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A DIFFERENCE IN PERSPECTIVE

There is an understandable and reasonable difference in viewpoint between military and political leaders. Military leaders prudently consider capabilities—what an enemy can do; while political leaders tend to emphasize intentions—what an enemy might do. Both considerations are valid, but somewhat limited. The standard threat analysis of capabilities and intentions requires expansion to include circumstances: can an enemy get away with what he intends to do? Professor Hartmann's article is excerpted from his forthcoming book The Game of Strategy, to be published late in 1976.

by

Professor Frederick H. Hartmann

The true strength of a prince does not consist so much in his ability to conquer his neighbors as in the difficulty they find in attacking him.

De Montesquieu,
The Spirit of the Laws

Any debate in the United States over defense and foreign policy questions will contain a built-in difference in perspective when viewed from the Pentagon and from the State Department. Military and political leaders normally and quite naturally use a different analytical framework to arrive at conclusions. Before the days of Henry Kissinger and the Nixon Doctrine this difference was far less noticeable. Military and foreign policy perspectives in the United States were much closer together—as is to be expected during wars and threats of wars. If today the gap between these perspectives is widening, it is not the military perspective which

has altered. But the decline in the essentially militarized cold war political perspective dominated by "containment," and the rise of a more "normal" political assessment of political problems have produced a much more noticeable gap in viewpoint. Rumors about a Schlesinger-Kissinger cleavage, current in 1974-1975, reflected this gap. Although personalities, as always, do have importance, such a surface analysis is hardly useful for understanding the real issues in the debate.

The normal (and quite justifiable) military view of national security problems begins with an analysis of what they call the "threat." Any civilian, hearing this term for the first time, may feel it is an overly dramatic term for appraising potential enemies. Since the dictionary defines "threat," among other definitions, as "an indication of probable evil, violence, or loss to come," the military view is not so far out as at first appears. Obviously,

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though, the difficulty in analysis using this approach will turn on how "probable" the particular "violence . . . to come" really is. The military, recognizing this problem, break their standard assessment down into "capability" (can he) and "intention" (will he). Capability analysis follows a traditional and useful analytical path, utilizing what is called in the academic world "the elements of national power." Especially important in this capability analysis, naturally, is the military element: the enemy order of battle as compared to our own, or the enemy alliance order of battle, compared to our own. Once an assessment is made or updated as to what he *could* do, the analysis shifts to whether he *would*. At this point in the analysis the wrench in turning from reasonably hard facts to what may appear almost pure guesswork naturally influences the military man to conclude that if the enemy can, he might, so it is best to be prepared against what he can do, only provided Congress will find the money. Adm. Thomas H. Moorer, former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, has publicly stated his skepticism with "announced or estimated intentions." In short, after a hard look at enemy intentions, the military man focuses on his own order of battle and weapons systems and problems. To his credit (since he knows only too well his own shortcomings in weapon systems or personnel or organization or logistics), he rarely surrenders to despair at this point even though the enemy's setup almost always appears better than his own. As Shakespeare wrote in "Henry V," "In cases of defence, 'tis best to weigh the enemy more mighty than he seems." At this point the military man argues that we need more or better planes, more men, more tanks, more missiles.

Such proposals by the military to spend more for security are natural. We would not really want it otherwise. Indeed, we would be poorly served by

generals and admirals who, on the simple-minded basis that Americans have more fighting spirit or that the Russian man-in-the-street is peaceloving, assume that military inferiority to the Soviet Union is acceptable to the United States. But, having said that, we must still add that the military perspective, as just described, is quite inadequate as the substance of a national security policy. If that is true, we must know why it is true.

Consider how inadequately the military analysis of the threat typically deals with enemy "intention." After all, how should an American general or admiral guess what goes on in the heads of the decisionmakers in the Kremlin? The American officer either assumes rationality or irrationality. If he assumes Kremlin rationality, he normally assumes that the Kremlin will compare the rival orders of battle and decide whether to "press the button" on that basis. (This kind of thinking results in the familiar appraisals of whether the Soviets have or are attempting to achieve a "first-strike" capability.) If he assumes Kremlin irrationality, he normally assumes that it is safest, since we cannot be sure of anything deterring their attack, that we have sufficient superiority to frustrate or defeat that attack. So whether the American general or admiral assumes Kremlin rationality or irrationality, his attention soon is fixed on our own order of battle again—to keep it at least equal.

The weakness in this typical approach is that enemy intentions do not derive solely or even primarily from their assessment of our order of battle. If the United States had experience with launching surprise attacks, it would understand this point more readily. Japan, for example, in 1941 attacked Pearl Harbor under conditions of military (and industrial) inferiority. Why she went ahead with that attack at that time had very little to do with either order of battle. That Japan chose to

attack stemmed far more from a lack of meaningful enemies at her back.

If enemy intentions do not turn essentially on order of battle analysis, what do they turn on? Here we come to the political perspective.

The first difference in the normal political perspective (compared with the military) is that it is wider in focus. Soviet-American relationships are not assessed in simple bilateral terms or even as alliance groupings arrayed bloc against bloc. A proper political assessment starts from the assumption that Soviet behavior toward the United States is not only influenced by but may even be shaped by Soviet assessments of third nation attitudes.

It is especially here that the change is most marked, compared to cold war political attitudes. The typical cold war political assumption denied there were third nations with third preferences, other than on a sort of temporary, until-they-discover-the-truth basis. Good guys versus bad guys is hardly a politically sophisticated approach. Yet the Truman Doctrine, articulated through a web of regional pacts up to and including the remarkable SEATO Pact, looked out on the world in exactly this way. Today it is fashionable to say that the breakdown in the monolithic character of communism has made the Truman Doctrine obsolete. It is not yet fashionable to accept the view that it was the cold warriors who saw far more unity in the Communist "camp" than ever, in fact, existed. But, whether the Communists once were a bloc and now are not, or they were once thought to be a bloc and now are seen to not be, the decline in cold war political thinking makes it again normal to visualize the Chinese "ally" of the Soviet Union as an important constraint on Soviet behavior or intentions.

To express the main point another way, military thinking quite naturally and inevitably *begins* with bilateral assessments, while the normal political

assessment really *ends* with the bilateral assessment. Where the military man starts by comparing numbers of United States and Soviet missiles or submarines or men and then calculating plus or minus factors for the "allies" on both sides, the political assessor normally starts by observing the degree to which third parties impose constraints on either side. The bilateral relationship, from a political point of view, always and inevitably includes a multilateral dimension. But from a military point of view, and especially under conditions of actual warfare, the bilateral relationship (of the two individual nations or the two warring blocs) is the real thing. The tanks and missiles that count are the ones in use or ready for use by the belligerents, not the ones in the hands of the nonbelligerents.

The contrast here in the military and political view is not absolute, but it is marked. The military man has to have the corner of his eye on the possible new front opened if a new nation enters the fray, but his preoccupation is with the slugging match he is already carrying on. But to the political man the most critical influence he may be able to bring to bear will stem not from his own deterrent capability, but from what he can stir up, encourage, or just let grow in his potential enemy's rear. The typical military assessment will not exclude feint and deception, let alone the end run around the flank. But ultimately the enemy has to be confronted and directly and physically deterred because he is already committed to the use of force. The typical political assessment, while not excluding direct power or pressure, finds it more efficacious to rely heavily on demonstration and indirect example. To express the point crudely but usefully, the military man understands the utility of a dagger in the back but believes in the punch to the jaw. The political man contemplates how to poise the dagger at the back in order to avoid the need for a punch to

the jaw. If a Schlesinger or Rumsfeld staff analyzes the threat, they will advocate more missiles. If a Kissinger staff analyzes the threat, they will advocate another trip to Peking. These are not really antagonistic concepts if properly orchestrated.

The second difference in the normal political perspective (compared with the military) is that it is much more relative. Look at the military aspect first. If the United States and the Soviet Union fight, they will use some or all of the weapons they possess. The range is exactly that: from some to all. While indefinite, it is also specific, with the extremes absolute. If war once begins, only the range of violence is not foreseeable. Each will kill a certain number of the enemy. And what will influence the range of weapons used is almost certainly predictable: whether one side can inflict nonreturnable damage. So the military problem, while containing important variables, is not very relative in its basic parameters. The enemy is the enemy. He is not being half-friendly when he refrains from killing every one of us.

But consider the political perspective. There is a very old saying, "My neighbors' neighbors are my friends," which offhandedly describes the likelihood of one's neighbor being an enemy. Quite properly, too, this old saying adds no caveats about "provided we share the same ideology." The Americans' thoughts may turn to Canada or Mexico as the friendly exception. Yet, in an earlier day, the United States invaded both (and invasions have also been launched from their soil to ours). China and Russia are hardly likely to be friends for very long at a time, in view of the long frontier they share and their mutual ability to inflict important harm on the other. The temporary exceptions prove this rule, for it was only during the days of an anti-Chinese policy by the United States, accompanied by a massive military deployment on China's

flanks, that Soviet-Chinese policy was close. Thus friendship and enmity, from a political perspective, are relative.

It is worth repeating again Oscar Wilde's line from *The Picture of Dorian Gray*: "A man cannot be too careful in the choice of his enemies." Personal relations permit more choice than do national identities, and the fixed effect of geographical location inhibits flexibility, but the point is still valid and is ignored by nations at their peril. Here is the greatest difference between the military and the political perspective, for the military man plans for a confrontation with a defined enemy, while the political man contemplates his choice of enemies (within, to be sure, certain constraints).

The Germans have an old proverb: "Many enemies, much honor." Also, many enemies, much defeat, and much lost territory.

If there is a way of choosing enemies and if there is even a small degree of flexibility in what choice one makes, then it is vital to see friendship-enmity as a relational quality dependent on still other relations rather than as a fixed thing. For many years, and even after World War I, the American military went on preparing war plans against Britain; then plans began to be made against Japan. They were doing the proper thing. It was not their job to choose enemies. But it is important that they also understand how the choice can be made and how it affects the freedom of decision ("intentions") of the prescribed enemy of the moment.

As it turned out, Great Britain did not "choose" to have the United States as an enemy in 1914 or after 1918. Japan, in 1941, made the opposite choice. What do we mean?

Look at British policy between 1900 and 1907. That short span of years began with the British virtually isolated in world affairs. The highly unpopular Boer War dramatized the issue. Kaiser Wilhelm, not exactly popular himself,

aroused considerable sympathy when he spoke of organizing a "Continental Combine" against the rapacious John Bull. England's self-arranged "splendid isolation" almost turned into the nightmare of diplomatic, even military encirclement. At odds with France, Russia, and Germany, with a history of hostility with America, she reassessed her situation. Whereupon, in short order, she sought to align with Germany to counter France (but failed), concluded the Hay-Pauncefote Treaty with the United States (1901) as a signal of conciliation, made an alliance with Japan (1902) to help deal with Russia, buried the colonial dispute with France (1904), and reached colonial understanding with Russia (1907). In short, she reached out to gain an ally, but, even more, significantly, she effectively reduced her active and determined enemies. She exercised a choice.

Japan in 1941 made the decision to go to war with the United States. The conditions under which she made this decision are not often carefully reviewed. But they are very instructive. Consider that China had by 1941 long ceased to be an active threat at Japan's back if Japan sought war in the Pacific. Japan had been engaged actively since 1937 in destroying Chinese warmaking ability. Then, in mid-1941, Adolf Hitler launched his assault on the Soviet Union, thus guaranteeing Russian preoccupation in Europe, England, France, and Holland, all of them with Far Eastern possessions, were already fully engaged in Europe. Thus, after mid-1941 in Asia the strategic situation had utterly altered in that Japan could contemplate war against the United States with guaranteed immunity from third-party intervention in Japan's rear. For the first and only time in the 20th century to date, Japan could fight America without automatically risking real war with other powers. Under these conditions, Japan attacked.

The actions just recounted of both

Great Britain and Japan have a common theme in that the strategic environment in which they found themselves initially contained a superfluity of enemies. In Britain's case, that number was reduced to a satisfactory level (so that Britain could face Germany) by British policy. In Japan's case, events also played into her hands.

The fact that Japan ultimately lost World War II should not obscure the fact that she attacked the United States under optimum conditions, part of which she arranged herself.

These deliberate policy choices are made possible by phenomena arising quite naturally out of the multilateral context in which all bilateral relations need to be assessed. The guiding principle is the conservation of enemies. It means that nations do not—should not—normally choose to accumulate more enemies than they can usefully use at any one time! Of course, any rule or law has its exceptions or transgressors. They end in exile at St. Helena or as a suicide in destroyed Berlin.

Notice that the *result* of a nation applying the principle of the conservation of enemies is not at all difficult for the military man to understand and appreciate. Military strategy seeks to cultivate situations where one's own strength is superior and concentrated while the enemy is inferior and scattered. But where the military strategist applies his thinking to lines of supply and reducing enemy effective strength at the point of battlefield impact, the political strategist is trying (1) to reduce what the enemy gains in allies, and (2) increase the opposition he encounters by confronting him with still other opponents.

The third difference between the military strategist and the political strategist is more difficult to explain than either of the other two. It turns on how they construct and utilize theory. The normal political perspective at any one time can be quite out of phase with the military perspective.

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Consider, as illustration, NATO strategic doctrine. We remember the days when John Foster Dulles used to talk of "massive retaliation." Once the Soviets also acquired a certain massiveness, however, doubts began to be raised. De Gaulle, for example, wondered out loud whether the United States would be willing to accept nuclear devastation as a result of a French action which aroused a Soviet response. The more massive the retaliation, the more important to have a nuclear strike force of one's own. At the same time, other kinds of doubts were being expressed about having only one option. By Kennedy's time the United States was hastening to build conventional forces to allow us to deal with "contingencies" below a full nuclear engagement, especially because of the conviction that the very equality of reciprocal destruction resulting from a nuclear exchange now put more premium on the less-than-nuclear.

The shift under McNamara to the new strategic doctrine in NATO of "flexible response" was accompanied by creaking and groaning all the way. West Germany, for example, had fears that the Russians would be well launched toward the Rhine while the NATO nations were still shrinking from the necessary action. The longer the wait, the more West Germany would be devastated by her own allies once the blow fell. But shift NATO did. And when they had, De Gaulle withdrew France from the integrated features of NATO. That is, France remained a member of the alliance but expelled NATO institutions and infrastructure from French soil. Most of this was crammed into Belgium and the Netherlands, while French military cooperation with NATO began to be haphazard or, at least, irregular.

Once the transition had been made, the military effect was drastic. Considering West Germany is only a hundred miles wide at its narrowest point

and that Belgium and the Netherlands are completely inadequate in area for logistics backup, the action of France forced NATO strategically into the position that any Soviet attack across the Iron Curtain would have to be repulsed in very short order by a fairly full resort to nuclear weapons. The flexible response and the controlled escalation have become phrase stations on the short road back to massive retaliation.

If this is true, has NATO altered its doctrine to reflect the new reality? Not at all. Emphasis continues to be put on finding the new conventional forces needed to balance the Soviet threat. But no NATO European nation is actually much interested in doing so, particularly so long as American troops are deployed near the Iron Curtain, thus guaranteeing American involvement if the Russians ever do attack the West.

When analyzed, NATO military strategic doctrine accords uneasily with either military or political reality. But no NATO nation is seriously concerned so long as the Americans continue to be deployed in Germany. Indeed, there are many good political reasons why it would serve little useful point to re-debate NATO military strategy. At the same time, the formally approved strategy has little resemblance to the real situation. It is considerably tidier than the reality.

A second illustration may drive the point home. Look at the American-Soviet nuclear balance. Disregarding the effects of nuclear weapons in the hands of third nations for the moment, the military logic of reliable intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM's) being possessed in large quantities by both sides is that each can destroy the other with "sufficiency," quite regardless of whether either has allies, forward land positions, naval fleets, et cetera. Cut down merely to those modest dimensions, they still each would "enjoy" an overkill capacity x-times greater than necessary.

Looking at this situation in strictly military terms, we can reach two opposite but equally rational conclusions. Conclusion One is that, because destruction would be relatively equal and very extensive, nothing can be gained by resort to nuclear weapons and therefore there will be no such resort. Wars will instead be fought by conventional forces, fleets will engage at sea, et cetera. Allies and forward land positions are prime factors in the balance.

Conclusion Two is the reverse of Conclusion One. Conclusion Two says that no concern over Berlin, no worry about Soviet penetration of the Middle East or the Indian Ocean is justified from a military point of view since, if Russia had most of the Third World in her pocket, it would not alter the nuclear equation one iota.

If a NATO planner believes in flexible response, he can also quite logically embrace Conclusion One. And, in fact, NATO, by taking that point of view, is spared much unpleasantness and divisive discussion. But if the criticism made above of flexible response is correct, then no U.S. troops in Germany are necessary militarily and we are wasting time and effort to bother with NATO at all. Who wants to act on *that* basis?

Go further. Suppose the truth is that any ultimate U.S. war with Russia would be nuclear. Can there be any doubt that Russia would be far more likely to follow a policy leading to that result *after* the United States had dismantled its alliances and discarded its political assets? Would not a Russia triumphantly playing a prime hegemonic role in the Middle East and the Indian Ocean area be more tempted to challenge the "weak" United States with "only" a few thousand nuclear warheads?

It is because of this type of complication in the total strategic equation that we recurrently have these rather unreal or at least distorted debates over whether there is a "missile gap,"

whether the Soviets are gaining a first-strike capability, and whether it means anything.

The surest thing we know is that wars are not normally fought at times convenient to the military. Even if the military ought to be generally satisfied with conditions at the outbreak of hostilities, they hardly ever are. Perhaps World War I was the nearest exception for some of the belligerents. At least the end of the great military-technological revolution that went on fairly nonstop between 1855 and 1905 permitted stockpiling. Which explains one of the reasons World War I was a stalemate. Except for the Russians, they were all about equally ready, as far as the major powers were concerned.

Put the point in reverse. Napoleon III did not fight Prussia in 1870 because that marked maximum French readiness. The Southern challenge in the United States in 1861 did not come because the South was "ready." Hitler dragged a reluctant general staff into war.

The rarest thing in international relations must be the simultaneous existence of a real military breakthrough in the field of weapons at the right time for exploitation by a national leadership determined to commit aggression against its neighbors.

To point this out is not grounds to dismiss military calculations about first-strike potential but rather to place those calculations in context. To be moved to commit a successful aggression, the potential aggressor would probably require simultaneously: a major weapons breakthrough (plus enough time for some stockpiling while still outdistancing the enemy in technological progress), a will to conquer, some allies to encourage it to take the chance (and help discourage the opposition), some disarray and defection among its enemies, and an obvious failure of willpower on the part of its major or prime enemy. What would be seriously

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misleading would be to assume only one part of this list counts—to assume that intention essentially equals capability. That kind of emphasis upon order of battle superiority or inferiority stemming from a technological breakthrough or lag focuses on relative weapons ratios as though they equated to policy decisions. In fact, they are only one element in such decisions: a highly dangerous element to disregard and an equally highly dangerous element to see as decisive.

The fourth difference in the normal political perspective (compared with the military) is that it contains many more gradations. Where the military man quite properly starts with a distinction between friendly and hostile or neutral, and needs normally to go no further with analytical subdivisions than combat effective-combat ineffective, the political matrix contains many more variables. Put the point this way: suppose two countries by rather narrow margins decide to fight one another. Once the fighting begins it is conceivable (but unlikely) that the fighting will be desultory and halfhearted. But the reverse is far more likely. Military operations have their own logic, and the closeness of the decision to resort to them will not normally shape the character of those operations. (Vietnam was no exception; the decision to involve the United States there initially was not in the least close.) The analogy one can use here is the President of the United States who is elected by the closest possible vote. He barely became President. But he still is completely possessed of Presidential power once he is in office.

The reason this point is worth making is that the political will to fight may be more highly qualified than the fighting itself. Where this is so it can be more effective to work on the political will than to win on the battlefield as such. That is why the ultimate psychological effect of the Tet offensive was so

important, even if so costly in casualties to the Vietcong.

Consequently, a military man notes the forces arrayed against him, especially their equipment and deployment. He then makes the prudent assumption that the enemy will fight hard. If the enemy does not fight hard, so much the better. If the military man decides to try to reduce the effective opposition he confronts, he may try to knock out the weaker allies of his major enemy but he knows that will only have a limited usefulness. Eventually he has to face his main enemy's main forces.

But a political man, noting a group of nations apparently hostile, begins by assuming that in fact some are 51 percent hostile, some 85 percent opposed, some almost completely opposed. He knows that by altering his approach or the contents or substance of his proposition, he can peel off the more loosely attached members of the group he confronts. To change 51 percent hostile to 49 percent hostile does not take any great effort. If enough of the group is peeled away, the psychological effect on the core of opponents remaining can be quite devastating.

The reason for this phenomenon is that in politics there is frequently almost as good a reason to do the alternative, while very infrequently on the battlefield is defeat about as appealing as victory.

The military equation is clear enough.

To understand the political part of the phenomenon one must remember that, if one changes policy, one gains as well as loses support from other nations. Some will like the new policy better than the old, and vice-versa. So the choice of political policy is in a real sense a choice among supporters and opponents. There is no parallel in the military field. Defeat just makes you defeated.

Thus, to understand the political perspective one must see nations as

pursuing policies which gain them varying reactions from various other nations, ranging from almost complete approbation to almost complete antagonism. If one classifies reactions along this approbation-antagonism spectrum, one finds a variation from very friendly to very hostile. Change the policy and one needs a new list. This is why enmity is, in fact, relational and why one's list of enemies can be managed. It involves substituting specific national interests (or ends sought through policy) for their alternatives. This is, of course, another of the cardinal principles of international relations: the law of counterbalancing national interests. It is that second "law" which makes the first "law," conservation of enemies, more than a pious hope. For to "conserve" enemies one must in fact be able to peel off the more loosely attached members of the would-be enemies' coalition. One does that by shifting counterbalancing interests, thus forcing a policy reappraisal throughout the system. The United States, by abandoning an anti-Chinese policy in Asia, not only effectively destroyed the nightmare of having to fight both China and Russia. She also, by giving up an outworn policy which yielded no dividends, created a serious Soviet politico-military preoccupation with the policy options newly available to China by virtue of the American policy shift.

Not just any policy change is available as an option, and each alternative or substitute carries with it its own cluster of advantage-disadvantage. Gains and losses thus are relative rather than absolute. The most useful substitutions are those which change a meaningful potential or actual enemy of oneself into either a neutral or into an actual or potential enemy of one's most serious enemy.

Thus the logic of the political perspective on strategy is that the enemy to be confronted is partly a matter of choice, while to the military man there

is no choice—he takes his enemies where and as he finds them. Quite naturally, then, the military man approaches strategic analysis from a quite different direction and making quite different assumptions, as compared to the political man. They ought to. That they do have these differences in perspective should be noted without any implication that either must yield to the other. They ought to be complementary. The most effective national security policy will be the one which looks at the issue from both perspectives in order to achieve a single view. It is the fact today that a single view of the contemporary Soviet Union has yet to emerge, primarily because of these two perspectives not so far being effectively joined.

From what has been said, it is apparent that the political and military perspectives will never be identical, if only because the predominant thrust of concern of each is different. The very nature of standard threat analysis has accentuated these differences, primarily because the military dismisses too much

BIOGRAPHIC SUMMARY



Frederick H. Hartmann received his A.B. from the University of California (Berkeley) and his M.A. and Ph.D. from Princeton University. He has taught at the University of Florida, with the academic

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emphasis on "intentions" as amorphous, whereas the political side of the house looks with skepticism on too great a preoccupation with forces and weapons systems. From an analytical viewpoint, although it is desirable that each side of the debate begin by emphasizing its own concern, it is important that they end by analyzing all of the same data, seeing the problem as the same problem.

To achieve this result consistently will involve modifying the military view, broadening its intellectual sweep beyond the "certainties" of capability analysis, and removing the "ambiguities" the military feels in looking at enemy intentions. The remedy is relatively simple. It involves broadening the standard two-part threat analysis to include three parts: capability, intentions, and *circumstances*. Looking at weapons will tell us whether our enemy

has the "hardware" to do the job on us if he would. Looking at intentions will tell us whether our enemy has any good reason to try if he felt he could get away with it. Looking at circumstances will tell both him and us whether he is likely to get away with it—because looking at circumstances will tell us what counts the most: whether his back is free.

Threat analysis, modified by this addition, can serve as an alternative strategic model. While, compared to the cardinal principles, it fails to point to time-linked perception, at best only implies counterbalancing interests, and is completely silent on the need to conserve enemies, it is nonetheless superior as a means of laying out order-of-battle data. For these reasons, it is likely to retain usefulness for the military man.

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