

1987

The Conceptual Framework for Strategic Development at the Naval War College

Robert S. Wood

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

Recommended Citation

Wood, Robert S. (1987) "The Conceptual Framework for Strategic Development at the Naval War College," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 40 : No. 2 , Article 3.
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol40/iss2/3>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu.

The Conceptual Framework for Strategic Development at the Naval War College

Robert S. Wood

Introduction

Strategy, in its broadest terms, involves more than the threat or application of force. It entails an interlinked set of concepts through which we seek to relate ends to means. It reflects all of those interests, values, assumptions, principles, and guides to action that go under the name of policy. Moreover, it is important to understand that international conflicts of interest are endemic, and we cannot divide time into periods of peace and periods of war. The spectrum of conflict is continuous, and any point on the spectrum requires that we bring to bear the relevant panoply of national capabilities from psychological to economic to cultural to military.

It is also patent that any national strategy must harmonize with the strategic culture of the people it seeks to serve. By strategic culture, I refer to generally shared attitudes in the society concerning the nature and requirements of external security, the conditions of peace, the causes of war, and the utility and restrictions on force. Here I would underline two aspects of the strategic culture that bear directly on U.S. strategy development. One bears upon problems of intelligence and expectations, and the other bears upon problems of implementation.

The first aspect of our strategic culture that I would signal is the tendency to project into the international sphere attitudes derived, first, from our domestic situation and, second, from our peculiar historical security environment. On the domestic side, for over a century our national agenda has focused less on constitutional issues—that is, the structure and limitations of political power—than on bargaining issues, that is, the distribution of benefits within that system. Furthermore, we have pursued our national

Dr. Wood is the Chester W. Nimitz Professor of National Security Affairs at the Naval War College and serves as Dean of the Center for Naval Warfare Studies as well as Special Academic Advisor to the President, Naval War College. This is the text of his statements before the Senate Armed Services Committee on 13 January 1987.

politics in an environment of remarkable prosperity. In the external world, on the contrary, many states are struggling to answer the most fundamental questions of who rules, under what restrictions, and how power is transferred—and this is being played out under conditions of much greater scarcity than we have experienced.

Secondly, our historical external security position has been rare for a great power. One observer stated it well—weak neighbor to the north, weak neighbor to the south. Fish to the east, fish to the west! Most other states have been shaped by different historical imperatives and have thus been more conscious of the tenuousness of their national existence. As a result of our background and experiences, we interpret threats and offer political solutions that at times seem to underestimate the deadliness of many struggles in the world and to overestimate the possibility of political or negotiated settlements.

A second problem in our strategic culture concerns our unwillingness in peacetime to take war seriously enough. Obviously, we spend billions on defense, raise and exercise forces, and devise plans. But the key aspects of war—and perhaps of international conflict generally—are uncertainty, risk, and probabilities. The conditions of deterrence and the requirements of victory are dependent on time, space, and circumstances. A single strategic option, a fixation on one region or theater, and a limited range of options may meet the desire to limit expenditures and to be as nonprovocative as possible. But, if we have a gut feeling that the maintenance of deterrence requires that we pose a range of threats to our enemies and that the flow of conflict is inherently uncertain—if we sense this, then we need to insist on a much broader range of contingency planning, operational options, and military exercises.

To be effective, strategy must not only link, in some general sense, resources to ends, but it must also provide the conceptual basis for developing and exercising a variety of operations or campaign options.

Two major geopolitical facts shape our foreign policy and our strategy. The first is that many of our friends and interests lie on the periphery of a great Eurasian empire, a vast militarized bureaucracy possessing interior lines of communication. The second is that the classic extra-European empires have collapsed since World War II and the globe has fragmented into a large number of states claiming independence and a large number of political movements claiming states. Many of those new states, regimes, and movements are economically underdeveloped, weak in political legitimacy, and insecure on their boundaries—and are often important either in terms of resources, location, population, or power potential. In a generalized sense, these systemic factors have dictated a foreign policy animated by a desire, first, to prevent the U.S.S.R. from converting its superior interior position into direct or indirect domination of its immediate neighbors and, second, to

minimize the threats that an interdependent world of weak regimes and antagonistic movements might present to our interest in a peaceful, interlinked global economy and stable political regimes responsive to the peaceful development of their peoples and resistant to external manipulation by our principal adversary.

Strategically, these interests have been translated into concepts of forward deployment of U.S. forces, coalition defense, extended nuclear deterrence, and flexible response. But, as I have indicated, to be effective, strategy must go considerably beyond these generalized concepts.

A credible deterrent posture and a recognized ability to shape the international environment and, if necessary, to employ force, require an array of operational alternatives and campaign options sensitive to different situations and dynamic change. A powerful forward strategy demands we develop contingency plans that link the entire range of American and Allied Powers, not simply military; further, that we articulate military-political options that allow us to think through possible sequences of actions and reactions in what, in military parlance, one might call theaters of operation. The world will never go according to plan; therefore, we need to test and exercise a variety of alternative plans. This is the essence of readiness.

It is a mistake to confuse the development and testing of various campaign plans with the forward national strategy that they are designed to implement. The ability to remain forward in peacetime and to prevail in wartime requires that we exercise a wide range of operations. So often this is portrayed as preparing for war in some offensive or provocative sense. Thinking and practicing—the unthinkable—the difficult—should be the job of our military commanders and is the most effective assurance of peace and the most certain guarantee that we will not be fixed by one set of assumptions and one set of responses. The strength of deterrence and the key to successful war termination depend on avoiding the unpreparedness of 1941 and the rigidities of 1914.

In developing our national strategy we should avoid tendencies both to see the world in our own image, and to defer serious contingency and campaign planning within and across theaters of operation until the crisis is upon us.

Concept of Strategy

Military strategy at its most basic is a plan of action relating military assets to political objectives. It is a set of interrelated *concepts* about the *employment of force* under specified *circumstances* and for specified *ends*. The adequacy of a strategy thus depends on its ability to guide the acquisition, structuring, and use of force to achieve—in concert with other elements of national power—a state's objectives.

Brilliant strategy may allow a state to defeat an enemy that possesses superior military strength and even shift to a more advantageous theater of combat. It is nonetheless dangerous to underestimate the strategic intellect of one's enemies and to ignore the relative intractability of geopolitical factors.

All strategies are fiscally constrained because resources are always limited relative to a wide variety of demands. But a politically-defined budgetary ceiling that delimits the level of national sacrifice without a clear appreciation of national interests, threats, and international circumstances is defective at the outset.

All of the above are truisms but ones which, as Winston Churchill noted, democracies appear to forget on an alarmingly regular basis. A call for a better articulated national military strategy should never, therefore, be a demand simply to do the same or more with fewer resources. It must include a realistic assessment of our interests, our geopolitical posture and historical role, the nature of enemies and friends alike, and the character of contemporary international politics.

Strategy, then, is a military plan of action designed to achieve policy objectives and to meet the threats and seize the opportunities identified by policy. Ideally, this military plan of action will not only flow from policy but will be consistent with the diplomatic, economic, and other plans of action also designed to serve policy. If military strategy links forces with ends, it must also provide the conceptual basis not only for raising and organizing forces but for developing and exercising a variety of operational or campaign options. Strategy must be executed at a particular time, in a particular place, and under particular circumstances. The translation of strategic concepts into force deployments and employments in time, space, and circumstances constitutes military operations and campaigns. Campaigns are a connected series of military operations to attain the results defined by political judgment and the strategic concept. Campaign plans, in effect, provide the guidance for a battle force commander to reach the strategic objective. As campaign plans are developed and exercised, strategic concepts may in turn be refined or even altered to take into account operational experience. On occasion, even policy presuppositions are modified.

Needless to say, the actual relationship among policy, strategy, and campaign options is never this tidy. Nonetheless, however confused the process, these distinctions are real and a necessary condition for differentiating the hierarchy of containment policy, the national strategy, and specific campaigns and operations. In assessing plans and exercises for military operations anywhere, it is thus helpful to state the political-military assumptions and the strategic concepts underpinning those operations. The basic contours of U.S. policy and strategy, however, are really fairly clear. What is not so clear, and is often confused with our fundamental policy and strategy, is the range of appropriate operational options.

8 Naval War College Review

A large number of U.S. interests and friends cannot be reached by “walking” to them. We must cross vast areas of water and air. Unfortunately for us, those same interests and friends lie on the periphery of the greatest Eurasian empire in history, a vast militarized bureaucracy possessing interior lines of communications. At the same time, there has emerged in the former colonial areas a host of new or renewed states, many economically underdeveloped, weak in political legitimacy, and insecure on their borders. Finally, the United States has acquired a nuclear force capable of delivering a devastating blow to any would-be enemy that might strike directly at the United States.

All of these factors make fairly clear the contours of U.S. policy—and strategy. The objectives are to prevent the U.S.S.R. from converting its superior interior position into direct or indirect domination of its immediate neighbors and to maneuver in a chaotic Third World environment so as to protect one’s material interests and to minimize alignments between states and movements in those areas and our principal adversary. In sum, we are pursuing in modern guise the classic role of a “regulatory state” seeking to construct and maintain the central balance while advancing its interests in a fragmented world. Coalition building, aid and trade programs, arms sales, periodic interventions or punitive strikes, counterbalancing regional adversaries—these policies of containment and power management, while relatively new to the United States, are not without substantial historical antecedents.

The principal military issue associated with this geopolitical posture is how to project military power across the whole spectrum of conflict in a technological and political environment that increases the cost of using military force. And, of course, all of this must be related, on the one hand, to a grand strategy that includes economic, diplomatic and other instruments of national power and, on the other hand, to restraints on the percentage of national resources that we are willing to devote to these international missions.

It is at this point that controversy generally breaks out. Given limited resources, what type of force structure will allow us to sustain our forward strategy from “peacetime” management of power to deterrence, to general war? And, secondly, what sort of operational options should we develop to sustain our interests across a number of regions and conditions? And, yet, if intellectually one has made the trek from our geopolitical posture through our general policy and strategy, we can at least focus the debate and delimit the choices. Unfortunately, we too often talk programs and specific operations without having made the journey. If political and military leaders are to exercise effectively their role in national strategy, it is at this level of *macromanagement* where genuine dialogue can be shaped within the government, and programmatic choices can be framed.

The Naval War College and Strategic Development

The mission of the Naval War College is to lead, through a rigorous course of study, senior officers and federal executives along this intellectual journey—to educate them in matters of military strategy, resource allocation, and combined and joint operations. This includes the theory, strategy, doctrine, planning, coordination, and direction of the military force available to a commander.

There are currently about 400 U.S. and international officers in residence at the College. They are all successful professionals who have proven their ability in the past, and who will be counted on in the future to be the leaders of their profession. This is true not only of our U.S. Navy, Army, Air Force and Marine Corps officers but also of the 61 international officers in residence.

Officers in Residence: 396

USN	45%
USA	17%
USAF	6%
USMC	13%
USCG/Civilian	4%
International	15%

Just as the number of officers attending the College has grown, the faculty has expanded to include officers from all services as well as an impressive group of civilians with solid academic reputations in their respective disciplines. This mix has enhanced the joint framework of the War College education. Every seminar in every subject includes an interchange among all the services represented and their civilian peers. Moreover, there is a close and continuing dialogue between all the War Colleges on matters of common interest.

Faculty Members: 86

USN	34%
Civilian	34%
USA	10%
USAF	10%
USMC/USCG	12%

The Naval War College thus provides a place where officers are afforded an opportunity to live together, to read books, to think independently, to test their views against others in and out of uniform and to participate in disciplined and rigorous inquiries that deepen their knowledge of their profession. The job of the faculty is to direct and focus these officers in their endeavors rather than familiarize them with masses of factual material.

10 Naval War College Review

Strategy and Policy. One of the College's goals is to teach its graduates to think strategically. Their study of strategy and policy examines the relationship between a nation's political interests and goals, on the one hand, and the way military force may be employed to serve those interests and goals on the other. Its application involves a process in which the officer must first create a description of what occurred, then analyze it, compare and contrast it to some fundamental concepts, examine it in relation to other similar and dissimilar experiences, and refine the fundamental ideas with the generalizations which emerge. These are the themes that are the basic underpinnings of our examination of strategy and policy. They are common to all nations that use military force to further political objectives.

Fundamental Themes

- o Military Means and Political Ends
- o Force Coordination and Strategic Execution
- o Non-military Means and Political Objectives
- o Strategic Theories and Military Capacity
- o Military Advice
- o Domestic Factors and Technology
- o Alliances
- o The International Environment

Our goal is to give our officers the mental tools for evaluating current strategy and for formulating new strategies—for understanding what conditions should be satisfied in order to have a national or regional strategy which supports and achieves our nation's political objectives—and for distinguishing good strategy from the kind which is simply a capability in search of a mission.

During their year in Newport, the officers examine several historical case studies as part of their study of strategy and policy. Collectively, these cases and others like them bring into vivid relief the themes previously mentioned. Moreover, the nature of these cases is such that the officers must apply a national as well as an alliance perspective in their analyses. Discussion of these wars enhances their capacity for flexible, dispassionate thinking. Moreover, it also fosters the development of broad-gauged officers who are knowledgeable in the history of their profession and its role in the world, and who understand that the past has a great deal to teach every profession.

Selected Strategy and Policy Cases/Issues

Theory and Prototype:

- o Athens versus Sparta

- o The Second Punic War
- o A Revolutionary Era: Europe 1789-1815
- The Modern Security Environment:
 - o The Age of Nationalism: Europe 1815-1890
 - o Total War: World War I
 - o World War II and Coalition Strategy
- Contemporary Use of Force:
 - o The Cold War and Korea
 - o Modern Revolutionary War: Algeria
 - o Grenada and Lebanon

National Security Decisionmaking. Another major focus of study is joint forces planning. Its objective is to develop and apply a comprehensive framework for planning future forces. Officers integrate the many and sometimes competing variables involved in planning, selecting, and obtaining these forces and their necessary support. As in our other areas of study, the College examines the full spectrum of conflict from strategic nuclear war to terrorism and considers the resulting force implications. Throughout, we approach our planning cases from an integrated joint and allied perspective. We have always considered this comprehensive approach mandatory since our national strategy, with its emphasis on coalition warfighting, requires that we look at both the complementary and competing U.S. and allied perspectives on a worldwide basis and then study specific theaters and potential campaigns to identify combined and joint force requirements, deficiencies, problems and alternatives.

Force Planning

- o Framework for Planning Joint Forces
- o Spectrum of Conflict
- o Joint and Combined
- o Objectives, Strategy, Forces, Threat, Risk
- o Limited Resources
- o National Security Command Structure
- o Case Method

We require that our officers approach force planning in the spirit of recognizing that America's defense effort requires a close relationship between our military strategy and the force structure we select to carry out that strategy. We emphasize that our defense strategy must be anchored firmly in our national security objectives, and our force structure decisions must stem directly from this strategy. The College reinforces the key variables of objectives, strategy, forces, threat and risk. A major

consideration is the proper and explicit selection of objectives to ensure they are not vague, misdirected, overly ambitious, or incomplete.

Our approach is to use extensive current cases to place the officers as closely as possible into the environment of a senior decisionmaker or as a principal staff officer to a senior decisionmaker. As part of this study, officers study all major strategic nuclear force modernization decisions and alternatives from the beginning of this administration to the current strategic defense initiatives. In addition to those displayed, we emphasize the force planning issues in the European theater such as theater nuclear forces, chemical forces, conventional force modernization, and follow-on-forces-attack. We also examine the other theaters to ensure a global perspective, as well as to consider specific regional contingency requirements.

Selected Force Planning Cases/Issues

Force Planning Cases:

- o Strategic Nuclear
- o NATO and Warsaw Pact
- o Contingencies

National Security Command Structure:

- o Grenada/Lebanon/Terrorism
- o Defense Reorganization
- o Command of Special Operations Forces
- o Technology Transfer

Defense Resource Board Simulation:

- o USN and USAF TACAIR
- o Close-Air Support
- o Army Combat Support/Combat Service Support

When studying the national security command structure, we candidly assess its strengths and weaknesses. We have extensively researched and written original cases on our operations in Grenada and Lebanon. We also look realistically at the major alternatives that have been proposed for defense and JCS reorganization. Other cases consider development of a U.S. response to terrorism, command of special operations forces, and development of a technology transfer policy.

Our focus on planning forces concludes with a simulation of the Defense Resources Board's use of selected, actual issues and papers. Officers are placed in either the role of a member of the board or a principal presenter to the board. In addition to those mentioned here, the officers have also considered such issues as the Army POM and the F-16/F-20 competition.

Operations. A third major focus is to prepare senior-level military officers for major command and senior staff assignments. We believe that senior-level professionals will be required to make increasing use of many military disciplines as they deal with joint operational problems and changing circumstances that will confront them in the future. The College employs a multidisciplined approach to warfighting. Officers wrestle with national military strategy and its maritime elements, joint and service doctrines, military decisionmaking, operational planning, the principles of military warfare, threat assessment, and war gaming techniques, among others.

Joint Military Operations

- o The Theater Level of War
- o Military and Maritime Strategies
- o Strategy, Campaign and Joint Operations Linkage
- o Integrating Air, Land and Sea Forces in Joint Ops
- o Elements of Military Decisionmaking
- o Warfighting Capabilities and Limitations
- o War Gaming as a Decisionmaking Tool

The focus is on the theater commanders, their subordinates and their senior staff officers. These are the integrating concepts. We place the officers in situations that force them to consider how the operational commander sees, shapes, fights, and sustains theater level campaigns and battles. The College highlights the commander's problem of organizing and coordinating separate service assets in a campaign. In sum, the College wants its graduates to be able to advise a commander how to organize and employ the total force within a theater to make a strategic difference.

In terms of the operational issues and cases that the College has used, we emphasize capabilities and limitations of forces and types of warfare.

Joint Military Operations Selected Issues/Cases

- o National Military Strategy
- o Maritime Strategy
- o Air-Land Battle
- o Forward Defense
- o Aerospace Doctrine
- o Strategic Mobility
- o Terrorism
- o Space
- o Unified Command Plan
- o War Termination
- o Joint Operational Planning

Cases and war games highlight strategic concepts, joint and service doctrine, sensor and weapon capabilities, and the functions and tasks of today's forces. We use the planning logic of the commander's estimate of the situation—a logic that identifies the alternatives available to one's enemy as a key variable in a military situation. Rules of engagement and limited intelligence are among the considerations that the officers must factor into their operational planning. We require them to make difficult decisions in a timely manner, in the face of uncertainty, in complex, joint operational simulations.

The officers play two major war games. One is a superpower confrontation in which they assume the roles of theater commanders and their principal subordinates. The second game focuses on a crisis within a theater with the officers assuming senior military and civilian roles. They consider how to employ forces under their command to assist the National Command Authority in resolving the crisis favorably. Throughout, we emphasize that the officers must use current forces to solve these operational problems.

Research and Gaming. As a first-rate graduate level institution, the College sponsors an extensive research program which focuses on strategy and campaign development, planning, war gaming and other advanced research.

Each summer the Naval War College conducts the largest and most comprehensive war game in the Western alliance. It is a three-week, multiservice endeavor by hundreds of officers and senior civilian officials; it simulates the course of air, ground and naval warfare in all theaters and conflict in space. It stresses interservice operations, rather than only those in the maritime realm. We believe that the scope of flag and general officer participation attests to this last point.

Global War Game	
Flag and General Officer Participation	
USN	32
USA	13
USAF	20
USMC	18
Additionally:	
2 Career Ambassadors	
4 Royal Navy Flag Officers	

The game's purpose is to gain insights into the nature of a global war between the West and the Soviet Union; insights related to strategy, to objectives and bargaining, to campaigns, to tactics, and to weapons systems.

Global War Game Series

Objectives:

- o Strategic Concepts for Joint/Combined Land/Air/Maritime Campaigns

- o Theater Priorities for Combined Operations
- o Effects of Blue Strategies on Red Decisionmaking
- o Diplomatic Initiatives Supporting National Strategies
- o Logistics
- o The Nuclear Threshold
- o Application of Advanced Technology to Tactics

There has been a sharp learning curve over the course of the games and in each new simulation we build on what we have learned, while not ordering the players to follow any preconceived script. It is an interactive, free-play game in which the Red and Blue military and National Command Authorities may use their conventional and nuclear forces as they wish. The forces and logistics of each side are based on the best available intelligence, while combat results are assessed by an experienced team of umpires using the most modern assessment techniques available.

The issues that arise from the play of the Global Game, as well as other games, are a source of research topics for the officers attending the College as well as the faculty. Last year, two Army research fellows reported aboard for a two-year stint that will extend over three Global War Games. They have already contributed significantly to Army participation in the Global Game. Their job at Newport is to focus on improving cooperation between the Army and Navy in joint combat operations and campaign planning. This program will facilitate long-term interservice continuity in the research program. The Air Force is considering a similar program. It already has an officer assigned to our War Gaming Department.

Other games as well as the scope of the College's Advanced Research Program sustain the joint context of our studies and provide insights to senior commanders and political leaders.

Selected War Games

Project	Sponsor
Blade Parallel	USCINCSOUTH
Drug Interdiction	COMDT, USCG
Live Oak	SACEUR
Inter-American 86	Naval War Colleges of the Americas
JLASS	NWC/AWC/AFWC/NDU
MNC Force Requirements	SACLANT

Advanced Research

Project	Participants
Northern Flank Combined Air Campaign	USN/USAF/USMC
AWACS Support of Maritime Ops	USN/USAF
Fourth Generation Soviet Aircraft	USN/USAF
Special Operations—A Framework for Change	USA
Strategic Airlift Requirements	USAF/USMC

In sum, the Naval War College offers a credible educational program in the higher direction of war. The College believes that its graduates must understand the realities of national power and military force and how best to integrate our Nation's military capabilities to assist in reshaping the strategic environment. While they are grappling with the issue of how to fight smart together today, they gain an appreciation of the value of long-term vision and consistency stemming from national interests and objectives. While War College research and games directly help the national political and military leadership define issues and assess alternatives, the most important product remains the officer-student who will, through the course of his career, apply the analytical rigor and strategic sensitivity gained in Newport.

Some have criticized the American military officer for being more engineering than military minded—a technician rather than a student and practitioner of war. We believe this criticism is unfounded. The very essence and purpose of the College is the same today as when Admiral Luce founded it: that is “to ensure that officers, not their equipment, are the controlling factors in war.”

