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STRATEGY AND OPERATIONAL ART: EXAMINING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE USE OF FORCE AND POLITICAL AIMS PROCUREMENT

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JCSP 46

Solo Flight

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INTRODUCTION

Since the end of the Second World War, Western nations have failed to achieve strategic victory when conducting war in pursuit of unlimited political aims such as the complete destruction or surrender of an enemy. The western development of a prescriptive theory of operational art that aims to limit the use of force and the risk to one's forces creates unfavourable conditions for success. Failures in Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan demonstrate that a substantial, but still limited application of force failed to achieve a lasting strategic victory despite initial tactical success. Therefore, polities have failed to achieve the sought after political and strategic aims of the military campaigns and operations because they have applied operational art to a limited degree that weakens their ability to fight for unlimited aims. This paper will argue that polities should only use or threaten to use military force in unlimited ways when seeking unlimited aims, and that success hinges on the proper application of operational art to support the strategic ways of achieving desired political ends.

The paper will first define key terms relevant to the analysis. Then, it will discuss the function and relationship between politics, strategy and operations. Finally, it will examine three case studies that demonstrate that the use of unlimited force in war allows a polity to achieve strategic victory.

Politics is a broad term that encompasses a wide variety of activities that a polity conducts both internally and externally. For this essay, politics is as defined by Gray as the

process that generates legitimate authority in relative influence.¹ Additionally, policy is the result, or continuing of, the political process.² Polities create and practice policy for the purpose of continuing or improving their relative situation.³ Policy is conducted to achieve goals both internally and externally, and often both at the same time. For example, tax on foreign goods is a form of policy that helps support internal economies but is also a tool for negotiating with other external entities. There can be many concurrent goals for this type of policy action. The use of military force can be examined in the same way. By using military force, a politician can seek to achieve external goals for the polity such as gaining a piece of territory that will increase regional influence, or provide access to new resources. However, may also be seeking popular support for what could be a legitimate cause, such as attacking a rival polity or group with different socio-cultural identities. As before, the choice to use military action as a policy tool often seeks to achieve multiple coexisting political aims. For these reasons, policy is done by polities for continuing or improving its relative situation both within the polity, but amongst other polities or entities as well. This interplay will be a critical factor in the case study examinations, where the politicians making policy and strategy decisions needed to weight the impact on their choices from both an internal and external lens that were often in conflict.

This paper will use the widely accepted definition of strategy from Clausewitz's *On War*: "Strategy is the use of engagements for the object of war."⁴ Additionally, it will elaborate with Gray's perspective that supports Clausewitz classic definition and adds that "Strategy is an intellectual activity: it is the level of effort that orders the military behaviour that should deliver

¹ Colin S. Gray, *The Future of Strategy* (Cambridge, UK Malden, MA: Polity, 2015), 17.

² Everett C. Dolman, *Pure Strategy: power and principle in the space and information age* (London New York: Frank Cass, 2005), 15.

³ Dolman, *Pure Strategy: power and principle in the space and information age*, 6.

⁴ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, Michael Howard and Peter Paret eds. and trans. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 177

some, at least, of the consequences commanded by the political high ground of policy aims.”⁵ Also useful for the understanding of strategy’s role in war and politics is Gray’s analogy of strategy as a bridge that provides the ways that connect policy end with military means.⁶ The concept of ends/ways/means illustrate the bridge that strategy plays between policy and action. By being an intellectual activity that provides a way to translate or continue political desires, or objectives, it cannot be prescriptive. It cannot be done the same way every time. Each instance of a strategy will be unique. And yet, the goal of strategy as a concept is always the same. It serves to achieve the conditions for, or further the objectives of the policy.⁷

When discussing warfare, this paper will examine how campaigns and operations were planned and executed. In these cases, the paper will examine the application of operational art. Operational art in this paper is defined as the application of creative imagination by commanders and staffs – supported by their skill, knowledge, and experience – to design strategies, campaigns, and major operations and organize and employ military forces’.⁸

The relationship between strategy and operations is cooperative and interdependent rather than independent and subordinate. For that reason, it is difficult to isolate the exclusive functions between the strategic and operational levels. That is to say that strategy provides a way to achieve a policy aim, and that all the military actions conducted are tactical, but the total efforts exercised by these tactical forces require an overarching, operational command, control, and planning function that enables the tactical activities to occur with some coordinated purpose.

Gray makes this point by stating that “Operations and strategy derive from the imagination of

⁵ Gray, *The Future of Strategy*, 28.

⁶ Gray, *The Future of Strategy*, 31

⁷ *Ibid*, 2-3.

⁸ Echevarria, Antulio J. “American Operational Art, 1917-2008”. In *The Evolution of Operational Art: From Napoleon to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press. Incorporated, 2010), 137.

military leaders and by circumstance of danger or perceived advantageous opportunity” and “Strategy can only be done through the agency of the tactical.”⁹ Strategy provides the ideas and the answers to the political goals and questions, operations organizes and focuses the way, and tactics conducts the fighting. The ideas and answers that strategy provide come from a tactical and operational world that would not exist without the need for politics and strategy in the first place.

Since strategy is the use of engagements for the object of war, and operations are the grouping and cumulative efforts of the tactical units, then the realm of possible options for the strategist to imagine are limited by the available forces and the creativity of the operational commander to formulate a viable plan. A strategy that requires a force that does not exist is not a suitable strategy. Yet, operations do not drive strategy. A mutual understanding of both is paramount to achieving both a suitable strategy and mounting an effective operation. Therefore, the relationship between strategy and operations lies at the centre of a problem that has plagued many polities from achieving its political goals. Either the strategy did not meet the operational capability, or the operations were not sufficient in reaching a strategic outcome that met the policy ends.¹⁰

According to Clausewitz, “the ultimate object of war is submission of the enemy.”¹¹ And, “those who use physical power to the utmost extent possible by no means excluded obtains a superiority if his opponent uses less vigour in his application.”¹² With these statements, Clausewitz is advocating for both a focused operational goal of warfare, and the unlimited

⁹ Gray, 39-40.

¹⁰ Gray, 41.

¹¹ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, Anatol Rapoport and J. J. Graham edition. (Harmondsworth, Eng. New York, N.Y: Penguin Books, 1982), 101.

¹² *Ibid*, 102

available use of force. To ensure that the ways and means lead to the ends, the ways must be clearly defined and realistically achievable. Gray supports this by stating that “tactical performance and strategic designs cannot be left to be resolved by *fortuna*.”¹³ Additionally, Gray states that “ When a polity goes to war, it is usually choosing to accept the verdict produced by the fighting.”¹⁴ If this is true, then the polity should take any means necessary to ensure to minimize the opportunity for chance to decide the ends.

In discussing ends and means, Clausewitz states that:

As protection of the country is the primary object for which military forces exists, therefore the natural order is, that first of all this force should be destroyed, then the country subdued; and through the effects of these two results, as well as the position we then hold, the enemy should be forced to make peace.¹⁵

Clausewitz further elaborates by saying that disarming the enemy rarely happens in practice, but is an abstract goal not required for peace.¹⁶ However, as an abstract goal that lies in the heart of strategy and operational art, the use of military force should create the reality that would drive an enemy to surrender, or want to surrender. Therefore, in war, you should strive to eliminate your enemy’s ability or will to fight. This may be impossible to achieve in practice, as Clausewitz explains, but by proving your resolve along with using as much force as possible, you can erode your enemy’s will to fight. If you are not striving for this goal, then you are not convincing your enemy that they should give up their will to fight, even if their ability is weakened or severely hindered.

¹³ Gray, 40.

¹⁴ Ibid, 27.

¹⁵ Rapoport and J. J. Graham, 124.

¹⁶ Ibid.

As discussed, policy will determine when polity goes to war. Then strategy dictates what the goals of the war as they relate to the political aims sought. Clausewitz states that in order to achieve your political aim, you must end the conflict under your terms which sets up the condition for you to pursue your aims.¹⁷ In order to achieve success, you should use utmost force to make every attempt to compel your enemy to submit. Strategy and operational art are crucial to this pursuit. A well devised strategy can only be assured if the military forces used in operations are used effectively, and if all available forces can be drawn upon in a timely manner. A limited action that fails can be acceptable, as the overall risk was low. The overall loss of personal and resources do not affect your ability to continue to wage war and defend your polity. Additionally, the failure to achieve limited political would have a minimal impact. In this case, careful consideration should be made as to the value of attempting a limited war in the first place. Conversely, if an unlimited action fails, it can be devastating and expensive. Such a failure may lead to the inability to defend the polity from future aggression, and cause significant damage to society and the economy of the polity.

As discussed so far, strategy advocates for the utmost use of force to achieve the aims. This means that any and all available forces should be used if needed. Politicians should be ready to ready to pursue the most extreme course of action to ensure the enemy succumbs. However, the application of force requires operational art in order to be successful. A failure in operational art, may lead to failure of the war effort in total, or be excessively wasteful.

For example, the strategic bombing campaign over Germany by the Allies during the Second World War was a large scale campaign that lasted nearly the entire duration of the War.

¹⁷ Rapoport and J. J. Graham, 101.

The Royal Air Force (RAF) and the United States Army Air Force (USAAF) focused much of their forces towards this campaign leaving little for the defence of Britain and the defence of critical shipping lanes. The goal of the campaign fluctuated between crippling Germany's industrial ability to sustain its war effort and to crush Germany's will to fight by instilling sheer chaos and destruction. The RAF focused primarily on the latter in hopes of terror bombing Germany out of the war.¹⁸ The USAAF preferred to attack industrial targets that could hasten the end of the Wehrmacht. Despite dropping over 1.3 million tons of bombs and killing an estimated 305,000 Germans, the campaign largely failed to deliver the hoped-for knock-out blow to Germany.¹⁹

The campaign did have some success. By the time the Allies landed in Normandy, the Luftwaffe was completely eviscerated due in large part to the continuous air-to-air melee between Allied bombers and Luftwaffe fighters, along with the destruction of several critical industrial sectors that were critical for aircraft production. Also, several new technologies—such as chaff and long-range radio navigation—were born out of the need to mask large bombers attacks and guide the crews on their targets regardless of cloud or moonlight.²⁰ However, the Allies never achieved the main goal of the entire campaign. Hitler never surrendered, and when Germany was defeated, it was not because of strategic bombing.²¹

In this case, the Allies' political goal was clear and unlimited: the complete surrender of Germany. Britain's strategy hinged on garnering support from the United States (US) and Russia

¹⁸ Tami D. Biddle, *Rhetoric and Reality in air warfare: the evolution of British and American ideas about strategic bombing, 1914-1945* (Princeton, NJ Woodstock: Princeton University Press, 2004), 220.

¹⁹ Robert A Pape, *Bombing to win: air power and coercion in war* (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 1996), 254-5.

²⁰ Richard Overy, *Why the Allies Won* (London: Pimlico, 2006), 144-5.

²¹ Pape, 311-3.

in order to overwhelm Germany. However, in 1940, after the Battle of Britain, the US was not yet ready to enter the War. However, Britain could not afford to wait idly. It needed to show Germany it was not going to accept its current situation. Additionally, Britain needed Russia to fight Germany in order to slow its advance elsewhere in Europe and the world. Therefore, Britain under Churchill directed the RAF to bomb Germany much like Germany had done to Britain. The RAF leadership, and in particular Bomber Command, were eager to pursue this strategy. Interwar air power doctrine had prophesized strategic bombing. Now they would get the chance to prove it.²²

Unfortunately, several key factors plagued the effectiveness of the campaign in which the RAF alone lost over 8000 airplanes and more than 47,000 aircrew during the campaign.²³ Most of which ultimately highlight poor operational art on the part of the RAF and the USAAF. Throughout the campaign, the Allies never sought to gain complete air superiority before attacking its targets. Furthermore, the bombers flew largely unescorted, and were sent on missions beyond fighter escort range. These errors point to a lack of understanding of the operational planning and application of air power. In fairness, the capabilities possessed by air forces during the Second World War were relatively new and their operational effectiveness untested.²⁴

Unsurprisingly, in the strategic bombing campaign over Germany, the Allies demonstrated their resolve and were prepared to use utmost force against Germany to achieve its political goals. However, operational art failed strategy by not focusing on how to use the air

²² Biddle, 182-3.

²³ Norman Longmate, *The Bombers: the RAF offensive against Germany, 1939-1945* (London: Hutchinson, 1983), 364.

²⁴ Overy, *Why the Allies Won* (London: Pimlico, 2006), 123.

forces most effectively. Conversely, the American Pacific War against Japan saw a similar resolve to pursue unlimited aims with the utmost use of force. In this case, the proper resolve along with a sound application of operational art generated the conditions for the unlimited surrender by the Japanese.

The war between Japan and the US demonstrates how the pursuit of political goals hinges on a well defined strategy and proper application of operational art. A rising middle power, the Japanese Empire sought to diversify its economy and expand its influence and control over the Korean and the Shandong peninsula, but also to the South towards the Pacific islands. Japan's political aims were to increase its span of control to grow its economic power and continue to increase its regional influence in Asia.²⁵ Japan's strategy was multi-faceted, but included a pre-emptive and unprovoked attack on Pearl Harbor in order to deny the United States' ability to force project in to the Pacific.²⁶

The US interests and politics in the Pacific and Asia ran counter to Japan's expansionary vision. Specifically, the US advocated its Open Door policy that touted peaceful commercial activity without further territorial acquisitions in Asia. The Open Door policy further renounced spheres of influence and Chinese territorial and administrative integrity.²⁷ Additionally, the US established an oil embargo that denied Japan access to the essential commodity which drove Japan to take more aggressive actions in order to claim territory in Indonesia and devise a plan to

²⁵ Jim Lacey, *Great strategic rivalries: from the classical world to the Cold War* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016), 493.

²⁶ Angelo N. Caravaggio, "'Winning' The Pacific War: The Masterful Strategy of Commander Minoru Genda." *Naval War College Review* 67, no. 1 (Winter, 2014), 84.

²⁷ Lacey, *Great strategic rivalries: from the classical world to the Cold War*, 490.

create a protected shipping zone that would ensure continued access to oil, rubber, and tin—essential materials for its growing Empire.²⁸

In summary, Japan and the US had completely dissimilar politics in Asia from the end of the 19th century until Pearl Harbor. The Americans wanted to maintain a peaceful economic environment where established nations could pursue economic goals without conflict or continued conquest. Japan, the regional power, wanted to grow its territorial claims to grow its Empire.

Japan concluded that in order to further its political goals, it would have to engage in war with the US, or at least attack America enough to give Japan time to grow its forces in the Asia to later consolidate and protect its new empirical borders. Japan, saw an opportunity to deny its enemy the ability to challenge its influence. A key tenet to Japan strategy was to discourage its adversary from pursuing conflict by making too costly.²⁹ Japan did not anticipate that the US would eventually turn all its military might into completely defeating the Empire.

Conversely, the US recognized that it would soon be involved in the conflict in Europe did not want to be simultaneously be involved in a major war in Asia. But the Japanese forced them into conflict by attacking Pearl Harbor. At that point, the US had many new political concerns it had to reckon. Firstly, it advocated and supported its Open Door policy in hopes of bringing stability to Asia and it sought to retain its credibility amongst other Asian and Pacific nations that abided and supported the American policy.³⁰ Secondly, with a commitment to the Allies to attack Germany, the US lacked the required forces to properly attack Japan.³¹

²⁸ Ibid, 88.

²⁹ Daniel Marston, *The Pacific war companion: from Pearl Harbor to Hiroshima* (Oxford: Osprey, 2005), 24.

³⁰ Lacey, *Great strategic rivalries: from the classical world to the Cold War*, 498.

³¹ Marston, *The Pacific war companion: from Pearl Harbor to Hiroshima*, 26.

Therefore, Japan was in a favourable position to consolidate its claims and sphere of influence in Asia. Because both the US and Russia were focused primarily on Germany, Japan had the initiative, the time, and the resources to continue its campaign in mainland Asia, and the Pacific Islands. Additionally, Japan was fighting in its traditional geographic area, allowing for shorter lines of communication, and greater understanding of the battle space. Overall, Japan had a clear political goal, and favorable situation and was willing to use as much force as possible to achieve its aims. However, it failed to properly apply operational art in order to ensure the best use of forces. Additionally, Japan's strategy misjudged the US ability to project sufficient force to the Pacific.³²

In the early 20th century, Japan's political establishment was heavily influenced by military leaders that often pushed for military solutions that outweighed policy. For example, the Imperial National Defence Policy of 1907 called for a substantial increase in forces including an army of twenty-five divisions from peacetime with the capacity for a surge of up to twenty-five additional divisions, as well as the development of a substantial naval fleet of several hundreds of ships. At the time, several regional tensions existed, but this surge in military capacity was substantial and disproportionate to Japan's policy goals of the time.³³ The aggressive policy was possible because the military played a disproportional role in policy. During the Meiji era, direct control over military and national security affairs was placed directly under the Emperor, and not the civilian politicians.³⁴ Therefore, military leaders could influence the Emperor directly, who in turn influenced national policy and other political affairs. The result, was a military force that did

³² Caravaggio, "Winning" The Pacific War: The Masterful Strategy of Commander Minoru Genda.", 111.

³³ Lacey, 486.

³⁴ Ibid, 483.

not serve and advice the policy as a whole, but had a special relationship with the head of state who did not necessarily have the full picture of the rest of the governments' policy.

After Pearl Harbor, America's political aims in the Pacific and Japan changed. They could no longer maintain the status quo and support their Open Door policy since Japan has provoked them. And destroyed any hope of peace. The ongoing war between China and Japan was complicated by a divided China that was united against a common foe, but still unstable and tumultuous.³⁵ Additionally, Russia's interests in China only added to Chiang Kai-shek's inability to preserve his unified Republic of China. Therefore, after Pearl Harbor, the US declared war on Japan with the ultimate goal of the complete surrender of the Japan Empire in hopes of eliminating an aggressive regional actor, and bring much needed stability to a region of the world experiencing a post-colonial re-birth under the heavy influence of Russia's communist ideology.³⁶

The war between the US and Japan was a battle between near-peer rivals at its onset. The US saw tremendous industrial and economic growth between 1941 and 1945. In the application of strategy, both Japan and the US applied unlimited force. The Japanese politicians, under the overreaching influence of the military, used all available forces to pursue its aims. This included pitting its naval forces against the US. Unfortunately, Japan did not apply sound operational art to manage its forces adequately and eventually was outmatched at sea. Additionally, Japan had to preserve forces to defend its home islands and expend forces across the Asia Pacific. Similarly, the US had agreed to help Britain and Russia destroy Germany before it focused its main effort

³⁵ Mao Tse-Tung, "On Protracted War." Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1967), 115.

³⁶ Lacey, 508.

on attacking Japan. This would delay their main assault on Japan, and gave more time for Japan so solidify their position.

Over the course of next five years a series of battles between the Japanese and American forces would attrite the Japanese Navy and allow the America forces to cut Japan off from the world. The loss of the US held Philippines and other Allied territories such as Singapore, and the Dutch Indies gave the Japanese early success. The eventual loss of all these territories, and the US invasion of Japanese island such as Iwo Jima, and Okinawa eventually spelled disaster for Japan. By 1945, Japan was isolated, its troops were cut-off and its home islanders were starving.³⁷

Overall, the US was victorious because it applied the utmost use of force with sound operational art that enabled the achievement of its political aims. American forces were superior in strength after they were brought the full weight of their military forces to bear in the pacific. The US sought unlimited goals against the Japanese, and their resolve did not waiver. Additionally, the coordinated use of air, land, and naval forces systematically contained Japan's ability to project its forces beyond its home islands. By destroying the Japanese Navy and seizing islands and airfields that would allow the US forces to strike Japan's home islands, while protecting their operational hubs from attack.³⁸ By the time the US used nuclear weapons, the result of the conflict was already assured. Nuclear attacks simply hastened their surrender, and despite the extreme amounts of death and destruction brought on the bombs, it surely saved several thousands of lives by shortening war by several weeks or months.³⁹

³⁷ Pape, 126-7.

³⁸ John A. Warden, *The Air Campaign: Planning for Combat* (Washington, D.C.: National Defence University Press, 1988), 52.

³⁹ Pape, 127.

Several decades later, during the Cold War, the US again engaged in conflict on the Asia Pacific. In an attempt to contain the threat of communism in Asia, the US first sought to assist Vietnam in assuring its internal security, then later cooperated in large scale limited war against North Vietnamese Communist forces. Several years of civil unrest between French Colonials and the Vietnamese set the conditions for a war between Vietnamese communist forces led by Ho Chi Minh and the last elements of French colonial forces. The end of the French colonial occupation of Vietnam in 1954 led to a divided Vietnam that started the US involvement in a war that would last nearly two decades.⁴⁰

The American political goal in Vietnam was to prevent the spread of communism in the Asia Pacific. The political goal was in response to a concept, often referred to as the Domino Theory, implied that if one state fell to the communists, many others would topple in a chain reaction like dominos lined up in a row.⁴¹ Checking communisms spread was a major political policy goal for the US during the Cold War. However, complicating matters of strategy was the threat of nuclear war. Both the US and the Soviet Union acknowledged the destructive power of nuclear weapons and took several steps to minimize the potential large scale war that would entangle the two superpowers and risk elevating to nuclear holocaust. Therefore, the US political goals were unlimited since they sought the destruction of the Viet Cong and the eventual reunification of North and South Vietnam. This process had originally been planned to happen in 1956.⁴²

⁴⁰ Geoffrey C. Ward. *The Vietnam War: an intimate history* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2017), 78.

⁴¹ Gregory A. Daddis, *Westmoreland's War: Reassessing American Strategy in Vietnam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 44.

⁴² Ward, *The Vietnam War: an intimate history* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2017), 76.

Within Vietnam, there were two different polities that sought similar political aims from different ends of the political spectrum. In the South, several leaders attempted to gain and maintain control of a tumultuous nation. Notably, Ngo Dinh Diem, a staunch anti-communist, became president of South Vietnam in 1955 and proceeded to eliminate all his political opponents and implement aggressive policy that oppressed ethnic and religious minorities within South Vietnam, and outlawed open dissent towards the government. His goals, like many of the other leaders that followed him, was to gain a stronghold on power within Vietnam.⁴³ In the North, Ho Chi Minh and his communist followers sought to eradicate his political resistance by gaining the trust of the local population and thwarting South Vietnamese and US forces with irregular warfare tactics and community building to strengthen the legitimacy of the North Vietnamese regime.⁴⁴

The strategic ways chosen by the US was to first support South Vietnam by training and equipping them to better fight the North.⁴⁵ Due to the limited success of this strategy in the early years of the conflict, the US eventually decided to increase its forces in the conflict and conduct a significant amount of combat operations. The shift towards a more aggressive and involved strategy could be characterized as too little too late because the South Vietnamese government has lost any hope of being able to unify the nation, and the unity of its military forces were fractured by infighting amongst senior officers who were battling the chaotic political landscape,

⁴³ Ward, 81.

⁴⁴ George K. Tanham, and Michael A. Sheehan. *Communist revolutionary warfare: from the Vietminh to the Viet Cong* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Security International, 2006), 66.

⁴⁵ Daddis, *Westmoreland's War: Reassessing American Strategy in Vietnam*, 38.

as well as the actual war. And back in the US, as the war dragged on, public support for the war was fledgling.⁴⁶

The US strategy over the course of the war was a result of Cold War de-escalation, of post-colonial self-governing diplomacy, and domestic politics. The result was an inconsistent strategic effort that gave North Vietnam resolve and opportunity to show consistent, dedication towards achieving its political aims. The US had several opportunities to utilize more force in decisive ways, but failed to take action. For example, the US Navy had the capability to completely overwhelm and destroy the North Vietnamese Navy. The incident at the Gulf of Tonkin in August 1964 was an opportunity for the US to claim that North Vietnamese attacked first, which they could have used to legitimize a counter-attack. Instead, a limited skirmish between navies resulted in a few casualties on each side, but did little dissuade North Vietnam.⁴⁷ Additionally, during both the Kennedy and Johnson administration, steps to increase the military footprint in Vietnam, but hesitated due to public opinion. Yet, both presidents also acknowledged that they could not completely withdraw.⁴⁸ Lastly, the failure of the USAF to properly engage in the campaign and provide significant amounts of resources to support the US Army such Intelligence, Surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR), troop movement, and re-supply demonstrated a disjointed force that could not escape its classic tenets in a new warfighting reality.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Robert Buzzanco, “‘Seeing Things Through in Vietnam’: LBJ, the Military, and the Growing U.S. Commitment to Vietnam, November 1963-December 1964.” Chapter. In *Masters of War: Military Dissent and Politics in the Vietnam Era*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 183.

⁴⁷ Daniel C. Hallin, *The "uncensored war": the media and Vietnam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 80.

⁴⁸ Buzzanco, “‘Seeing Things Through in Vietnam’: LBJ, the Military, and the Growing U.S. Commitment to Vietnam, November 1963-December 1964.”, 153.

⁴⁹ James S. Corum, and Wray R. Johnson. “Airpower in South Vietnam, 1954-1965.” Chapter 6 in *Airpower in Small Wars: Fighting Insurgents and Terrorists* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2003), 272.

Overall, the US had clear political aims that waivered between presidencies as the leaders considered elections and public support. Domestically, the leaders needed the support of its population to carry out the messy conflict aimed at preventing a communist wave across the Eurasian continent.⁵⁰ Therefore, the strategy shifted to meet what the politicians believed they could and retain public support. Coupled with the erosion of confidence between the US and South Vietnamese governments dedication towards fighting the conflict, the application of operational art was piecemeal and inconsistent. Unlike the war against Japan, there was no overarching plan with tangible end states, and there was an aversion to applying utmost force on the North Vietnamese due to both the risk of escalation with the Soviet Union, but also the lack of American public aversion to casualties.⁵¹

In this paper, we have seen that the relationship between the policy, strategy, and operations is critical for achieving success. War is always about politics and strategy is the bridge that allows military means to achieve political aims.⁵² Additionally, the utmost use of force is crucial to the waging of war.⁵³ However, a sound application of operational art ensures the proper application of force necessary for achieving the desired political goals. The three case studies show three different instances where the various elements required for success in war were applied differently.

In the first case, clear political goals and strategic resolve to exercise utmost force failed because of the misapplication of operational art in the strategic bombing campaign of Germany. In this case, the Allies has a clear goal, and were willing to use all available force to achieve their

⁵⁰ Ward, 102.

⁵¹ Hallin, *The "uncensored war" : the media and Vietnam*, 90-1.

⁵² Grey, 4.

⁵³ Rapoport and J. J. Graham, 101.

goal. However, the nascent application of large bombing fleets proved to be inconsequential to the war effort and cost the Allies heavy losses and hindered the overall effectiveness of the ground invasion of Nazi-occupied Europe.

In the second case, we saw a US joint force that applied sound operational art to isolate and coerce Japan into complete surrender. Again, the US had a clear political goal, and developed a sound strategy that would throw all available force toward forcing Japan to succumb to the Americans. Finally, the constant sound application of operational art, despite a series of tactical losses and victories, allowed the US to maintain a focused approach to the conflict. Critical to the success of this campaign, was the utmost resolve of the polity in achieving this goal, and the close cooperation of the joint force in winning the war in the air, at sea, and in the islands.

Lastly, we saw that the US failed to achieve its clear political objective in Vietnam during the Cold War, because its strategy lacked a dedication towards the utmost use of force, along with the consistent application of operational art. Additionally, the climate of de-escalation, the diverging political aims of the leadership in South Vietnam, the lack of legitimacy of the war itself by the American people, and inter-service rivalry hindered the political, strategic and operational effectiveness of the US forces in Vietnam. This final case is the worst-case scenario since the aims were clear and valid given the politics of the US during this time, but everything needed to support that aims was lacking or inconsistent.

After examining these three cases, we see that having a clear supporting relationship between the strategy and the operations allows for the political aims to be met with greater certainty. It would be foolish to argue that political success can only be achieved in these conditions. However, in an unlimited conflict where a polity is resolved in their war effort,

strategy must be viewed as the way to achieve the political aims, and therefore must support the notion that all means be made available for as long as required in order to achieve the aims.

Additionally, the application of operational art must be tied to achieving tactical and operational objectives that set the conditions for victory, as opposed to using the forces to strike a quick blow to the enemy, in hopes that it will dissuade further conflict. Simply using all available military might is not enough to ensure success. The ability to appropriately channel that force to where it will make the most impact is as important as having the force at all. In essence, to assure the greatest chances of success, you must apply all available resources in a carefully planned crafted way towards achieving your strategy, and be resolved to see it through, lest a better option presents itself as a result of the conflict. Otherwise, the enemy will outlast, or outfight you.

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