]ritten to summarise the art and science of strategy-making and implementation in a handy format,” the booklet begins by differentiating strategy from policy and associating the establishment of ends-ways-means with policy. Strategy is described as “finding plausible ways to deliver long-term policy objectives over time, using the resources available (i.e., balancing ‘ends, ways and means’). Like statecraft itself, strategy is inherently competitive.” After discussing grand strategy, military strategy, operations, and tactics, the booklet fixes on “a course of action that integrates ends, ways and means to meet policy objectives” as its definition of strategy.

A “good strategy” is identified by the following characteristics:

1. It is designed to achieve a clearly stated policy goal.
2. It is characterized by clear ownership, at the right level, and is subject to continuous constructive challenge, during both formulation and implementation.
3. It has a central “big idea.”
4. It is easily communicated.
5. It acknowledges uncertainty and expects unforeseen outcomes.
6. It is appropriately resourced.
7. It is based on reality and can adapt as circumstances change.
8. It accounts for all stakeholders.
9. It has continuity of leadership.
10. It recognizes that the opposition has a voice.

“Five simple tests” to evaluate any individual strategy (“[w]hatever approach the strategist adopts”) are recommended:

1. First, it must be acceptable; second, it must be feasible; third, it must be suitable to the circumstances; fourth, it must be sustainable, not only in terms of resources but also in terms of the common will of the members of an organisation or the people of a nation to see it through; and fifth, it must be able to adapt as circumstances on the ground change. It is useful to consider each of these tests individually, noting that they should be applied using a critical thinking approach.

A discussion of the “instruments of power” particularly emphasizes “media and strategic communications” as essential for public dissemination of strategy. “The importance of ‘wrapping’ a strategy in a compelling narrative—the ‘strategic narrative’—and ensuring that it is communicated at every possible opportunity cannot be overestimated.”

To actually craft the strategy, the Royal College suggests an “iterative twelve-step approach—referred to as the ‘strategic assessment’”—and examines “the Cold War policy of deterrence to demonstrate that seemingly disparate approaches can combine to create an effective strategy.” The booklet takes an apparent diversion to discuss the importance and nature of “strategic leadership” for both organizations and individuals—probably as a response to Chilcot Report critiques. It then concludes with three appendices, of which the last, “an approach to the conduct of a strategic assessment for a positional strategy,” applies the twelve-step approach to an example through a series of charts. This is the most practical how-to section of the booklet. The overall accomplishment of the publication is to reflect the British way of developing strategy under current political conditions.


Like most popular business books on strategy, *Good Strategy / Bad Strategy* consists largely of cases and vignettes of recent real-world corporate decision-making used to illustrate particular principles. However, unlike most other authors of such books, Rumelt denounces much of written corporate strategy as equating “Mom-and-apple-pie values, fluffy packages of
buzzwords, motivational slogans, and financial goals with ‘strategy.’” (This quote is from a publisher’s description, not Rumelt.) Strategy requires the making of a choice, and Rumelt’s estimate is that many leaders simply cannot choose, because doing so would mean forgoing other options, provoking disapproval from superiors or subordinates, or possibly being characterized as a failure. The results are inertia and entropy. Yet strategy should be the central task of the leader and serve as a specific and coherent approach to overcoming obstacles to progress.

In using vignettes to describe good strategies, Rumelt includes U.S. defense examples, particularly the approach of Andrew W. Marshall’s Office of Net Assessment in crafting strategy to compete with the Soviet Union during the latter stages of the Cold War. Other cases examined are Apple, General Motors, Walmart, NVIDIA, Silicon Graphics, the Getty Trust, the Los Angeles Unified School District, the 2007–2008 financial crisis, and the two Iraq wars and Afghanistan intervention.

Rumelt uses the term kernel to describe an approach to assessing a challenge, developing a guiding approach to overcoming it, and designing specific actions. The key is to focus on “proximate” objectives—those that can be accomplished in the period foreseen, even if it’s a stretch, rather than shooting for idealized end states that are distant because they remain vague or general. Considerable attention is paid to the “sources of power,” or sources of strategic advantage, particularly in business competition, but these go beyond those listed in other (military) sources (economic, strategic communications, etc.) to include intangibles that define the degree to which a strategy is detailed.

With roughly equal opportunity and resources, the company that has focused its strategy on overcoming obstacles will possess a strategic advantage. A focused approach to strategy includes asking “questions and then questions of those questions” (what others might call challenging assumptions).

As Emeritus Professor of Business and Society at the University of California–Los Angeles and formerly as a professor at Harvard Business School, Rumelt favors a Socratic-type dialogue for overcoming groupthink and other psychological barriers. Eschewing academic language, the book is a fast read, was a best seller in its first year of publication, and remains influential.

Strachan, Hew. “The Lost Meaning of Strategy.” Survival 47, no. 3 (2005), pp. 33–54. Strachan effectively argues that the term strategy has lost its meaning, since it routinely is used as a synonym for policy. From the period of Clausewitz and his contemporaries to approximately the end of the First World War,
strategy referred to “the conduct of war as exercised at the level of military commander.” Given the enormity of the two world wars and a focus by Britain and the United States on a large maritime component to defense, the term grand strategy came into vogue to describe “the coordination of allies in different theatres of war and to mobilise all national resources for the prosecution of war.” Although this elevated the concept of defense strategy to mean the planning conducted by the seniormost political decision makers, not that simply at the level of the military commander, it also allowed the term strategy to be applied to all sorts of nonmilitary endeavors. Strachan concludes that “[s]ince the end of the Cold War the vocabulary of war-making has lost definition, making lesser conflicts seem larger than they are, ‘militarising’ foreign policy and robbing the nation state of an important conceptual tool for adapting military means to political objectives.”

Sir Hew Strachan’s influence stems from the fact that he was Chichele Professor of the History of War at Oxford—considered the top professorial position for a military historian in the United Kingdom—as well as his teaching stints at the University of Glasgow, Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, and University of Saint Andrews.


Similar in format to this Black Book, this CNA document is a briefing-slide-and-text compendium by Capt. Peter M. Swartz, USN (Ret.), one of the drafters of the U.S. Navy’s famed Maritime Strategy of the 1980s. The paper combines his personal experiences with the findings of a larger report/briefing he coauthored entitled *U.S. Navy Capstone Strategies and Concepts: Introduction, Background and Analyses* (CNA MISC D0026421.A1/Final [December 2011], available at www.cna.org/).

Swartz provides recommendations for crafting the Navy’s “declaratory” strategy: “What it says to itself and the world about what it should do and does, and where it is heading.” (This corresponds with Huntington’s strategic concept.) Swartz notes that “[t]he Navy—and any of the Nation’s large military institutions—has many other types of strategies (and policies, visions, etc.). Ideally, they all are aligned with—and indeed derive from—its declaratory strategy.”

Swartz chooses the term capstone documents to refer to “those documents—typically signed by the Chief of Naval Operations—that seek to explain and guide the Navy. They have come in many guises—strategies, visions, concepts,
doctrines, policies, etc.—and under many names.” Observing that his larger study “discusses in some detail the differences and similarities of all these types of capstone documents, as well as the context and development processes,” Swartz notes that there is a need for “‘cuts to the chase’—focusing on recommendations of immediate use to Navy staff officers”—hence his “what to consider before you write one” version.

Following an analysis of the historical elements that required changes to U.S. strategic documents between 1970 and 2009, Swartz identifies rationales for maintaining a capstone strategy: (1) explain the need for the Navy, (2) explain how the Navy meets that need, (3) explain where the Navy is heading, (4) implement specific ideas of naval leadership (and drafters), and (5) “[u]nify Navy elements in a common conceptual framework” and “[b]reak down internal Navy community and platform parochialism,” among others. Swartz identifies impediments to crafting strategy and emphasizes the need for multiple versions of a capstone strategic document (unclassified, classified, etc.), each tailored to a particular intended audience. He also includes an extensive checklist of what should be questioned and considered during the crafting process, and concludes with best practices.

Swartz’s work is the most detailed briefing on the intent of recent Navy/naval capstone documents, with recommendations that accord closely with those of this Black Book.

_During his years on active duty, Capt. Peter Swartz, USN (Ret.), was a key drafter of the 1980s Maritime Strategy. He later spent many years as a scholar-analyst at the Center for Naval Analyses._


The article details a situation in which, absent a public capstone “strategic vision” crafted at the direction of the seniormost naval leaders, a multiplicity of documents vie to define the Navy and its future, confusing both internal and public perceptions of its objectives. The author points to seven primary documentary sources—none of which were (at the time of the article’s publication) clearly endorsed or repudiated _as_ the strategy—that _might_ provide guidance to the Navy’s strategic planning. As a result, those crafting or determining specific Navy policies and doctrine can cherry-pick concepts from the various documents that might suit the preferences of their own individual naval organizations. Simultaneously, it becomes difficult for the Navy to gain public and
congressional support for its future-force-structure plans, since they appear unconnected to a single defining strategy.

This provides an obvious argument for an overarching, public, strategic vision that could provide the guidance to generate an internal unity of purpose, elicit support from the American people, and clarify potential areas of cooperation with allies and partners. Given the myriad “strategies” that individual naval organizations have published to praise their own efforts and rationalize their desires for increased resources, such an overarching strategic vision (signed by the Secretary of the Navy, the CNO, or both) is needed—to use a literary metaphor from J. R. R. Tolkien’s books—as “One Ring to rule them all.”


Signed by the director of Joint Force Development (J7) and describing itself as providing “guidance to develop [strategy], implement strategy, and assess strategy” and examining “how strategy is made, who makes it, what moral criteria guide strategic decisions, and what pitfalls may occur in the making of strategy,” this joint doctrine note (JDN) also states that it is “not authoritative.” “If conflicts arise between the contents of this JDN and the contents of a joint publication (JP), the JP will take precedence for the activities of joint forces unless the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff issues guidance that is more current. This JDN may supplement strategy discussions in JP 1, Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States; JP 3-0, Joint Operations; and JP 5-0, Joint Planning.” These introductory statements immediately raise questions about the exact audience and purpose of the note.

Neither a how-to manual nor a comparative study of alternative methods, the document gives primacy to the ends-ways-means definition of strategy. It maintains that all strategies follow that fundamental logic, to which it adds “risk” and “costs” as elements of assessment.

The executive summary consists of a list of terms that separates grand strategy from military strategy, and includes discussion of such terms as instruments of national power (summarized in the DIME acronym), the nature and character of warfare, and strategic competition. The nature of warfare is viewed as being constant, the character as variable. Strategic competition is described as falling along a spectrum that includes cooperation, competition below armed conflict, and armed conflict.

The note discusses the sequential relationship among the NSS, National Military Strategy (NMS), and combatant command strategies (the latter described
as bridging national strategies and joint operational planning). A direct (and lengthy, in terms of the overall note) discussion of the legal requirement for an NMS is included. Interestingly, it does not mention a Secretary of Defense National Defense Strategy (NDS), despite the fact that the first NDS had been issued prior to the publication of this JDN. Sidebars quoting from Joint Force Quarterly articles and National War College course papers are included, some of which introduce acronyms not in use elsewhere (such as MIDFIELD, for military, informational, diplomatic, financial, intelligence, economic, law, and development). There is no discussion of the individual services being involved in the drafting of strategy, conforming to the view that they should not be.

The note advises that “[n]o strategy is infallible” and posits that, “[g]iven the complexity of designing strategy, it is understandable that some strategists seek ways to simplify the process. There are, however, several traps to recognize and avoid.” The identified traps include “searching for strategic panaceas,” “emphasizing process over product,” “seeking the decisive fait accompli,” “using labels such as limited warfare,” and “mismatching political-military outcomes.” The note concludes with advisory statements such as “strategists must rely on logic if they hope to produce an effective strategy.”

Overall, the JDN does not compare favorably with less-official discussions of strategy (to the extent that they exist), and its hasty preparation is evident in sections that, for example, refer to “the following three questions” but include four questions. Its importance, however, is that it appears to reflect some of the Joint Staff approach to strategy development.


Yarger begins with a succinct definition of strategy: “In simplistic terms, strategy at all levels is the calculation of objectives, concepts, and resources within acceptable bounds of risk to create more favorable outcomes than might otherwise exist by chance or at the hands of others.” As do several other sources, he insists on a distinction between plans and strategies. “Strategy is not planning. . . . [I]t partakes of a different mindset. Planning makes strategy actionable. It relies on a high degree of certainty—a world that is concrete and can be addressed in explicit terms. . . . Planning is essentially linear and deterministic. . . . The planning process is essential to reduce uncertainty at the tactical level. . . . The planning process works because the lower the level, the more limited the scope and complexity, and the shorter the timeline; hence, the number of unknowns is limited and can be compensated for in branches and sequels to create ‘certainty.’” With that in mind, “[g]ood strategy
development requires the military professional to step out of the planning mindset and adopt one more suited for strategic thinking. In the strategic mindset, the professional military strategist embraces the complexity and chaos of the strategic environment and envisions all its continuities and possibilities in seeking to create favorable strategic effects in support of national interests.’’

Yarger ‘‘expound[s] and advocate[s]’’ the U.S. Army War College’s ends-ways-means model. However, he also expresses them as ‘‘objectives (ends)’’; ‘‘strategic concepts (ways)’’ (which differs greatly from the way Huntington originally defined strategic concept); and ‘‘resources (means).’’

The inputs to the strategy process are described: ‘‘From an accurate analysis of the strategic environment, the strategist determines the threats to and opportunities for the advancement or protection of these interests. From policy, the strategist receives the political leadership’s vision, guidance, and priorities of effort in regard to interests. Thus, in constructing a valid strategy, the strategist is bounded by the nature of the strategic environment, the dictates of policy, and the logic of strategy.’’ Yarger emphasizes uncertainty as the key element of the strategic environment, which he captures under the U.S. Army War College acronym VUCA (volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity).

The division of roles is clear between strategists and policy makers: ‘‘The strategist is responsible for mastering the external and internal facets of the strategic environment, adhering to policy or seeking change, and applying the logic of strategy to strategy formulation. He articulates the strategy in the rational model of ends, ways, and means; but leadership remains responsible for the decision to execute the strategy.’’ Nevertheless, ‘‘the strategist must sort through an arena of cognitive dissonance to arrive at the ‘real’ truth. The real truth best serves interests and policy in the long run; the strategist must reject the expedient, near-term solution for the long-term benefit.’’ Yarger has no suggestion regarding what the strategist should do if decision makers reject the ‘‘real truth.’’ (This is where and when the crafters of strategy must use all their marketing skills and persuasiveness.)

Yarger summarizes his perspective in the following fifteen ‘‘assumptions and premises of strategy’’:

1. ‘‘Strategy is proactive and anticipatory but not predictive.’’

2. ‘‘Strategy is subordinate to policy. Political purpose dominates all levels of strategy.’’
3. “Strategy must be consistent with the nature of the strategic environment.”

4. “Strategy maintains a holistic perspective. . . . Strategy reflects a comprehensive knowledge of what else is happening within the strategic environment and the potential first-, second-, and third-order effects of its own choices on the efforts of those above, below, and on the strategist’s own level.”

5. “Strategy creates a security dilemma for the strategist and other actors. Any strategy, once known or implemented, threatens the status quo and creates risk for the equilibrium of the strategic environment.”

6. “Strategy is founded in what is to be accomplished and why it is to be accomplished. Strategy focuses on a preferred end state.”

7. “Strategy is an inherently human enterprise. . . . The role of belief systems and cultural perceptions of all the players is important in the development and execution of strategy.”

8. “Friction is an inherent part of strategy.”

9. “Strategy focuses on root purposes and causes.”

10. “Strategy is hierarchical. Just as strategy is subordinate to policy, lower levels of strategy and planning are subordinate to higher levels of strategy. The hierarchical nature of strategy facilitates span of control.”

11. “Strategy exists in a symbiotic relationship with time. Strategy must be integrated into the stream of history. . . . Small changes at the right time can have large and unexpected consequences. Consequently, an intervention at an early date has greater effect at less cost than a later intervention.”

12. “Strategy is cumulative. Effects in the strategic environment are cumulative.”

13. “Efficiency is subordinate to effectiveness in strategy.”

14. “Strategy provides a proper relationship or balance among the objectives sought, the methods used to pursue the objectives, and the resources available. In formulating a strategy, the ends, ways, and means are part of an integral whole and work synergistically to achieve strategic effect at that level of strategy.”

15. “Risk is inherent to all strategy. Strategy is subordinate to the uncertain nature of the strategic environment. Success is contingent on implementation of an effective strategy—ends, ways, and means that positively interact
with the strategic environment. Failure is the inability to achieve one’s objectives.”

*A retired U.S. Army colonel, at the time of writing Yarger was a professor at the U.S. Army War College.*
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