

An Unspannable Bridge?: American Strategic Competency

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This essay explores recent criticisms that the American strategic community has lost the art and process of making strategy. It also examines the charge that "operational art has devoured strategy" by arguing that American military culture did not suddenly want to overwhelm the strategy process, since it is quite comfortable with an astrategic and apolitical orientation. Narrowing its professional domain to pure warfighting deliberately isolated the military from politics and from the deeper grasp of strategy that should shape its purpose and missions. This shift to a narrow professional sphere was unconsciously abetted by a civilian policy community which has abdicated its contribution to spanning the Strategy Bridge.

America's last decade of conflict has stimulated a number of scathing critiques about American strategic competence. Too often in Washington, strategy is lost or completely absent. Some have argued that there is frequently a black hole where U.S. strategy should reside.¹ This gap creates the appearance of low levels of connectivity between desired political objectives and the scale and intensity of military action. Recent major conflicts have highlighted further criticisms about an American Way of War that consistently struggles to link ends, ways and means.² As the creation of such a coherent linkage is strategy's principal purpose, the indictment warrants review.

¹ Colin Gray, *Another Bloody Century: Future Warfare*, London: Orion, 2005, p. 111.

² For recent and insightful critiques of U.S. foreign policy and strategy gaps see Peter Beinart, *The Icarus Syndrome, A History of American Hubris*, New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2009; Derek Leebaert, *Magic and Mayhem: The Delusions of American Foreign Policy From Korea to Afghanistan*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010; and Dominic Tierney, *How We Fight: Crusades, Quagmires, and the American Way of War*, Boston: Little, Brown, 2010.

Numerous formal studies and authors cite a growing U.S. strategic thinking deficiency.³ Some experienced critics believe that the United States has forgotten the art of developing coherent strategies and strategic logic, especially the relationship between ends and means, and the linkage between policy goals and resources.⁴ Not long after the first bombs were launched in late 2001, the American Way of War was under fire for its tactical and apolitical orientation, and its failure to give proper appreciation to the political and socio-cultural context in which military force was being applied. It is hard to disagree with analysts who decry American's lack of strategic planning establishment which "is increasingly hard-pressed to choose realistic goals or craft strategies likely to achieve our objectives at affordable costs in the face of various constraints..."⁵

One major blue ribbon panel, the U.S. National Security Commission/21st Century, found that America faced a crisis of competency in government. Its final report concluded that "strategic planning is largely absent within the U.S. government."⁶ Of gravest concern, they could find no overarching strategic framework guiding U.S. national security policy or the allocation of resources. The commission identified the need for a culture of coordinated strategic planning to permeate all U.S. national security institutions.

One major study project also noted the lack of any planning culture outside of Defense, and more recently noted that "senior U.S. officials find it almost impossible to break the tyranny of the inbox and find time for strategic planning."⁷ While each national security agency brings its experience and focus to bear on security challenges, "the mechanisms to integrate the various

³ I think the term was first used by Edward Luttwak. See also F. G. Hoffman, "America's Strategic Thinking Deficiency Crisis, Diagnosis and Cure," Washington, DC, Institute for National Strategic Studies, conference paper, 2008; and Mackubin T. Owens, "Civil-Military Relations and the U.S. Strategy Deficit," *FPRI E Note*, February 2010.

⁴ Aaron L. Friedberg, "Strengthening U.S. Strategic Planning." *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 31:1, Winter 2008, pp. 47–60.

⁵ Andrew F. Krepinevich and Barry D. Watts, "Lost at the NSC," *The National Interest*, January/February 2009, p. 63.

⁶ U.S. National Security Commission/21st Century, *Road Map for National Security: Imperative for Change*, Washington DC, March 15, 2001, p. 48.

⁷ Clark A. Murdock et al, *Beyond Goldwater-Nichols: Defense Reform for a New Strategic Era*, Phase 1 Report, Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, March 2004, pp. 61–62.

dimensions of U.S. national security policy and to translate that policy into integrated programs and actions are extremely weak, if they exist at all.”⁸

After a stint in government observing the problem close up, Professor Aaron Friedberg observed that:

The U.S. government has lost the capacity to conduct serious, sustained national strategic planning. Although offices and bureaus scattered throughout the executive branch perform parts of this task for their respective agencies, no one place brings all the pieces together and integrates them into anything resembling a coherent, comprehensive whole.⁹

This lost capacity can be traced to America’s lofty position of global primacy and its incomparable resources. It is quite clear that resources are no longer infinite and that power is relative. What was just very recently considered a Pax Americana buttressed by American hyperpower is reportedly descending into decline. An astute pair of American strategists recently observed that “The ability of the U.S. national security establishment to craft, implement, an adapt effective long-term strategies against intelligent adversaries at acceptable costs has been declining from some decades.”¹⁰ Restoring a passable degree of competence is drawing serious attention in Washington, an admission of belated recognition and necessity.

Strategic Examples

The impression that U.S. strategic competence is waning is predicated upon a series of perceived missteps or omissions. The litany of contemporary American strategic shortfalls is not necessarily short.

Panama-1989. In Operation Just Cause, the United States military planners created an exquisitely complicated coup de main that collapsed the limited security elements of the Noriega regime. However, little thought was given to the establishment of order and the stand up of the Eduardo administration.¹¹

⁸ Clark A. Murdock, Pierre Chao, Anne A. Witkowsky, Michele A. Flournoy, and Christine E. Wormuth, *Beyond Goldwater-Nichols*, Phase 2 Report, Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2006, p. 27. Accessed at http://www.csis.org/media/csis/pubs/bgn_ph2_report.pdf.

⁹ Friedberg, “Strengthening U.S. Strategic Planning,” p. 47.

¹⁰ Andrew F. Krepinevich, Jr., and Barry D. Watts, *Regaining Strategic Competence*, Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2009, p. vii.

¹¹ John T. Fishel, “The Murky World of Conflict Termination: Planning and Executing the 1989-90 Restoration of Panama,” *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 3, Spring 1992, 58–71; John T. Fishel and Richard

Desert Storm-1991. In its first war in Iraq, the United States brilliantly created a coalition to isolate Iraq and drive it out of Kuwait. But its war termination planning was negligible and opportunities to generate a more lasting solution were lost.¹² President Bush thinks he whipped the Vietnam Syndrome, but he was actually a victim of it.¹³

Somalia-1993. A humanitarian intervention originally designed to secure international relief supplies turned into a violent contingency that resulted in a virulent urban fire fight captured in *Black Hawk Down*. Instead of owning the problem, the Clinton Administration failed to take the risks inherent in Somalia's makeup seriously, and failed to ensure that the risks were mitigated and that ways and means appropriate to desired ends were being applied.

Kosovo-1999. Working within a consensus-bound NATO coalition, the world's superpower and allies required 78 days of semi-precise aerial bombing to convince Serbia to withdraw. Sharp debates between planners and leaders in Washington and NATO Headquarters marred a clear strategy. Winning ugly is the best one can call this one.¹⁴

Afghanistan-2002-present. In Afghanistan, "inconsistencies and a lack of coherence in U.S. Government strategic planning processes and products, as well as fundamental flaws in U.S. Government structures and systems for coordinating and integrating the efforts" of the government's strategy reflect a serious problem requiring much more than a cosmetic adjustment.¹⁵ Woodward's description of the President of the United States crafting his own strategy during the Afghanistan strategy review depicts a tortured process within the team around him.¹⁶ Moreover, the leaks that preceded this decision cycle proved fatal to future candid

Downie, "Taking Responsibility for Our Actions? Establishing Order and Stability in Panama," *Military Review* 72, April 1992, pp. 66–77. Richard H. Shultz, Jr., "The Post-Conflict Use of Military Forces: Lessons from Panama, 1989-91," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 16, June 1993, pp. 145–172.

¹² Matthew Moten, ed., *Between War and Peace: How America Ends Its Wars*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011. Readers are urged to read the concluding chapter, Andrew Bacevich, "The United States in Iraq, Terminating an Interminable War," pp. 302–321.

¹³ On the impact of the Vietnam war see Eliot A. Cohen, *Supreme Command, Soldiers, Statesmen, and Leadership in Wartime*, New York; Free Press, 2002, pp. 175–191, 199.

¹⁴ Ivo H. Daadler and Michael E. O'Hanlon, *Winning Ugly: NATO's War to Save Kosovo*, Washington DC: Brookings, 2000.

¹⁵ Lewis G. Irwin, *Disjointed Ways, Disunified Means: Learning from America's Struggle to Build an Afghan Nation*, Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, May 2012. p. xix.

¹⁶ On the Afghanistan surge decision by the Obama Administration and the President's labored efforts to address the resource and temporal dimensions of strategy see Bob Woodward, *Obama's Wars*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010, pp. 232–282, 290–300, and 311–314.

strategic assessments and resulted in subsequent reviews being so closely held that key military inputs were lacking.¹⁷

Iraqi Freedom-2003. The United States invaded Iraq and toppled Saddam Hussein's regime with great dispatch at little cost. Civilian leaders browbeat military commanders for campaign plans that fit their views of the risks and costs.¹⁸ However, it could not generate a satisfactory peace for the better part of 5 years at a cost of trillion dollars. As Dr. Steven Metz of the U.S. Army War College has concluded "However laudable the overarching American objectives in Iraq, the United States was strategically and conceptually unprepared to realize them. We used flawed strategic assumptions, did not plan adequately, and had a doctrinal void. American strategy was characterized by a pervasive means/end mismatch."¹⁹ The ghosts of Vietnam were also evident in the planning of Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2002-2003. Rose writes "the Iraq War ended up being one of the oldest and most straight forward stories in the book—a classic realist cautionary tale of unchecked power leading to hubris, then folly, then nemesis."²⁰

The President browbeat his military leaders into generating strategic options for victory, as they had concluded that further increases in force levels and resources were unbalanced and increased risks to the overall strategic posture of the United States. The senior military leadership was out of ideas, and resorted to a handpicked, highly-educated "Council of Colonels" to augment the intellectual heft of the strategy offices of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in order to step

¹⁷ David E. Sanger, "Charting Obama's Journey to a Shift on Afghanistan," *The Washington Post*, May 20, 2012, p. A1, 9. This article draws upon his forthcoming *Confront and Conceal: Obama's Secret Wars and Surprising Use of American Power*, New York: Crown, 2012.

¹⁸ Dale Herspring, *Rumsfeld's Wars: The Arrogance of Power*, Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2008. For insights on how policy makers viewed these events see Douglas Feith, *War and Decision: Inside the Pentagon at the Dawn of the War on Terrorism*, New York: Harper, 2008; pp. 274–298, 360–391.

¹⁹ Steven Metz, *Learning from Counterinsurgency in American Strategy*, Carlisle, PA: Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, 2007, p. 85

²⁰ Gideon Rose, *How Wars End, Why We Always Fight the Last Battle*, New York: Harper Collins, 2010 p. 276.

back from its ongoing conduct of the war and refresh its rethinking of the conflict's fundamentals.²¹

The President ultimately teamed with “dissidents” within the military in theater, retired general officers, and strategists from conservative think tanks to cobble together the rationale for a surge into Baghdad and the surrounding towns.²² It is premature to make an historical assessment at this time about the strategic tradeoffs facing the President and his policy team at the time, and to determine if the long-range interests of the United States were served.²³ However, both Afghanistan and Iraq reflect a disturbing trend, evident at Panama and Desert Storm, at war termination which is indicative of a problem of both planning and translation in action.²⁴

Can the Strategy Bridge be Spanned?

Our discussion begins with an analysis of the utility of Colin Gray's metaphorical “strategy bridge.”²⁵ This metaphor, with acknowledged limitations of any linear or man-made construct, is claimed to serve as a powerful description of the core function of strategy. There is little doubt that strategy connects or bridges the aims of policy with tactical actions. In the absence of such connective logic or tissue, military action is purposeless if not entirely senseless. The metaphor has several levels of relevance. Strategists and strategy connect distinctive entities or subcultures, as well as ideas and phenomena, that otherwise stray off and fall into the swirling

²¹ On the role and inputs of this group see Woodward, *The War Within*, pp. 171, 179–181, 203–204; Thomas Ricks, “Pentagon May Suggest Short-Term Buildup Leading to Iraq Exit,” *The Washington Post*, November 20, 2006, p. 1.

²² On the unusual bureaucratic maneuvering behind the Iraq surge decision see Thomas E. Ricks, *The Gamble: General David Petraeus and the American Military Adventure in Iraq, 2006-2008*, New York: Penguin, 2009, pp. 74–125; Bob Woodward, *The War Within: A Secret White House History 2006-2008*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 2008, pp. 129–208, 230–251, 266–290. Also see Herspring, pp. 68–77, 89–162.

²³ For a superb summary of the decision making process of the U.S. government at this time see Peter D. Feaver, “The Right to Be Right: Civil-Military Relations and the Iraq Surge Decision,” *International Security*, Vol. 35, No. 4, Spring 2011, pp. 87–125.

²⁴ The principal theme of Gideon Rose, *How Wars End, Why We Always Fight the Last Battle*, New York: Harper Collins, 2010.

²⁵ Colin S. Gray, *The Strategy Bridge*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.

torrents of human passion, friction, and contingency without significant effort. Suspended above that torrent, the strategist's job is to hold that bridge and give coherence to the application of force and scarce resources.

At the risk of being labeled a pendant, the purported benefits of the bridge metaphor are worth examining briefly. Dr. Gray has admitted that the notion of a bridge is less than ideal in the sense that a steel or stone bridge is passive or static.²⁶ My principal concern is that in American strategic culture too many policy challenges are approached as engineering problems.²⁷ On my side of the Atlantic, problems have solutions. These solutions can be designed like an engineer's drawings or an architect's scale models and then purpose built in a straight linear fashion with a master blueprint. Furthermore, the strategic DNA in the United States tends to displace the human dimension of war and masks the biases of the policymaker into a strictly rational and antiseptic decision maker. The mental image of a man-made, steel-girdered span or something akin to Waterloo bridge in London only reinforces a cultural frame of reference that too often equates policy to an actionable plan, and too frequently confuses action and resources expended with progress. The end result is all science and no art, a massive engineering project with arches and trusses with little account of the intangible but tectonic forces at play.

Furthermore, we should acknowledge our Clausewitzian understanding of war and strategy as a reciprocal activity, one in which the adversary is a relevant if not central part of the context.²⁸ Keeping this interactive relationship or duel foremost in our mind is surely germane. A single bridge metaphor is as sterile as the Clausewitzian trinity which invariably tends to force analysis inward to examining rational policy represented by government, with the passion of the people and the acclaimed chance and genius of military action. Our understanding of war and warfare must embrace the competitive and reciprocal essence of the subject. There is a duel

²⁶ Gray, *Strategy Bridge*, p. 7.

²⁷ Dr. Gray identified this element of American strategic culture. See Colin S. Gray, *Irregular Enemies and the Essence of Strategy: Can the American Way of War Adapt?*, Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, Army War College, March 2006.

²⁸ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, Paret and Howard trans., Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986, p. 191.

inherent to its fundamental nature. But the notion of “dueling bridges” does not generate a lot of satisfaction.

We should explore alternative metaphors, by starting with the Toffleresque notion that societies wage war largely framed by the manner in which they generate wealth.²⁹ This Third Wave approach suggests value to a metaphor more oriented towards the Information Age. One could posit a linkage and function connecting the nodes of policymakers with the networks of tactical actors in the Infosphere as a potential metaphorical device. In this non-industrial model, the purpose of strategy is served by the Computer Server which collects, assembles and dispatches discrete packets of information in a logical flow and facilitates the transfer of directive and feedback responses in a continuous way over great distance between those on the network. This model has the advantage of offering both hardware and software to the metaphor to capture both physical and cognitive aspects of the policy-strategy-tactics bridge. It also reflects the dynamical, evolving, non-linear elements of human conduct in an open system.

In the hardware sense, the word *server* typically designates computer that host software applications that support the work demands of a network environment which can be large mainframes or distributed tactical personal computers. In the context of client-server architecture, a server is a computer program running to serve the requests of other programs, the "clients." Thus, the "server" strategist performs some computational or logic task on behalf of "clients" and well as connecting them with supporting software. In this client-server configuration, information between the entities is shared with each other. Servers often provide essential services across a network inside a large organization.

This metaphor has some value in that it too offers an interactive, connecting metaphor and one that emphasizes both a connecting role and cognitive function of some kind, which represents the function that strategy serves. This computer network model also represents the two-way traffic or discourse like Dr. Gray’s proverbial bridge. However, even worse than the well trod bridge is the notion that the art and mystery of strategy can be resolved by gadgetry or

²⁹ Alvin Toffler, *The Third Wave*, New York: Bantom, 1984.

reduced to the movement of 0's and 1's.³⁰ The notion that technology is uniquely American competitive advantage or that complex challenges can be resolved principally by technological advances is a compelling but false narrative in U.S. history.³¹ Further depleting the utility of this metaphor is the notion that numerous bytes of data and information equate to wisdom or the contextual knowledge necessary to function effectively as a strategist.

Thus, at the end of the day, Professor Gray's device has genuine value beyond the other alternative. Its' overwhelming virtue is based on its simplicity and imagery. A bridge has one function, to connect two banks separated by some distance. A strategy bridge securely connects policy with its instrumental agencies, including military forces. However, rather than a modern bridge with its arches that we may want to consider a floating bridge as the better metaphor, one more appropriate to the tides and furies of friction and contingency. Good strategy certainly allows one to navigate better against the inevitable complexities of execution, but we cannot expect to rise above the torrent. We can proceed with this essay's principal aim, which is to explore why the U.S. national security community finds the strategic bridge ineluctably shaky if not utterly unspannable.

As noted earlier the strategy bridge connects both organizational entities as much as policy to actions. In theory, one embankment represents the policy community, largely comprised of very senior civilians. Far on the alternate bank are the operational/tactical units that provide the action component of strategy. These two communities come from their different worlds, which are filtered by the orientation, culture, education, professional lexicon of each community. It is these different lens or culture that contribute frequently to dysfunction at the strategic level and make the strategist's job as complicated as it is. There is great value in understanding the role and evolving character of strategic culture in international relations.³²

³⁰ For a modern interpretation see Thomas G. Mahnken, *Technology and the American Way of War Since 1945*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2010.

³¹ For a critique of this aspect of U.S. strategic culture, see H. R. McMaster, "The Human Element: When Gadgets Become Strategy," *World Affairs*, Winter 2009.

³² Colin S. Gray, "Comparative Strategic Culture," *Parameters*, Vol. 14, No. 4 Winter 1984, p. 26; Colin S. Gray, "Out of the Wilderness: Prime Time for Strategic Culture," *Comparative Strategy*, Vol. 26, No. 1 January-February 2007, p. 5.

There is also value in understanding distinctions between strategic and military cultures, and national cognitive styles and their influence on innovation and adaptation to a changing security environment.³³ However, polities are not monolithic, they are more often *composites* of agencies and institutions with their own organizational cultures and value systems.³⁴ Strategic and military culture are not synonymous.³⁵ A clash of cultures can occur and history suggests that it often does.³⁶ This clash can be constructive, representing another potential interaction on the bridge and the value of the bridge metaphor as it connects disparate perspectives and cultures.

The Clash of Cultures

However, more often, by acts of omission, within American policy and strategic circles, the clash is muted or incomplete. The military community in the United States has its own unique military culture, a subcomponent of its national strategic culture. I have written on this particular topic elsewhere as have other critics of U.S. military culture as it applies to either strategy or the application of force.³⁷ Three principal cultural attributes of the American military characterize its world view and professional frame of reference.

³³ Lawrence Sondhaus, *Strategic Culture and Ways of War*, New York: Routledge, 2011. On how national cultures and cognitive styles impact the identification of potential revolutions in military innovation see Dima Adamsky, *The Culture of Military Innovation: The Impact of Cultural Factors on the Revolution in Military Affairs in Russia, the US, and Israel*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011.

³⁴ On the organizational culture of separate military institutions of the U.S. Military see Carl Builder, *Masks of War*, Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University, 1989; on the U.S. Army see Brian McAllister Linn, *The Echo of Battle: The Army's Way of War*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007, and on the personality or "mask" of the U.S. Marines, see F. G. Hoffman, "The Marine Mask of War," *Marine Corps Gazette*, January 2012.

³⁵ A point made by Elizabeth Kier, *Imagining War: French and British Military Doctrine Between the Wars*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997, p. 30; Theo Farrell, *The Norms of War, Cultural Beliefs and Modern Conflict*, London: Lynne Rienner, 2005.

³⁶ See my chapter "History and the Future of Civil-Military Relations, Bridging the Gaps," in Williamson Murray and Richard Hart Sinnreich, eds., *The Past as Prologue, The Importance of History to the Military Profession*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007, pp. 247–265..

³⁷ F. G. Hoffman, *Decisive Force: The New American Way of War*, Westport, CT: Praeger, 1996. See also F. G. Hoffman, "The Powell Doctrine: Prudent or Inflexible Force," *Marine Corps Gazette*, February 1994; and F. G. Hoffman, "Decisive Force: The New American Way of War," *Strategic Review*, Summer 1994. For an interesting update see Benjamin Buley, *The New American Way of War*, London: Routledge, 2010.

Autonomy. This characteristic builds upon the Huntingtonian notion that the military provides a unique social service and competency.³⁸ Its expertise, knowledge, sacrifice, and corporateness combine to make it a unique profession with special obligations and status. One of its unique elements is the profession's mastery of the employment of military force and its desire to retain control or autonomy over its professional sphere. Taken too far, this sense of ownership of a preserve can isolate the military officer corps by focusing inward on the most technical elements of its professional domain, detached from domestic political influence or from an understanding of the social/political/economic context in which military power is being applied.

Apolitical. Another aspect of the U.S. military's DNA is its apolitical character. This too stems from Huntington's normative code. The U.S. military ethic seeks to serve society and swears allegiance not to its civilian leadership but to the state's Constitution. The military serves policy, but is not part of the policy making process per se, it advises on critical matters of force development, policy choices, risk assessments, and decisions regarding the use of force. It is to be heard in policy circles, a voice but not a vote. Coupled with Huntington's professional creed, this produces a mindset that divorces politics from thinking and decisions about war, a profoundly anti-Clausewitzian concept. This apolitical character has been stretched over the years, and when military officers cross the line (MacArthur, Fallon, McChrystal), a public rebuke or forced dismissal can occur.

Absolutist. Morris Janowitz once identified two prototypes of American military officer: pragmatists and the absolutists.³⁹ The former accepted the notion that contingencies and policy may dictate the employment of military force for specific and limited aims and purposes short of decisive victory. The absolutist strain represented by MacArthur during the Korean war objects to constraints, embraces the von Moltkean conception of force as a last resort after other means have failed. MacArthur's famous construction that "there is no alternative than to apply every available means to bring it to a swift end. War's very objective is victory not prolonged

³⁸ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957; as well as Dayne E. Nix, "American Civil-Military Relations, Samuel P. Huntington and the Political Dimensions of Military," *Naval War College Review*, Winter 2012, Vol. 65, No. 2, pp. 88–104.

³⁹ Morris Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier: A Social and Political Portrait*, New York: Free Press, 1971.

indecision” is very representative of this strain.⁴⁰ This same notion animates the Powell Doctrine’s call for overwhelming and decisive force in a short time span, and is derived from his Vietnam-era generation.⁴¹

There is a tension between these characteristics. As one British professional said of his “Cousins,” those who have accepted that they serve the state have not necessarily bought into the complementary idea that the statesman is the master.”⁴² Moreover, the intense inward looking focus on the art and science of the profession separates it from the political forces that give it meaning and guide its application in war. Not surprisingly, the end result is a professional orientation that is unconstrained once employed but without the essence of Clausewitz’s most important conception of war as an extension of politics. The result is a profession that is supreme in its technical skills, but strategically autistic.

This has produced not an American way of war, but a Way of Battles that produces disappointment on a regular basis in converting military actions and success into desired strategic effects. The U.S. military’s narrow fixation with the fighting function of warfare substitutes for a deeper and comprehensive grasp of what war is truly all about.⁴³ Others bemoaned the U.S. military’s fascination with technological panaceas for complex challenges.⁴⁴ The larger problem however, despite the U.S. military’s adulation of Clausewitz, is that we too often fail to appreciate his fundamental conclusion that force is applied to serve policy, which

⁴⁰ Quote from Robert J. Donovan, *Tumultuous Years: The Presidency of Harry S. Truman, 1949–1953*, Columbia, MO: University of Missouri, 1996, p. 362.

⁴¹ On the Powell Doctrine, see F. G. Hoffman, *Decisive Force*, op cit; see also Max Boot’s critique in his concluding chapter of *Savage Wars of Peace, Small Wars and the Rise of American Power*, New York: Basic Books, 2004.

⁴² John J. Hackett, “The Military in the Service of the State,” in Malham M. Wakin, ed., *War, Morality and the Military Profession*, Boulder, CO: Westview, 1979, p. 110.

⁴³ Antulio Echevarria, *Towards an American Way of War*, Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, Army War College, January 2004.

⁴⁴ Frederick Kagan, *Finding the Target*, New York: Encounter Books, 2007; H.R. McMaster, “Learning from Contemporary Conflicts to Prepare for Future,” *Orbis*, Fall 2008.

directly influences either the conduct or ending of a war.⁴⁵ General Tommy Frank's comments to his policy counterpart on the eve of the Iraq invasion—"You pay attention to the day after, I'll pay attention to the day of" was sadly representative of the American Way of War.⁴⁶

But the American Way of War is not entirely the result of a peculiarly framed military culture. The other side of the bridge is also responsible for the sometimes dysfunctional translation of policy aims into successful strategic behavior. To preserve the symmetry of my assessment, as well as its alliterative nature, I claim three overall attributes from the civilian-dominated policy embankment before our bridge.

The first characteristic of U.S. policy community is what I call it Aim centric nature. By this I mean the narrow focus on establishing policy aims and objectives as the beginning and end of its responsibility. This confuses policy and the mere ends of the End/Ways/Means logic with the end of the policy planning and supervision process. This characteristic often is represented by intense debates in policy making circles about goals and objectives but too little debate about the way in which these ends are to be obtained and the inherent logic behind which the implementing strategy is based. This is a by-product of Vietnam which acculturated subsequent Presidents including both President George W. Bush and George H. W. Bush to eschew any micromanagement of military plans. An antidote to this pernicious line of thinking was introduced by Eliot Cohen in his *Supreme Command* which argued for an intimate intercourse between policy makers and military planners.⁴⁷ A mastery of detail is not required for policy makers to contribute to strategy and to comprehend its fundamental logic and coherence, but a general familiarization with military history and strategic theory is essential.

⁴⁵ For a brief but critical evaluation of the interpretations of Clausewitz within U.S. military culture see Hew Strachan, *Clausewitz's On War, A Biography*, New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2007, pp. 1–4; as well as his "The Lost Meaning of Strategy," *Survival*, Autumn 2005, Vol. 47, No. 3, pp. 33–54.

⁴⁶ Tommy Franks, *American Soldier*, New York: Regan Books, 2004, p. 441. On pre-war planning the best source is Nora Bensahel, *After Saddam: Pre-War Planning and the Occupation of Iraq*, Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2008.

⁴⁷ Eliot A. Cohen, *Supreme Command, Soldiers, Statesmen, and Leadership in Wartime*, New York: Free Press, 2002.

The U.S. policy community is also an Assumption Free environment. Too often policy discussions bring a number of personal and institutional biases to the table, in the form of implicit and sometimes explicit assumptions.⁴⁸ These are too frequently unchallenged even when documented and even more frequently never revisited during a conflict when interaction with a living breathing adversary with a will of its own proves them untenable.⁴⁹

Finally, because of America's overwhelming military and materiel resources, the U.S. policymaking circle has had the luxury since the end of the Cold War of thinking that policy was unconstrained in terms of Assets. Without unlimited resources, the need to prioritize the application and sequencing of force has taken the need to consider means out of the crucial E/W/M thread. Back in January 2011, then Chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Mike Mullen, USN, told reporters that the doubling of the defense budget since 9/11 had mentally handicapped the military. "We've lost our ability to prioritize, to make hard decisions, to do tough analysis, to make trades," he said.⁵⁰ What Admiral Mullen was referring to was internal to the Pentagon due to its surfeit of resources over the last decade. The dramatic increase in defense spending since 9/11 made the Defense Department's internal resource allocation processes complacent. But the ability to prioritize assets and means has been a challenge for a far longer period, and is only now becoming a concern to the American strategy community, forcing it to reduce its overseas commitments and to prioritize its regional posture.

Part of the frustration between civilian and military leaders is their respective orientations and requirements. The military leader and planner seek clarity of purpose, sustained commitment, and consistency of objectives. The political leader hopes to preserve options, minimize risks, avoid commitments with firm obligations, and wants to extend timelines. The

⁴⁸ T. X. Hammes, "Assumptions – A Fatal Oversight," *Infinity Journal*, Issue 1, Winter 2010, pp. 4–6; and more recently Ben Lombardi, "Assumptions and Grand Strategy," *Parameters*, Spring 2011, pp. 29–40; Gregory F. Treverton and Jeremy J. Ghez, *Making Strategic Analysis Matter*, Conference Proceedings, Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2012.

⁴⁹ On challenging assumptions and red teaming see Williamson Murray, *War, Strategy and Military Effectiveness*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011, pp. 136–137, 164–166.

⁵⁰ Transcript, DOD News Conference, Robert Gates and Admiral Mike Mullen, January 6, 2011. Accessed at <http://www.defense.gov/transcripts/transcript.aspx?transcriptid=4747>.

interaction is a litany of frustration for the participants, and probably will always be so.⁵¹ The military is bound to provide its best advice in council and to selflessly carry out decisions made by elected democratic officials.⁵² The challenge is to generate a constructive output of that interaction that maximizes the potential for positive strategic effect.

The essence of strategy requires a lot more than defining policy aims or even clear military objectives. A policy community that focuses entirely on Aims, makes a habit of unchallenged Assumptions, and acts as if Assets were endless, is not contributing its share towards the crucial discourse and occasionally volatile interaction that *must* occur at the middle of the bridge. The gap in our metaphorical bridge may lie at either end from a flawed policy expecting too much, or in flaws in a military instrument incapable of generating the tactical effects that are desired. The strategist pulls these pieces into a coherent and integrated whole and gives meaning.

The clash of cultures described herein certainly complicate the formulation, execution and adaptation of strategy. The power of the State must be harnessed to a logic that only strategy can provide.

Solutions

There is much discussion these days about fixing America's strategic thinking deficiencies. Some commentators focus on structural solutions. Contrary to some perspectives, process and structure is important in the development and vetting of both good strategy and

⁵¹ Michael D. Pearlman, *Warmaking and American Democracy, The Struggle over Military Strategy, 1700-To the Present*, Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1999; Suzanne C. Nielsen and Don M. Snider, eds., *American Civil-Military Relations: The Soldier and the State in a New Era*, Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009.

⁵² For a minority viewpoint in U.S. military circles see Andrew Milburn, "Breaking Ranks, Dissent and the Military Professional," *Joint Force Quarterly*, No. 59, 2010. The author, a serving U.S. Marine officer argued (inaccurately) that professionals had moral obligations to evaluate and dissent/disobey orders that they did not assess as advancing the national or organizational interest. For a superb response by UNC Professor Richard Kohn see http://ricks.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2010/09/29/richard_kohn_fires_a_warning_flare_about_a_joint_force_quarterly_article

policy.⁵³ The solution set will require three inter-related components, Structure, Process, and Education.

Structure. The making of strategy (and implementation, assessment and adaptation) requires structure. Of course, too much structure or too many bureaucratic equities can be fatal. As one seasoned analyst concludes “the U.S. government has become an increasingly ponderous beast, unable to act quickly or even to understand how its various parts fit together to act at all.”⁵⁴ The organizational pathologies of the current U.S. system impede if not preclude success. The costs of structural dysfunction will get worse, too, because both problems and opportunities in the global environment are becoming increasingly diverse and multidimensional. Handling a nuclear Iran and fighting terrorists, rescuing Darfur and rebuilding failed states in Yemen, managing the entry of new powers in to the international order and protecting against the meltdown of the international financial system---all of these new challenges demand integrated approaches the current system struggles to deliver, designed as it was for a Cold War world that no longer exists.

Structural solutions abound. There are also numerous recommendations to create planning boards and cells at the National Security Council to rectify acknowledged shortfalls. Our major institutional bodies have evolved over time to deal with the intricacies of planning.⁵⁵ As the world has grown more complex, so too have our planning structures. But their complexity has produced more autism than strategic insight or actionable guidance. I will not go so far as Professor Bracken’s deliberately provocative claim that “the higher organization of national security is so dysfunctional that it almost doesn’t matter what strategies we select or how

⁵³ Ionut C. Popescu, “The Disputed Importance Of Process In The Making Of American Grand Strategy,” *Orbis*, Vol. 54, Issue 4, Fall 2010.

⁵⁴ Paul Bracken, “Managing to Fail, Why Strategy Is Disjointed,” *The American Interest*, September/October 2007, p. 71.

⁵⁵ On the history of these institutions, see Amy Zegart, *Flawed by Design, The Evolution of the CIA, JCS and NSC*, Stanford University Press, 1999; John Prados, *Keepers of the Keys: A History of the National Security Council from Truman to Bush*, New York: William Morrow, 1992; and David Rothkopf, *Running the World: The Inside Story of the National Security Council and the Architects of American Power*, New York: Public Affairs, 2005.

individually brilliant our policymakers are.”⁵⁶ Even brilliant organizational arrangements cannot compensate for ignorance or malfeasance at the policy table.

But I wholeheartedly agree that organization matters. It is important to recognize that such structures exist to support decision makers, not to develop and rationalize decisions without direction. At best, they should serve as a catalyst for strategic debate by policy makers. American planning offers structure, but they are not a substitute for effective political or military leadership willing and able to grapple at the arch of the bridge to resolve the apparent alchemy of political aims into directed and purposeful effort.

A number of structural changes have been offered. The reestablishment of the National Planning Board, a throwback to the Eisenhower era has been suggested. It would be comprised of statutory members from selected Departments of the Federal Government, and reside within the Executive Office of the President. Recreating this body and establishing its secretariat as a function of the National Security Advisor (NSA) is one way to reintroduce the NSC staff to long-range and conceptual thinking. Instead of a full blown interagency planning process run by the NSC staff, a dedicated NSC Strategic Planning Directorate is another option.⁵⁷ This directorate would report to the NSA but could still be comprised of a staff seconded from the various departments, as well as academic or policy experts.⁵⁸

The final option is the least ambitious, the designation of a small handful of NSC staffers as a full time planning cell. Its performance would be reliant upon the NSA’s authority, but limited by its weak connections to the rest of the planning staffs of other national security partners. General Zinni has sketched out an innovative proposal for a National Planning and Monitoring Agency.⁵⁹ This model assumes that the current NSC staff is too crisis oriented and perhaps too politically constrained. Rather than build something within the White House, this

⁵⁶ Bracken, p. 71.

⁵⁷ Peter Feaver and William Imboden, “A Strategic Planning Cell on National Security at the White House,” in Daniel W. Drezner, ed., *Avoiding Trivia: The Role of Strategic Planning in American Foreign Policy*, Washington, DC: Brookings, 2009.

⁵⁸ Friedberg, “Strengthening U.S. Strategic Planning,” pp. 55–59.

new entity could be created to monitor events, trends, and to develop and integrate strategic and operational plans that involve more than a single agency or Department. The leadership, appointment status, Congressional oversight obligations, and independence of such a body need to be detailed before we can fully assess it. Yet, it offers an original solution to a long standing problem.

My preferred option is a high-level body of dedicated strategists from the national security cadre akin to the National Intelligence Council. Members of this council would be nominated by the various Cabinet agencies and demonstrate proven policy and strategy development skills. This body would be a full time strategic body, similar to the National Planning Board but not comprised of officials dual hated as part of the existing agencies and Departments. They responsible for developing long-term strategic plans, and in crises would serve as a mechanism for red teaming and vetting proposed interagency strategic plans. This National Planning Council could be composed of external experts, as well as full-time government personnel and would be the NSC's think tank, able to direct resources independently to study strategic challenges and devise creative solutions. In the main, they should be drawn from a national security service corps of experts with breadth and depth and work for the National Security Advisor.⁶⁰

Process. The noted U.S. military historian Williamson Murray directed a major study that produced the definitive understanding of how states and bureaucracies go about framing their strategic intentions and applying them in the real world. Instead of a linear process that produces a static document or conception, Dr. Murray found that strategy should be viewed as a *process*. This process does not merely conclude with a fixed product but reflects “a constant adaptation to shifting conditions and circumstances in a world where chance, uncertainty, and

⁵⁹ For an original proposal regarding strategic organizational initiatives, see Tony Zinni and Tony Koltz, *The Battle for Peace: A Frontline Vision of America's Power and Purpose*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.

⁶⁰ On the concept of a cadre of national security experts with interagency experience, see *Roadmap for National Security*, pp. 101–102; see also the detailed assessment by James Locher et al, *Forging a New Shield*, Washington, DC: Project on National Security Reform, November 2008, pp. 500–511.

ambiguity dominate.”⁶¹ Our holder of the bridge is thus a process manager not merely a toll collector. This process serves to “weigh imponderables through structured debates and pare away personal, organization and national illusions and conceits.”⁶² The process is also an iterative and continuously renewable process. It is not about writing a single plan—it’s about applying the plan to real circumstances and constantly adapting it to changing conditions and constantly confirming the coherent logic of a strategy in action.

However, decision-making processes at the highest councils of war are largely determined by the personality and information processing styles of major leaders. There are trends within U.S. military planning circles to enhance military decision making by incorporating more holistic, systems theory-based, modes of critical inquiry to improve planning. This movement is generically called the Design movement, although it incorporates various different strains and influences from foreign military thinking including that of Shimon Naveh from Israel.⁶³ The intent behind this initiative is not pernicious, but the end result can be problematic.

The U.S. military has learned from recent conflicts that a myopic focus on the operational level of war can be limiting. It has extended its operational art with new conceptions of what is called Operational or Campaign Design. Design has traditionally been a part of the art of campaign planning but is now being systematized with modern techniques of critical thinking. On the plus side it begins to craft a serious mode of thinking about identifying the contextual factors and the essence of the problem, as well as the fundamental logic of the way(s) selected for employment in the campaign will resolve the problem and achieve the desired policy aim. The downside is that this cognitive thinking can easily be reduced to a process-centric mode of thinking and that the thinking is occurring too late and on one side of the bridge.

⁶¹ From the introduction to Williamson Murray, MacGregor Knox, and Alvin Bernstein, eds., *The Making of Strategy: States, Rulers, and War*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 1.

⁶² MacGregor Knox, “Continuity and revolution in the making of strategy,” in Williamson Murray, MacGregor Knox, and Alvin Bernstein, eds., *The Making of Strategy: Rulers, States and War*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 645.

⁶³ Huba Wass de Czege, “Systemic Operational Design: Learning and Adapting in Complex Missions,” *Military Review*, January-February 2009, pp. 2–12.

Much of what the U.S. military is solving with Design and incorporating into its planning processes are either usurping or fulfilling tasks/questions/issues that should be the preserve of that black hole called strategy. Consider this statement by a leading but underappreciated American military theorist:

Design can be thought of as problem *setting*—locating, identifying and formulating the problem, its underlying causes, structure and operative dynamics—in such a way that an approach to solving the problem emerges. In the words of Nobel laureate Herbert Simon, “solving a problem simply means representing it so as to make the solution transparent.” In contrast, planning can be thought of as problem *solving* once the problem has been set (by design or default). Where design starts with a “blank sheet of paper,” planning occurs within an established conceptual framework, whether created through design or the result of unquestioned defaults or assumptions. Where planning focuses on generating a plan—a series of executable actions—design focuses on learning about the nature of an unfamiliar problem. Planning thus focuses on the physical, devising actions intended to have a direct effect in the physical world. In comparison, design is more conceptual, even abstract, hypothesizing about underlying causes and dynamics.⁶⁴

This sounds a lot like strategy where the essence of a problem and a defined policy aim are understood and evaluated in terms of translating intent, end states or aims into action. This is evidence of either the need to replace what strategists are NOT providing or further evidence of what militarized formulation of what strategy should be providing to theater planning. Instead of operational design, the concept of Strategy Design may be a more valuable concept to incorporate the critical thinking and holistic problem solving concepts embedded in design, and a way of closing that black hole where American strategy too frequently falls. But one might not throw the baby out with the bath water since valuable techniques are being developed that might better be taught and applied in a poli-mil environment where national strategy is best developed.

This development has been identified and critically evaluation by a pair of Australian concept and doctrine writers with clear implications.

The U.S. military’s decision to extend the meaning of operational art to encompass campaign planning is a theoretical dead end which perpetuates the failing identified by Echavarría (sic) and others. By conflating two very different ideas, the U.S. (and the Anglophone world in lockstep)

⁶⁴ John F.Schmitt, “A Systemic Concept for Operational Design” Quantico, VA. Undated.

has reinforced the difficulty of the strategic management of wars and exposed an Achilles (sic) heel.⁶⁵

But what Kelly and Brennan overstate is the cause of this development. It was *not* the American obsession with German methodologies or Russian operational theory that pushed Design to the forefront. It was, as discussed earlier, a reflection of a military culture that after Vietnam sought to distance itself from politically-derived interference and micromanagement from civilian leaders who dabbled in tactics and mastered accountability avoidance. This version of an American Stab in the Back syndrome has been adequately covered in the U.S. military literature and was codified by the Vietnam era generation in Colin Powell's doctrine of overwhelming/decisive force. In short, the U.S. military did not devour strategy; they ran from it to focus on their own professional sphere and their bridge embankment. This resulted from their apolitical character and was perceptively picked up on by Hew Strachan in his depiction of the American penchant for operating in a "politics free zone."

While Kelly and Brennan have misidentified the cause of the virus, they are absolutely correct in their prognosis of how it manifests itself by isolating policy and politics from campaign planning. They also hit the target when they conclude that "it seems most likely that at least partially for bureaucratic reasons rather than reasons having to do with how to wage war."⁶⁶

But while the U.S. military ran to their side of the embankment, many in the civilian strategy world ran in the opposite direction, focused on policy and acquisition management. Both sides can take blame, but our Australian commentators fail to recognize the abdication of general strategy at the apex of U.S. military circles. So rather than devouring strategy, both sides have walked away from the dinner table and retreated to their respective domains. The

⁶⁵ Justin Kelly and Mike Brennan, *Alien: How Operational Art Devoured Strategy*, Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2009, pp. 70–71. See also the same authors in "The Fort Leavenworth Heresy and the Perversion of Operational Art," *Joint Force Quarterly*, January 2010, pp. 109–116.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

development of design now seeks to backfill in the missing components that the military recognizes as absent or seeks to control better than in a dynamic civil-military partnership.⁶⁷

Kelly and Brennan correctly call for much of what we think of as Campaign Design to be shifted back to the strategy process to better provide all the agencies and instruments of national power some consideration in the promulgation of complete strategic guidance. Rather than throw away its nascent techniques, the application of Design at the strategic level may afford the interagency community a more comprehensive methodology to resolve the complex interactive variables that constitute the art of strategy at the national level. This would include a comprehensive grasp of context, assumptions, constraints, and risks; in addition to a coherently linked end/ways/means chain.

Education. Others believe that the gap can be spanned by educating strategists at America's premier institutions of higher learning including at U.S. war colleges. Advocates of rigorous, historically-grounded education based their arguments on how history contributes to understanding the future and contributing to the present. Given the dynamics of today's purportedly complex strategic environment, it not surprising that education is seen as critical. In the words of Professor Williamson Murray at the U.S. Naval War College

The world of the twenty-first century is –a world that will look more like the pre-Westphalian world—will demand a senior leadership for American's military that is far better educated. Senior American military leaders must possess the ability to understand and deal with the “other.” There is an enormous intellectual and conceptual gap between the views of most American elite on issues of war and peace. Only senior officers who are deeply educated in the issues surrounding the use of military force can bridge this gap.⁶⁸

The U.S. professional military education (PME) system is rigorously defined and accredited by external civilian educational associations and by the Joint Chiefs of Staff.⁶⁹ The

⁶⁷ Adam Elkus and Crispin Burke, “Operational Design: Promise and Problems,” *Small Wars Journal*, February 9, 2010. Accessed June 28, 2012, at <http://smallwarsjournal.com/blog/journal/docs-temp/362-elkus.pdf>. Elkus and Burke cogently capture the risks in design and its implementation.

⁶⁸ See Williamson Murray, “Professionalism and Professional Military Education in the Twenty-first Century,” in Nielsen and Snider, eds., *American Civil Military Relations*. The quote is at pp. 147–148.

⁶⁹ Not without some comments, see Joan Johnson-Freese, “The Reform of Military Education, Twenty-five Years Later,” *Orbis*, Winter 2012, pp. 135–153.

civilian leadership and policy community are, by and large, the product of the finest schools in the United States, which include many excellent programs in international relations, political science and security studies at leading universities with close links to current and past government officials. Undoubtedly, the leading PME institutions provide the best platform for introducing their students to the fundamentals of strategy in their 10-month curricula. But for many officers, this will be the beginning and perhaps the end of their formal academic study of strategy. At best, these great strategy courses do more than just expose students to the complexities of designing, implementing and adapting strategies.⁷⁰

Many students at these institutions will not be assigned to positions where their strategist mettle will be tested. Many individuals do not have the cognitive skills for strategy if they have the potential for flag or general officer rank. In a 1973 book on grand strategy, the American defense scholar John Collins concluded that while “strategy is a game that anyone can play, it is not a game that just anyone can play well. Only the most gifted participants have much chance to win a prize....” The schoolhouse can expose the complexities of historical example and introduce students to process but it cannot train strategists. As Professor Gray notes, “the best we can do is to try to identify those individuals who have this talent and then make sure that they are put in positions in which they can use it to good effect.”

The security studies programs do as well as their military counterparts in introducing students to strategic history and the messy but never mundane aspects of making strategy. Obviously, education by rigorous study and observation and coaching is not the same as experience. But education must be our starting point. As Dr. Colin Gray, the Anglo-American strategist advises

At its highest level, the strategist has to attempt to orchestrate military and other behavior for desired political consequences. This is an inherently enormous challenge in currency conversion from military coin to political coin. Some education in strategic history cannot train a person regarding best practice for his historically unique strategic problems. But

⁷⁰ See the description of the strategy course at the National War College in Cynthia Watson, “A Vision of Developing the National Security Strategist From the National War College,” in Gabriel Marcella, ed., *Teaching Strategy: Challenge and Response*, Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, March 2010.

that education assuredly can educate today's strategist as to the kinds of behaviors that succeeded and failed in particular categories of a given situation.⁷¹

Consideration to a broader and more sustained educational program to support U.S. national security executive programs built upon the existing foundation at schools like the National Defense University (NDU) should be considered essential.⁷² As Dr. Patrick Cronin, former Director of the Institute for National Security Studies at NDU in Washington, DC, argues for more rigorous admission and graduation standards, and also seconds the notion that a second year program or greater use of civilian educational venues may better serve the U.S. strategy community.⁷³ He argues about the need to produce “a deeper bench of strategist, a cadre of broad, creative, flexible strategic thinkers who have knowledge of all instruments of comprehensive national power, have a clear grasp of international relations and global trends, and understand that no strategy is worthwhile without an ability and plan to implement it.”⁷⁴

But if strategy is an art form requiring deep study coupled with experiential activity inside Washington or at a theater-level headquarters, a more formal and extended program for national security officials to routinely acquire, sustain and exercise strategic thinking may be a fruitful avenue worthy of consideration. But the rigorous study and practice of strategy development and reassessment will never come entirely from the classroom or book study.

Undoubtedly, rigorous mental preparation is needed. Surely, a broad education in both the liberal arts and strategic history is required commendable. So too is a sense of humility about the role of tragedy and contingency in human affairs. If possible, we might want to add a historically-grounded understanding about strategy, as well as a deep understanding about war and warfare, and the enduring continuities of war. A part of that education and a way to enhance civil-military interaction would be shared wargaming and pre-crisis seminars on critical topics prior to the eruption of a security crisis. There is a great value to crisis simulations as a means of

⁷¹ Colin S. Gray, “Strategy: Some Notes for a User’s Guide,” *Infinity Journal*, Vol. 2, Issue 2, Spring, 2012, pp. 4–9.

⁷² As suggested in the conclusions and recommendations of the Project for National Security Reform’s impressive final report, *Forging a New Shield*, pp. 500–513.

⁷³ Patrick M. Cronin, “A Strategic Education,” *Marine Corps Gazette*, June 2010, pp. 60–64.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

testing plans, coming to a greater fidelity on options, and sharing creative thinking.⁷⁵ Such a “strategic immersion” would pay dividends in future challenges and sustained strategic thought.⁷⁶ In particular, it would be a useful laboratory for continuous development, refinement, and dissemination in strategic practice. This is something that the entire U.S. national security enterprise could benefit from. NDU in Washington DC, has a world-class strategic leadership and crisis simulation center capable of supporting national leaders in this strategy immersion initiative.

Conclusion

For America to retain its place on the world’s stage, it will have to change its strategic mindset and machinery. Strategic thinking cannot stay in the dark, the strategic flame must be relit.⁷⁷ Policymakers must get off their embankment and meet at the middle to join with their strategists to “weigh imponderables through structured debates that pare away personal, organizational, and national illusions and conceits.”⁷⁸ They must squarely face the parochial interests of bureaucracy, define assumptions, accurately discern strategic options, and make choices about ways and means. They must be prepared for shocks and to peel back the “known unknowns” to better anticipate the future.⁷⁹

At the end of the day, strategy is the critical bridge between the often ephemeral aims of policy and the gritty reality of military action. That translation of objectives-to-action requires a guiding logic that only strategy can provide. Without a strategy worthy of the name, the cash transaction of battle has little purpose and an even lower chance of effectively translating that effort into desirable ends at an exchange rate that is acceptable. This is the singular duty of the strategist on the bridge. As a strategic theorist historian of some renown has commented, “It is

⁷⁵ Lincoln P. Bloomfield, “Playing Games with Foreign Policy,” *Naval Institute Proceedings*, July 2003, pp. 68–72.

⁷⁶ Cronin, p. 62.

⁷⁷ Carl H. Builder, “Keeping the Strategic Flame,” *Joint Force Quarterly*, Winter 1996–1997, pp.76–84.

⁷⁸ MacGregor Knox, “Continuity and revolution in the making of strategy,” p. 645, in Williamson Murray, MacGregor Knox, and Alvin Bernstein, eds., *The Making of Strategy, Rulers, States and War*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

⁷⁹ I am indebted to Nathan Freier, “Know Unknowns: Unconventional Strategic Shocks in Defense Strategy Development,” Carlisle, PA: Peacekeeping and Stability Operations Institute, November 2008.

the duty of the strategist to try to match purposeful military effort and its consequences with the country's political interests expressed as policy. This can be a mission of heroic difficulty, even to the point of impossibility.”⁸⁰

Strategy may be difficult, but not impossible. Structure, process and especially education are contributory components to resolving the defects in how U.S. policymakers think about war and apply American military power. Strategy, both the process and the product, are essential to spanning the black hole from policy aims to achieved strategic effect. Strategy must be more than mere fluff, it cannot be founded upon an inadequate diagnosis or a mere list of goals.⁸¹ The bridge must be the conduit for the two-way traffic that animates action and provides a continual feedback between ends, ways and means. It is not an illusion or an exercise in futility, it is essential for rationalizing the purpose, costs and means of war.

Strategy remains the mechanism by which political goals are tightly bound to diplomatic action and military efforts. For “without strategy, there is no rationale for how force will achieve purposes worth the price in blood and treasure.”⁸² Yet, strategy is frequently ignored. Too often there is a gap in the bridge, which has been covered by greater effort and resources. But in a world in which relative power levels are narrowing, America's historical bifurcation between policy and operations must be closed. Given that our security communities expect undaunted sacrifices from those toiling at the tactical level, much more can and should be expected at the summit.

⁸⁰ Colin S. Gray, *Schools for Strategy: Teaching Strategy for 21st Century Conflict*, Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, Army War College, November 2009, p. vii.

⁸¹ Richard Rumelt, “The Perils of Strategy,” *McKinsley Quarterly*, June 2011.

⁸² Richard K. Betts, “Is Strategy an Illusion?” *International Security*, Fall 2000, p. 5.