Making Sense of War

Strategy for the 21st Century

Strategy is commonly referred to as the art of war, as the way in which military force is used to achieve political objectives. *Making Sense of War: Strategy for the 21st Century* provides a comprehensive and clear analysis of the complex business of waging war. Written in lucid prose, the book gives readers a thorough understanding of the key concepts in strategic thought, concepts that have endured since the Athenian general Thucydides and the Chinese philosopher/warrior Sun Tzu first wrote about strategy some 2500 years ago. It also examines the influence on strategic choice and military strategy of political, legal, and technological change.

Making Sense of War explains the nature and significance of such strategic choices as compellence and coercion, and such strategic principles as identifying and attacking the centre of gravity, seizing and holding ground, firepower and manoeuvre, and the knockout blow. It discusses the constraints and opportunities facing military commanders in the 21st century, and demonstrates that the formulation of military strategy will continue to be perhaps the single most important responsibility for senior security officials.

The book discusses strategy at every level of competition, employing a thematic approach and using historical examples from 500 BCE to the present. It offers original insights into the imperatives of military success in the era of asymmetric warfare, but remains readable for a wide range of readers.

Alan Stephens is a senior lecturer at the University of New South Wales Australian Defence Force Academy. Previous appointments include principal adviser to the Australian Federal Parliament's Joint Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee, official historian for the RAAF, contributing editor to *Asia-Pacific Defence Reporter*, military history commentator on ABC television, and RAAF pilot.

Nicola Baker is a lecturer on Strategic Studies at the University of New South Wales Australian Defence Force Academy. She has worked as a consultant to various Australian defence organisations and written on a range of military and strategic issues.

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Alan Stephens and Nicola Baker

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Contents

Abbreviations

ATF	Australian Task Force
CENTO	Central Treaty Organisation
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency (US)
DCA	defensive counter-air
ECOMOG	Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group
EBP	effects-based planning
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
IAF	Israeli Air Force
ICBM	inter-continental ballistic missile
INTERFET	International Force for East Timor
ISTAR	intelligence, surveillance, target acquisition, reconnaissance
MAD	mutual assured destruction
MOOTW	military operations other than war
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NCW	network-centric warfare
NSC	National Security Council
ONUC	Operation des Nations Unies au Congo
OODA	observation-orientation-decision-action
PGMs	precision-guided munitions
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organisation
PSO	Peace Support Operations
QRF	Quick Reaction Force

RAF	Royal Air Force
ROE	rules of engagement
SACEUR	Supreme Allied Commander, Europe
SEATO	Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation
UNAMET	United Nations Mission in East Timor
UNAMSIL	United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone
UNFICYP	United Nations Force in Cyprus
UNITA	National Union for Total Independence of Angola
UNITAF	Unified Task Force
UNOMOC	United Nations Operation Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo
UNOSOM	United Nations Operation in Somalia
UNPROFOR	United Nations Protection Force

Preface

CHAPTERS one to six were written by Alan Stephens and chapters seven to ten by Nicola Baker. Both authors contributed to the Introduction and chapter eleven.

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Introduction

AT THE BEGINNING of the twenty-first century many long-standing strategic beliefs and practices appear to be under serious challenge, to the extent that some commentators have even declared 'the end of strategy'.[1]

There can be little doubt that the international environment is experiencing momentous change. The phenomenon of globalisation seems to be sweeping away national boundaries; the communications and information revolution is redefining who relates to whom, how, when and where, again on a global basis; and the 'market' may be superseding the 'nation' as the basis of statehood. Those secular pressures are undermining the nation-state but ironically contributing to a resurgence in the innately exclusive and often antagonistic phenomenon of nationalism. A new element of uncertainty and insecurity has been introduced by al-Qa'ida's stunning attack on New York City and Washington on September 11, 2001 and the rise more generally of the incidence of suicide bombing.

Simultaneously, the potential for the large-scale, theatre-level wars between nations that have shaped both the nature of conflict and the structure of defence forces for centuries seems to be diminishing. The Korean Peninsula, the Taiwan Straits, and Israel and the Middle East remain dangerous flashpoints, but major inter-state wars have generally been on the decline. Following a Cold War that ended with a whimper not a bang, the number of armed conflicts around the world between 1991 and 2003 decreased by more than 40 per cent, international crises declined by 70 per cent, and expenditure on

international arms transfers fell by 33 per cent.[2] Europe's remarkable shift towards economic unity and political stability since World War II has been particularly significant, its recent progress tending to make us forget that, prior to 1945, it was the cockpit for most of the world's critical inter-state tensions.

Where major conflict does still occur, it often takes the shape of civil war. The extreme human rights abuses often associated with these wars present the community of states with a moral and legal dilemma: should they intervene to prevent suffering or should the sovereign rights of states – a key element of international law – remain paramount? Inter-state conflicts, which are now usually less brutal, present a related challenge, namely, how to reconcile a limited military commitment with the achievement of long-term political objectives. As General Rupert Smith has noted, a significant consequence of the failure to resolve these issues is that even when a military action has been concluded, the confrontation will continue; that is, competitors are likely to be in a 'condition of continuous conflict'.[3]

The early twenty-first century is also characterised by a diverse range of military capabilities and strategies. At one extreme is the United States of America, with its advanced technology, enormously expensive weapon systems, complex networks of people and machines, and doctrines of overwhelming force and paralysis, while at the other extreme are states which have no armed forces at all. In-between states have a wide range of capabilities, and some of those and some sub-state and trans-national groups have developed inventive ways to confound their high-technology opponents.

The first-world approach has produced the kinds of armies, navies and air forces that during the 1990s and the early years of the twenty-first century were overwhelmingly effective in defeating their conventional opponents in the Middle East. But the utility of massive conventional force appears to be becoming increasingly questionable for reasons that this book will explore.

At the start of the twenty-first century it is clear that a thorough understanding of the utility of force and a sound appreciation of strategic possibilities and constraints will be required if politicians are to navigate the changing security environment and military commanders are to match their operations to political objectives. Much

of the literature on strategy and war has been too compartmentalised to provide a useful survey of ideas and practice or offer suggestions for the way forward. Some authors have concentrated on the approaches of particular theorists like Sun Tzu or Clausewitz, or on military commanders like Alexander, Napoleon, or Mao Tse-tung. Others have focused on combat power in the different environments of land, sea, air, the potential of the various services, and the merit of individual concepts such as the indirect approach or the knock-out blow. Despite the obvious current blurring of operational boundaries, much of the contemporary writing on strategy continues to assume that war can be analytically and practically divided into different levels and types of conflict and understood in isolation.

A more integrated, explanatory and prescriptive analysis is warranted and this book has been written with that objective in mind. Our approach has been to examine the subject through themes rather than single issues or eras, and through the influence of powerful agents of transformation as diverse as technology and social attitudes.

Strategy is best described as the bridge between policy and operations; that is, as a plan for the employment of military forces in pursuit of political objectives. Military force can be utilised in a variety of ways: to exert influence in the interests of stability and security, to deter attack, and to prosecute wars. The slogan 'shape-deter-respond' describes these approaches not as alternatives but as a necessary continuum to be implemented in sequence. This sequence reflects the long-standing strategic judgment that it is better to achieve objectives by shaping – by gaining and exploiting influence – than by relying on the more uncertain notion of deterrence; but that if shaping fails, it is better to deter than have to move into the decidedly uncertain arena of responding. In this book, we describe strategy and discuss its potential and limitations at all three stages.

A good strategy should always fit securely into the enduring ends-ways-means construct, in which 'ends' identifies the political objective, or, in current terminology, the effect we wish to create; 'ways' defines the method we choose to pursue that effect; and 'means' describes the tools available to implement that way. It follows that if either the means or the ways is inconsistent with the desired ends,

then the strategic approach will be unsound, regardless of the available firepower, technology, doctrine, and organisational arrangements.

It is no use winning battles if they do not contribute in some way to the achievement of political objectives; conversely, some military defeats can make a contribution to eventual political victory. Depending on the circumstances, a particular outcome might be regarded as a win by some, as a loss by others. For example, in 480 BCE a small Spartan-led alliance of Greeks defending the mountain pass at Thermopylae against a massive Persian army was eventually defeated. However, the time won by the defenders enabled their countrymen further afield to prepare for war, and was crucial to the Greeks' ultimate victory. In the greater scheme of things, the Spartans' loss was the first step towards this goal.

Strategy is best appreciated by an understanding of its enduring themes and significant shifts, and through familiarity with its classical texts and the ideas of its most influential theorists and practitioners. That has been our aim in casting a wide historical net, in addition to enlivening abstract theory by way of tangible illustration. *Making Sense of War* has made extensive use of specific historical examples to illustrate general strategic issues. In some chapters our approach is thematic or ahistorical, in others we focus on the evolution of ideas and practices.

Chapters one and two on 'How to win' and 'Stove-piped strategy' are concerned primarily with theory, in the first instance by establishing the nature of strategy and discussing the essential logic of the ends-ways-means construct; and in the second by reviewing the major theories that have underpinned traditional Western approaches to war. Chapters three and four address the transition from theory to practice by examining traditional approaches to warfighting and tracing the translation of strategy into action through the fundamental expressions of manoeuvre and the application of force.

That translation is continued in chapters five and six, but in a more applied form. The mechanism of 'shaping' is discussed, describing the idealised concept of winning without fighting through the manipulation of influence; while the concept of 'strategic paralysis' examines the possibility of winning with minimum costs by stunning an adversary into inaction. The idea of defining desired outcomes in terms

of effects rather than physical destruction, damage or conquest is an important addition to strategic thinking analysed in chapter six.

It is axiomatic that if we are to make good strategy, we must understand the nature of war, especially its political dimension. Chapters seven to nine are concerned with this essential window into strategic thought, particularly as it relates to the twenty-first century. Because of the emphasis on the present, these chapters inevitably refer frequently to the US experience. As the world's only military superpower during the 1990s and into the start of the twenty-first century, the United States has exerted an extraordinary influence on contemporary international relations in general, and on patterns of strategic behaviour in particular.

When states are contemplating war – before they make a decision to commit or finalise their military strategy – they must consider a whole range of political, diplomatic, social, economic and other factors. Chapter seven examines these issues, and some of the problems they pose for war planners and chapter eight extends the discussion to the evolving legal and enduring prudential constraints on strategy and war. Chapter nine explores the vexed issue of civil–military relations and the impact that debates over this issue have had on strategic flexibility and international security. Chapter ten examines the special challenges of armed humanitarian interventions and the lessons drawn from these types of deployments for the conduct of all future wars. Finally, chapter eleven discusses the nature of twenty-first century threats and distinguishes between what is likely to endure in strategy and what may have to change.