

# The Meaning Of Strategy:

Part I:  
The Origin Story <sup>1</sup>



Sir Lawrence Freedman, PhD

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The word "strategy," which is now commonplace, only first came into use to understand military affairs at the beginning of the 19th century in Europe. Since then, its meaning has changed in important ways.

At the heart of the historical study of strategy is a tension between the consideration of strategy as practice, which is bound up with the history of human conflict, and strategy as theory. The theorists can draw on all the practice, but their task is complicated by the fact that many practitioners did not describe themselves as strategists or, if they did, the term meant something different from how it is now understood.<sup>2</sup> The word "strategy" first came into use in discussions of military affairs in Europe during the 1770s,<sup>3</sup> but it was not until the 20th century that it acquired the broad meanings now attributed to it and that now tend to be applied retrospectively to past practitioners. Prior to World War I, the term had a specifically military character. Only later did it become concerned with the relationship between military means and political ends. Eventually the term became so detached from its military origins to be applied to all fields of human endeavor from sports to business,<sup>4</sup> which is why it has now become necessary to talk of "military strategy" as a sub-category of this much broader field.

The much narrower and largely apolitical early usage needs to be kept in mind when contemporary practitioners of military strategy turn to the classics of the Napoleonic period, especially Carl von Clausewitz, when seeking to gain a deeper understanding of their trade. It is best to do this critically, recognizing the specific issues these earlier theorists were addressing and the conceptual framework with which they were working.

In this, the first of two articles, I explore how "strategy" was understood when it first appeared. I first consider why it would not have been difficult to introduce strategy into the military lexicon at this time. As the value of the word was to help distinguish the higher levels of command from the lesser levels of command, I show how the concept of strategy developed in tandem with that of tactics.

One issue was whether this higher level was the domain of natural creativity, normally spoken of as "military genius," or else involved principles that could be learned and applied in a variety of different situations. The first of these was more of a French approach and the second more German. Both, however, were superseded by the focus on the decisive battle that was a feature of the work of both Baron Antoine-Henri de Jomini and Clausewitz, inspired by the campaigns of Napoleon Bonaparte. In a second article, I will show — largely by looking at discussions of strategy in Britain and the United States — how much a consensus on the general meaning of the term, if not a precise definition, was established during the first half of the 19th century and why this changed little during the second half. Once it was established that strategy was essentially about preparing forces for a decisive battle, this constrained — rather than liberated — thinking.

Scholars now routinely use the word "strategy" to discuss how wars were fought in the past, enabling them to explore continuities in practice and compare cases over time and space. Such explorations are undertaken, however, with a contemporary understanding of the term, which stresses the importance of using military means to achieve political objectives. In the period considered in this article, the general assumption was that any political objectives for which it was worth going to war could be achieved through the defeat of the enemy in battle. It is also important to keep in mind that even during this period, those practicing strategy by and large did not use the term. This is certainly the case with Napoleon, whose campaigns shaped the way strategy came to be viewed in the 19th century. When he eventually pondered the term in exile, he did not find it useful, reflecting his suspicion of attempts to over-intellectualize the art of war.

1 I am indebted to comments from Jeremy Black, Ryan Evans, Beatrice Heuser, and Benedict Wilkinson.

2 Beatrice Heuser described "strategy" as a word in evolution to which she casts with a small "s," as opposed to a practice in evolution, when she gives it a capital "S." This article is about small "s" strategy and, for that matter, small "t" tactics. Beatrice Heuser, *The Evolution of Strategy: Thinking War from Antiquity to the Present* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 3.

3 Beatrice Heuser, *The Evolution of Strategy*, and *The Strategy Makers: Thoughts on War and Society from Machiavelli to Clausewitz* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger Security International, 2010).

4 It was used in other contexts during the 19th century, but (as with revolutionary strategy) with a military analogy in mind. For the history of the concept see Lawrence Freedman, *Strategy: A History* (New York: OUP, 2013).

The question of how strategy should be defined and understood, therefore, was largely a matter for military theoreticians. The theoreticians had military experience of their own, and in the case of the two great figures Jomini and Clausewitz, their ideas developed through their participation in the campaigns of the Napoleonic War. But their theories were still reflections on the practice of others and were not forged through their own practice. Clausewitz, for example, had worked out his definitions of strategy and tactics by 1805, and they had not varied significantly by the time he came to write “On War,” although his broader understanding of warfare undoubtedly did mature over this period.<sup>5</sup> Jomini insisted that the innovations in warfare were in the realm of tactics, while strategy had timeless characteristics. One of the striking features of this story is the lack of interaction between particular military events and the use of the term. All authors drew on military history to make their points, although at first the examples were as likely to be drawn from the ancient world as recent experience.

In the concluding section of my *Strategy: A History*, I considered strategies as scripts. In cognitive psychology, a script is defined as “a predetermined, stereotyped sequence of actions that define a well-known situation.”<sup>6</sup> The basic idea is that when we come across a situation we think we recognize, we draw on an available mental script that creates expectations about how events are likely to unfold. It offers guidance on how others will behave and how we, in turn, should behave, at least until we start to note deviations from the script. Then, improvisation is required. My discussion of the advantage of thinking of strategy as a script was meant not only to explain why much strategy was intuitive, but also to point to the importance of adaptability and flexibility as it became more deliberative.

Scripts are also appropriate with regard to the material considered in this article. The tactical manuals used to prepare forces for battle were often set out as scripts on the appropriate responses to defined situations. An efficient army required an almost intuitive mechanical response to the challenges of warfare. Appropriate responses were drilled into troops who were trained to follow orders mechanically so that they knew without asking how to wheel, form squares, defend, and attack, and when to fire and charge. In the manuals,

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the scripts were set out in meticulous detail, with diagrams and recommended formations. The purpose of drill was to make all of these actions second nature to the troops so that they would always know what was expected of them and would move expeditiously into position, neither flinching nor breaking in the face of the enemy. The more these scripts were internalized by the fighting units, the more effective they would be in a campaign.

The drills became increasingly demanding in the face of the complexity of potential maneuvers and the need for disciplined responses in the face of fire that was becoming heavier. But this created its own problems when circumstances arose in which mechanical responses were inadequate and improvisation was needed. By the middle of the 18th century it was apparent that command at the higher levels must have a creative aspect. This was the level at which opportunities that might be fleeting or missed by a duller eye could be seized boldly with speed and confidence. This was where “military genius” made its mark. For those engaged in officer education, this posed a problem because not every officer would be a genius. It was here that one could address the key question of whether genius was a gift bestowed upon a few great commanders or whether there were rules and principles that could be followed that could get the commander close to genius-like decisions without actually being a genius. This was the level that came to be described as “strategic.”

The context in which these issues came to be identified and addressed took place has been well

<sup>5</sup> Hew Strachan, *Clausewitz's on War* (London: Atlantic Books, 2007).

<sup>6</sup> Freedman, *Strategy*; Roger Schank and Robert Abelson, *Scripts, Plans, Goals, and Understanding: An Inquiry into Human Knowledge Structures* (UK: Psychology Press, 1977), 41.

described and explored elsewhere.<sup>7</sup> The spirit of the enlightenment era demanded a more scientific approach to all human affairs, even war. The systematic study of phenomena such as war required careful classification of its different branches, better to explore its differences. Innovations in cartography allowed generals to work out how they might advance from their home base to confront an enemy, with an eye to logistics, and then plot the conduct of battle. In Britain, for example, the need for better maps for war-making had been underlined during the 1745 Jacobite Rebellion. What became known as the Ordnance Survey began in 1790, under the Board of Ordnance, the government body responsible for the defense of the realm.<sup>8</sup> The growing size and complexity of modern armies demanded far more attention to the problems of how they were to be drilled, moved, sustained, deployed, and commanded. The first general staff designed to support the commander-in-chief was introduced in Austria after the 1750s, although it was the Prussians who made the system work most effectively.<sup>9</sup> Lastly, the War of the Austrian Succession (1740 to 1748) and then the Seven Years War (1756 to 1763) involved tactical innovations, notably in the campaigns of Frederick the Great. In the 1757 Battle of Rossbach, Prussian forces under Frederick defeated a combined French and Holy Roman Empire force twice their size, imposing massive losses while suffering few themselves.<sup>10</sup> After this, the French avoided further combat with Prussia and an introspective debate began into the failings of the French military system and the need for reform. Demands for reform extended to the wider political and economic system, leading to the upheavals resulting from the French Revolution. This provided the setting for Napoleon's wars of conquest, pushing all the issues connected with strategy to the fore, as the defeat of the enemy army in battle became the prime objective.

## “Strategy” Enters the Lexicon

The agreed view is that the word “strategy” arrived in the modern European lexicon in 1771 when the French officer Paul Gédéon Joly de Maizeroy published his translation of the Byzantine emperor Leo VI's *Taktiká*. This included references to *strategía* as well as *taktiké*. *Strategía*, previously discussed as the science of the general, was now transliterated simply as *stratégie*. A word was born.<sup>11</sup> By the end of the Napoleonic Wars, “strategy” was in use by military theorists across Europe. When Clausewitz came to discuss the question of strategy and tactics at the opening of Book 2 of *On War*, he was almost apologetic, assuming that what he had to say was now familiar. Strategy and tactics were so “closely related” that any careful distinction would be considered “superfluous” by many readers. People knew of the distinction (“now almost universal”) and could distinguish between the two (“everyone knows fairly where each particular factor belongs”), even if they could not always understand why the distinction was being made.<sup>12</sup>

Black notes an appearance in a Danish military dictionary in 1810. It was present in Italy by 1817, in Spain and Holland by 1822 and a bit later in Portugal.<sup>13</sup> As we will see in my next article for this journal, the new word was noted almost immediately in Britain, although not actively discussed until the first years of the 19th century. Why was the adoption of “strategy” so widespread and so rapid? The first reason is that it was not really a neologism and would have been understood (if not always in the same way) without much explanation. Those who aspired to contribute to the theory of war in the 18th century were likely to have a firm grounding in the classic Greek and Roman writing on the subject. The key words came from Greek. *Taktiké* meant “order” while *strategos* and *strategía* referred to generals and the things generals did.<sup>14</sup> They would have read Polybius

7 In addition to Heuser's work, see: Azar Gat, *The Origins of Military Thought: From the Enlightenment to Clausewitz* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1989); Azar Gat, *The Development of Military Thought: The Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1992); Hew Strachan, “The Lost Meaning of Strategy,” *Survival*, 47, no. 3 (2005), reprinted with other relevant essays in Hew Strachan, *The Direction of War: Contemporary Strategy in Historical perspective* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

8 Rachel Hewitt, *Map of a Nation: A Biography of the Ordnance Survey* (London: Granta, 2010).

9 Martin van Creveld, *Command in War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985).

10 Dennis Showalter, *Frederick the Great: A Military History* (London: Frontline Books, 2012).

11 This has been most definitively established by Heuser in *The Evolution of Strategy* as well as *The Strategy Makers*.

12 Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 128.

13 Jeremy Black, *Plotting Power; Strategy in the Eighteenth Century* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017). The Russians had never really lost the word, because of the Byzantine influence, although, as noted below, this was more closely associated with stratagem.

14 Edward Luttwak, *Strategy: The Logic of War and Peace* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 239. Luttwak notes that the Greek word does not have the same connotation as the modern word. He suggests this would have been *strategike episteme* (general's knowledge) or *strategon sophia* (general's wisdom).

(c.200 to 118 BCE), whose treatise on tactics was lost, but regular reference was made to it in his subsequent histories of the wars of the Greeks and the Romans.<sup>15</sup> The Greek Aelian of the second century provided a detailed discussion of Greek tactics, which was an important source for later writers concerned with the organization of their own forces.<sup>16</sup> Aelian in turn influenced Arrian (86 to 180), who discussed the concept in his *History of Alexander* and also wrote a treatise on Roman tactics, *Techne Taktike*.<sup>17</sup> The Roman Senator Frontinus (40 to 103) wrote a wide-ranging work on strategy, which was lost, but an extract covering stratagems survived.<sup>18</sup> Stratagems were also addressed in Onasander's *Strategikos* from the first century.<sup>19</sup> Frontinus's writings, including possibly his lost work, influenced Flavius Vegetius Rematus of the late fourth century. Vegetius's *De Re Militari* ("The Military Institutions of the Romans") never lost its popularity and by the 18th century was seen as a vital guide to the military art.<sup>20</sup>

As Christopher Duffy has observed, "intelligent officers knew far more about classical military history than they did about the events of their own time." Vegetius had become "effectively an eighteenth century author."<sup>21</sup> A study of the reading habits of British officers during the course of the 18th century confirms the predominant role for the classics (Polybius, Arrian, Frontinus, Vegetius, etc.) that only latterly gave way to more contemporary authors.<sup>22</sup>

So even before the words strategy and tactics made their way to the center of military theory over the final three decades of the 18th century, they would not have been alien to those educated in the classics.<sup>23</sup> It did not take a great etymological leap for *strategía* and *taktiké* to turn into strategy

## By the end of the Napoleonic Wars, "strategy" was in use by military theorists across Europe.

and tactics. It might have been common, as with Sir John Cheke's 1554 translation of Leo's *Taktiká* from Greek into Latin, to refer to the art of the general or of command (*ars imperatoria*),<sup>24</sup> but elsewhere, variants of the Greek word were in use. They just did not employ contemporary spelling. One known instance comes from the early 17th century. James Maxwell translated Herodian of Alexandria's *History of the Roman Empire*. Against the following words in the text, "All Places of Martiall command they gave to brave noble Captains and Souldiers expert in Marshalling of Armies and Military Exploits," the translator added his own marginal note: "In which words the author hath couched both the parts of war: viz, tactick and Strategmatick."<sup>25</sup> As we will see when other cognate words were used, there was always this dichotomous relationship between the derivatives of *strategía* and *taktiké*.

Although the greatest interest has been in the emergence of strategy, it should be noted that tactics was also not in regular use until well into the 18th century. Up to that point, it was largely used in connection with the wars of antiquity. French dictionaries beginning in 1694 defined "tactiques" by reference to "the Ancients," as "*L'art de ranger des troupes en bataille*." ("The art

15 Fridericus Hulstsch and Evelyn S. Shuckburgh, *The Histories of Polybius* (London: Macmillan, 1889).

16 Christopher Matthew, *The Tactics of Aelian* (London: Pen & Sword Military, 2012).

17 Arrian, *The Campaigns of Alexander*, trans. Aubrey de Selincourt (London: Penguin, 2003).

18 Sextus Julius Frontinus, *The Stratagems and The Aqueducts of Rome*, trans. Charles E. Bennett (London: William Heinemann, 1980).

19 Smith, C.J., "Onasander On How To Be A General," *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 42, no. 571 (1998): 151-166.

20 Flavius Vegetius Renatus, *The Military Institutions of the Romans (De Re Militari)*, ed. Thomas R. Phillips, trans. John Clark (Man sfield Centre, CT: Martino, 2011).

21 Christopher Duffy, *Military Experience in the Age of Reason* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul), 39.

22 Ira Gruber, *Books and the British Army in the Age of the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

23 Although Latin was much more in use than Greek, recent scholarship suggests that Greek was better known than had previously been supposed. Micha Lazarus, "Greek Literacy in Sixteenth-Century England," *Renaissance Studies* 29 (2014), 4 33-58. I am grateful to Dr. Naoise MacSweeney of Leicester University for this reference and also for her observation that *strategos* may well have been one of the first words that students of Greek might have learned, as it is a regular second declension noun and suitable for teaching. She suggests that it is possible that a much wider set of people had a sense of *strategos* and *strategia* than would necessarily have had a working knowledge of Greek.

24 Heuser, *The Evolution of Strategy*, 4-5.

25 Herodian of Alexandria, *his History of twenty Roman Caesars and emperors (of his time.)*, trans. James Maxwell (London: Printed for Hugh Perry, 1629).

of putting troops into battle.”)<sup>26</sup> The key figure in persuading Europe that tactics were “worthy of serious study” is considered to be the Chevalier de Folard.<sup>27</sup> He published his *Nouvelles découvertes sur la guerre* in 1724. This was followed by a new translation of Polybius’s *History*, which Folard had commissioned and for which he contributed comments of his own.<sup>28</sup>

In Britain, John Harris’s *Lexicon Technicum*, published in 1723, defined tactics as “the Art of Disposing any Number of Men into a proper form of Battle.” Harris reported that the Greeks were very “skilful” in this branch of the military art, “having Public Professors of it,” who were called *Tactici*.<sup>29</sup> He referred to the Emperor Leo VI, as well as Aelian and Arrias. The word “tactics” appeared, but not with its own entry, in Samuel Johnson’s 1755 dictionary,<sup>30</sup> under the heading of “Evolutions,” a term used to describe the point when an army shifted its position, for example to move from attack to defense or defense to attack:

The motion made by a body of men in changing their posture, or form of drawing up, either to make good the ground they are upon, or to possess themselves of another; that so they may attack the enemy, or receive his onset more advantageously. And these evolutions are doubling of ranks or files, countermarches, and wheelings.<sup>31</sup>

There was no reference to tactics in Humphrey Bland’s 1727 *A Treatise of Military Discipline* or in Lt. Col. Campbell Dalrymple’s 1761 “*Military Essay*.”<sup>32</sup> Nor was there a mention in the most influential British work on the Seven Years War, by Major-

General Henry Lloyd.<sup>33</sup> It was, however, introduced when Lloyd added new material as a second part of the book in 1781. Then, he described his outline of the principles of war as “the foundation of all tactics, which alone can offer us some certain and fixed principles to form and conduct an army.”<sup>34</sup>

The most admired commander of his day, Frederick the Great of Prussia, wrote his *General Principles of War applied to Tactics and the Discipline of Prussian troops*, in 1748. Written in French, it was not translated into German until 1753 and then at first issued only to his generals. It was widely published in 1762, late in the Seven Year’s War, after a copy had been taken from a captured general. Despite the title, the text did not actually discuss tactics (and discipline was clearly the highest priority). In his *Éléments de Castramétrie et de Tactique*, published in German in 1771, he considered as tactics issues that would soon come under the heading of strategy.<sup>35</sup> Therefore, when it came to new ways of thinking about the art of war, tactics had a definite head start over strategy, and could cover the same ground, but the lead was not that substantial.

## The Origins of “Strategy”

As for strategy, close cousins of the word were already in use. There were at least two important derivations from the original *strategía* in the lexicon prior to 1771. The first, which was well-established, was stratagem. Strategy and stratagem had the same origins but over time developed separately.<sup>36</sup> The *Oxford English Dictionary* (an invaluable source on these matters) identifies stratagem’s first English

26 *Le Dictionnaire de l’Académie Française* 1694. By the 1798 version camping and making evolutions had been added to the definition. The appearance of words in French dictionaries can be explored on <http://artfl-project.uchicago.edu/node/17>.

27 Duffy, *Military Experience in the Age of Reason*, 40.

28 *History of Polybius*, newly translated from Greek by Dom Vincent Thuillier, with a commentary or a body of military science enriched with critical and historical notes by F. de Folard (1729).

29 John Harris, *Lexicon Technicum: or, A Universal English Dictionary of Arts and Sciences: Explaining Not Only the Terms of Art, But the Arts Themselves*, Vol. II, 2nd ed. (London: Brown, 1723).

30 Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language* (London: 1755), <http://johnsonsdictionaryonline.com>. Johnson gives Harris as his authority.

31 Frederick II (“the Great”) of Prussia, “General Principles of War” (1748/1753), accessed at [http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub\\_document.cfm?document\\_id=3582](http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=3582).

32 Humphrey Bland, *A Treatise of Military Discipline: In Which is Laid Down and Explained the Duties of Officer and Soldier* (London: 1727). This book, which was essential reading in the British army and went through a number of editions, does contain a chapter, “Evolutions of the Foot, with an Explanation, and General rules for Wheeling;” Campbell Dalrymple, *A Military Essay: Containing Reflections On The Raising, Arming, Cloathing, And Discipline Of The British Infantry And Cavalry* (London: D. Wilson, 1761).

33 Major-General Lloyd, *The History of the Late War in Germany Between The King Of Prussia, And The Empress Of Germany And Her Allies*, Vol. 1 (London: S. Hooper, 1781). This part was first published in 1766.

34 Major-General Lloyd, *Continuation of the History of the Late war in Germany, Part II* (London: S. Hooper, 1781), 20.

35 Castramétrie (Castramation) referred to laying out of a military camp.

36 Everett L. Wheeler, *Stratagem and the Vocabulary of Military Trickery*, Mnemoseyne supplement 108 (New York: Brill, 1988).

use in 1489 in a military sense (“Whiche subtilites and wylis are called Stratagemes of armes”).<sup>37</sup> It soon came to refer to any cunning ploy or ruse, in some ways suffering the same fate as the modern strategy as a term with a military meaning that became adopted more generally. This can be seen in Shakespeare. In “All’s Well That Ends Well,” it is used in a military sense (“If you think your mystery in stratagem can bring this instrument of honour again into his native quarter, be magnanimous in the enterprise and go on”) and then in a wider sense (“for the love of laughter, let him fetch his drum; he says he has a stratagem for’t”).<sup>38</sup> Samuel Johnson referred regularly to stratagems, in a wide and not uniquely military way. Stratagem, however, not only remained an essential element in the art of war, but also there were a number of derivations, identified by the *Oxford English Dictionary*, in use from the 16th through the 18th centuries — stratagematic, stratagematical, strategematist, and stratagemical.<sup>39</sup>

Another related word, now wholly obsolete, was *stratarithmetrie* (made up of the Greek words for army, number, and measure). This was a form of military arithmetic. John Dee, a highly influential mathematician and an important figure in the Elizabethan Court, wrote an introduction to a new translation of Euclid in 1570 in which he explained the relevance of its principles to a variety of human affairs, including war. He distinguished between “Stratarithmetrie” and “Tacticie,” and in so doing referred to the Emperor Leo VI’s work (this was not long after Sir John Cheke’s Latin translation had been published). Stratarithmetrie, according to Dee, offered a way “by which a man can set in figure, analogically to any *Geometricall* figure appointed, any certaine number or summe of men.” It would be possible to choose the best geometrical figure (perfect square, triangle, circle, etc.) that had been used in war “for commodiousness, necessity, and advantage.” It differed from the “Feate Tacticall” that would necessitate the “wisedome and foresight, to what purpose he so

ordreth the men.”<sup>40</sup> Dee was cited as an authority on this matter long after he died. The word was used as he intended, for example, in 1652:

Stratarithmetrie is the skill appertaining to the warre to set in figure any number of men appointed: differing from Tacticie, which is the wisdom and the oversight.<sup>41</sup>

The potential of mathematics as a guide to the optimum organization of troops for military engagements was a familiar theme in the 17th and 18th centuries. It was satirized by Shakespeare in *Othello* with Iago’s disparaging comments about Michael Cassio, a “great arithmetician” who “never set a squadron in the field/Nor the division of a battle knows more than a spinster — unless the bookish theoretic.”<sup>42</sup>

Ephraim Chambers’ *Cyclopædia*, the first edition of which was in 1728, contained a reference to tactics, taken directly from Harris’s *Lexicon Technicum*. Unlike Harris, however, Chambers also included as items stratagem (a “military wile”), *stratarithmetry* (“the art of drawing up an Army or any part of it, in any given Geometric figure”) and, lest the origins of the word be forgotten, *strategus* (as one of the two appointed Athenians who would “command the troops of the state”).<sup>43</sup>

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Thereafter, it was hard to find a dictionary without similar or replicated entries as they were habitually copied. In Britain, similar references

37 William Caxton, *C. de Pisan’s Book Fayttes of Armes*, (1489).

38 William Shakespeare, *All’s Well That Ends Well*, First Folio (England: 1623), III.vi.59, III.vi.32.

39 Richard Collier, *The Great Historical, Geographical, Genealogical and Poetical Dictionary; Being a Curious Miscellany of Sacred and Profane History* (London: Henry Rhodes, 1701). In 1701, Collier referred to a Frederick Marabotti as “a good soldier, and particularly considerable in the Stratagemical Part of War.” This was originally a translation from the French of Louis Moréri’s encyclopedia, *The Great Historical Dictionary, or Curious Anthology of Sacred and Secular History* (first published in 1674). The usage here is Collier’s.

40 John Dee, *The Mathematicall Praeface to The Elements Of Geometrie of the most auncient Philosopher EVCLIDE of Megara* (London: John Daye, 1570), accessed at <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/22062/22062-h/22062-h.htm>.

41 Silvanus Morgan, *Horlogiographia optica* (London: Andrew Kemb and Robert Boydell, 1652).

42 William Shakespeare, *Othello*, First Folio (England: 1623), I, i.

43 Ephraim Chambers, *Cyclopædia, or, An Universal Dictionary of Arts and Sciences* (London: J. and J. Knapton, 1728), 135.

were found in Chambers' competitors, for example in Rees's *Cyclopaedia*,<sup>44</sup> and the third edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, published from 1788 to 1797.<sup>45</sup> This edition was reproduced in its entirety as *Dobson's Encyclopædia*, published in the United States from 1799.

The first edition in 1694 of the authoritative *Dictionary of the French Academy* had a reference to stratagem as "ruse de guerre," repeated in later editions. The 5th edition in 1798 made no mention of *stratégie*.<sup>46</sup> The great *Encyclopédie*, compiled by Denis Diderot, was originally intended as a French translation of Chambers, and the eventual version, first published in 1765, had a number of items attributed to Chambers. These included entries for "stratagem" and "stratarithmetry," noting that the latter was not used in France.<sup>47</sup> There was also a discussion of the role of the *strategos*.<sup>48</sup> Unlike Chambers, however, there was a long section on tactics. This was described as "the science of military movements," and then, with reference to Polybius, "the art of matching a number of men destined to fight, to distribute them in rows and rows, and to instruct them in all the manoeuvres of war." This discussed at length the practices of the Romans, the more recent application of the core principles, and addressed the issue of whether or not the French should imitate Prussian methods, clearly an issue after the defeat of French forces in the Seven Years war.

## Why the Concept of Strategy Was Readily Adopted

Thus, when Maizeroy used "strategie" by itself and without translation in his 1771 translation of Leo VI's *Taktiká*, its appearance would not have posed great difficulties for the more educated students of warfare in the late 18th century. There was the same contrast with tactics as before. Was there, however, also continuity in meaning? Through the 18th century, stratagem had been recognized as

an important part of the art of war, fitting in with a preference for what later became known as an indirect approach. According to this approach it was usually best to avoid a pitched battle but if this was not possible then every available ruse should be used to fight only in the most propitious circumstances.

The classics encouraged this view, and also emphasized the use of skillful techniques to outsmart the enemy. When Polybius discussed tactics in his histories, he referred to one encounter during the Punic Wars that illustrated the difference "between scientific and unscientific warfare: between the art of a general and the mechanical movements of a soldier." At issue was not the ability to fight with fury and gallantry, but the use of tactics that helped avoid a "general engagement" by relying instead on wearing the enemy down through surprise ambushes and pushing them into positions where they could neither escape nor fight and risked starvation.

Frontinus described strategy (*strategikon*) as "everything achieved by a commander, be it characterized by foresight, advantage, enterprise, and resolution," of which stratagem (*strategematon*) was a subset, including aspects of trickery but was more generally about how success could be achieved by "skills and cleverness."<sup>49</sup> A key theme for Vegetius was the need to avoid battle unless necessary: "Good officers decline general engagements where the danger is common, and prefer the employment of stratagem and finesse to destroy the enemy as much as possible in detail and intimidate them without exposing our own forces." Stratagem was thus one way of waging war, distinct from more direct action.<sup>50</sup> Onasander's "Strategikos" described ruses designed to mislead an enemy into misapprehensions about the size of the army, or to maintain the morale of troops by demonstrating that things were not as bad as they might suppose. In this way, the "world of war" was one of "deceit and false appearances."

This was the tradition carried through the great works of Byzantium. The *Strategikon* of Byzantine

44 Abraham Rees, *The Cyclopaedia; or Universal Dictionary of Arts, Sciences and Literature* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme & Brow).

45 *Encyclopaedia Britannica; or, A Dictionary of Arts, Sciences, and Miscellaneous Literature*, 3rd ed., ed. Colin MacFarquhar and George Gleig, 1797. This contained a tiny reference to tactics in general although a long section on naval tactics.

46 *Le Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*. Sixième Éd. It only made an appearance in the 6th edition, published in 1835 ("Faire une belle disposition, de belles dispositions, des dispositions savantes, etc., Disposer habilement son armée pour combattre").

47 It did include a similar word, *Strataryhmetrie*, as "the art of placing a battalion in battle on a given geometrical figure, and of finding the number of men contained in this battalion, whether we see them closely, or we see them from afar."

48 *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, vol. 15, 541. A dictionary published in 1801 of new words had nothing on strategy, but included tactican as (the art of training soldiers to form various military evolution); William Dupré, *Lexicographia-neologica gallica* (London: Baylis, 1801).

49 Frontinus had long been available in French. A new edition was published in 1765. An English translation was not published until 1811, although later superseded, but it was well known as a Latin text.

50 Clarke's translation was first published in 1767. It had a single mention of tactics, with reference to the Athenian schools of tactics, but a number on stratagem. An English translation was published by Caxton in 1489.



Emperor Maurice (582 to 602) contained the same theme of relying on cunning rather than brute force to gain victory:

Warfare is like hunting. Wild animals are taken by scouting, by nets, by lying in wait, by stalking, by circling around, and by other such stratagems rather than by sheer force. In waging war we should proceed in the same way, whether the enemy be many or few. To try to simply overpower the enemy in the open, hand in hand and face to face, even though you may appear to win, is an enterprise which is very risky and can result in serious harm.

In addition: “A wise commander will not engage the enemy in pitched battle unless a truly exceptional opportunity or advantage presents itself.”<sup>51</sup> Here was a distinction between strategy and military skill. Strategy made use of times and places, surprises and various tricks to outwit the enemy with the idea of achieving its objectives even without actual fighting. It was “essential to survival and is the true characteristic of the intelligent and courageous general.”<sup>52</sup> The “Strategikon” was not known to Europe’s military innovators as they mined the classics for useful ideas, but, along with Onasander, it influenced the later Emperor Leo VI’s work, completed in the 10th century, with the same key themes (although it had a greater emphasis on the need to pray before battle).<sup>53</sup> As the Russians had followed Byzantine usage, for them the art of the general was very much bound up with stratagem.<sup>54</sup>

The Chevalier de Folard, while gaining his notoriety by his promotion of the column as a way

to win battles, also shared the classical view that battle was best avoided.<sup>55</sup> Black describes Folard as debating Vegetius “as if he was a contemporary.”<sup>56</sup> One of the best known works of military theory of the mid-century, Count Turpin’s “Essay on the Art of War” included strong advocacy of stratagems to help generals get out of difficult situations.<sup>57</sup> Frederick the Great also had seen battle as subject to too many chance factors to be embraced as a preferred method.<sup>58</sup> The overlap between stratagem and strategy is evident in Chambers’ entry for stratagem, although this also indicates that changes in the nature of warfare might require a different approach. “The Ancients dealt mightily in Stratagems; the Moderns wage War more openly, and on the Square.”<sup>59</sup>

Thus, when Maizeroy translated Leo’s *Taktiká*, he was taking on a work heavily influenced by the stratagem tradition. The prolific Maizeroy took the view that the French had paid far too much attention to other European armies and not enough to the ancients. When later he came to identify the rules of strategy, the links with stratagem became clear:

not to do what one’s enemy appears to desire; to identify the enemy’s principal objective in order not to be misled by his diversions; always to be ready to disrupt his initiatives without being dominated by them; to maintain a general freedom of movement for foreseen plans and for those to which circumstances may give rise; to engage one’s adversary in his daring enterprises and critical moments without compromising one’s own position; to be always in control of the engagement by choosing the right time and place.<sup>60</sup>

51 Emperor Maurice, *Strategikon: Handbook of Byzantine Military Strategy*, trans. George T. Dennis (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984), 65, 86; Edward Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Byzantine Empire*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009). Luttwak discusses relational manoeuvre as an alternative to attrition and to stratagems.

52 *Ibid.*, 23.

53 Edward Luttwak, *The Taktika of Leo VI*, trans. George T. Dennis (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Texts, 2014), Chapter 12. Paradoxically, Dennis notes, Maurice’s *Strategikon* was mainly about tactics (as defined by the Byzantines), and Leo’s *Taktiká* was mainly about strategy. One possibility is that the works would not have had titles and that librarians with limited knowledge of the subject mislabeled the two works in their catalogues.

54 Black, *Plotting Power*, 255.

55 *Ibid.*, 122.

56 *Ibid.*, 122.

57 Count Turpin, *An Essay on the Art of War*, trans. Joseph Otway (London: W. Johnston, 1761). First published in French in 1754.

58 He had provided a list of the tricks and stratagems of war intended to “oblige the enemy to make unnecessary marches in favour of our own designs. Our own intentions are to be studiously concealed, and the enemy misled by our affecting plans which we have no wish to execute.” Frederick the Great, *Instructions for his Generals*, 1797. On French tactical debates, see Robert S. Quimby, *The Background of Napoleonic Warfare: The Theory Of Military Tactics In Eighteenth-Century France* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1956).

59 The importance of the Infantry Square, as a means of dealing with cavalry charges had been underlined during the War of the Spanish Succession (1701 to 1714). The formation of an effective square required considerable skill and discipline. It was dealt with extensively in Bland, *A Treatise of Military Discipline*, 90, in his discussion of how infantry should cope with “Attacks of Horse.” Bland referred to stratagems as feints a number of times in this book. The most elaborate discussion of the Infantry Square over this period was in General Richard Kane, *A New System of Military Discipline for a Battalion of Foot on Action* (London: J. Millan, 1743) published posthumously. Kane had fought in the War of the Spanish Succession.

60 Joly De Maizeroy, *Théorie de la guerre* (Lausanne: Aux dépens de la Société, 1777), 304-5.

One additional factor that might possibly have affected the debate about strategy and stratagems in the early 1770s was the publication of the first Western translation of Sun Tzu's *The Art of War* by Father Joseph Amiot, a Jesuit missionary and sinologist. This was one of a number of texts grouped together in a more general collection entitled, *Military Art of the Chinese*.<sup>61</sup> According to one source, this was received with considerable enthusiasm, with one reviewer describing this as containing "all the elements of the great art which had been written by Xenophon, Polybius, and de Saxe."<sup>62</sup> Yet, other accounts suggest that the positive response was fleeting, and there was even less impact when it was re-published a decade later.<sup>63</sup> Little admirable was seen in Chinese military practice at this time. Despite claims that it was read by Napoleon, there is no evidence of this, and it would certainly be stretching a point to suggest he was at all influenced.<sup>64</sup> Amiot's translation is now considered to be poor,<sup>65</sup> and not based on the most reliable version of the text. In this translation, neither the terms tactics nor strategy appear, though they were prominent in later English translations. There were a few references to stratagems.<sup>66</sup> Nonetheless, if this translation had any impact, it would have been to reinforce a stratagem-based, indirect approach that saw battles as events to be avoided if at all possible.

### **"Strategy" Gave a Name to the "Higher" Parts of War**

In addition to the familiarity with the language and the stratagem tradition, a third reason why the concept of strategy was adopted so readily lay in its value in filling a gap in contemporary discussions about the problem of levels of command.

Marshal Maurice de Saxe's *My Reveries Upon the Art of War* was written in 1736, but only published posthumously in 1756. Saxe was one of the most successful French generals of the 18th century. In his *Reveries*, he referred to neither strategy nor tactics, but did distinguish between the "higher" and "lesser" parts of war. He argued that commanders must understand the lesser parts, though elemental and mechanical, covering methods of fighting and discipline, as they provided the "base and the fundamentals of the military art." Once Saxe had dealt with those in the first part of his book, he then moved on to the higher — "sublime" — parts, which he suspected might interest only experts. This meant moving beyond the "methodical," suitable for ordinary minds, to the "intellectual," with which the ordinary might struggle. This is why war was like the other "sublime arts." Application was not enough. There must be talent and excellence.<sup>67</sup> What this part lacked was a name.

This sense that there was a level of activity that lacked a proper name is evident in Maizeroy's prolific output from the 1760s to the 1780s, which included not only his translation of Leo VI, but also editions of his *Cours de tactique, théoretique, pratique et historique*, first published in 1766, as well as works on stratagems and his own *Théorie de la Guerre*.<sup>68</sup> Maizeroy, a lieutenant colonel in the French army who had served as a captain under Saxe, explored the distinction between the higher and lesser forms of the art of war. The lesser was,

Merely mechanical, which comprehends the composing and ordering of troops, with the matter of encamping, marching, manoeuvring and fighting ... may be deduced from principles and taught by rules.

In his *Traité de tactique*, published in 1767, he

61 Joseph Marie Amiot, *Art militaire des Chinois, ou, Recueil d'anciens traités sur la guerre: composés avant l'ère chrétienne, par différents généraux chinois* (Paris: Didot l'aîné, 1772). Bachmann, "Jean Joseph Marie Amiot Introduces 'The Art of War' to the West," *The Shelf*, January 28, 2014, <http://blogs.harvard.edu/preserving/2014/01/28/jean-joseph-marie-amiot-introduces-the-art-of-war-to-the-west/>. See also "Sun-tse: Les treize articles sur l'art militaire," *Chine Ancienne*, accessed October 2017, <https://www.chineancienne.fr/traductions/sun-tse-les-treize-articles-sur-l-art-militaire>.

62 Corneli, Alessandro, "Sun Tzu and the Indirect Strategy," *Rivista di Studi Politici Internazionali* 54, no. 3 (1987): 419-445. For a suggestion of the influence of Amiot's translation on French plans to wage guerrilla war in Britain in the 1790s, see Sylvie Kleinman, "Initiating insurgencies abroad: French plans to 'chouannise' Britain and Ireland, 1793-1798," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 25, no. 4 (2013): 663.

63 "1772, Sun Tzu atteint l'Occident," accessed October 2018, <http://suntzufrance.fr/1772-sun-tzu-atteint-loccident>.

64 There is, for example, no reference to Amiot's translation in Bruno Colson, *Napoleon on War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

65 When Lionel Giles later translated the book into English, he described this "so-called translation" to "be little better than an imposture. It contains a great deal that Sun Tzu did not write, and very little indeed of what he did." *Sun Tzu on The Art of War*. Amiot is also blamed for assigning to Sun Tzu a traditional Western title *The Art of War*, already used for Machiavelli and soon to be used by Jomini.

66 For a comparison of the Roman and Byzantine texts on stratagems with Sun Tzu, see David A. Graff, "Brain over Brawn: Shared Beliefs and Pre-emptions in Chinese and Western 'Strategemata,'" *Extrême-Orient Extrême-Occident*, no. 38 (2014): 47-64. Smith, op.cit., makes a similar point.

67 Marshal Maurice de Saxe, *My Reveries Upon the Art of War*, trans. Brig. Gen. Thomas R. Phillips, *Roots of Strategy*, 1 (Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1985), 191, 248. On Saxe, see Jon Manchip White, *Marshal of France: The Life and Times of Maurice, Comte de Saxe, 1696-1750* (Sevenoaks: Pickle Partners, 2011).

68 On Maizeroy, see David, Alexandre. "L'interprète des plus grands maîtres: Paul-Gédéon Joly de Maizeroy l'inventeur de la stratégie," *Stratégique* 99 (2010/11); Black, *Plotting Power*, 129-133; and Gat, *The Origins of Military Thought*, 39-43.

referred to the higher as “military dialectics,” including “the art of forming the plans of a campaign, and directing its operations.”<sup>69</sup> By the time of his 1777 *Théorie de la Guerre*, and following his translation of Leo, the higher form was strategy, which was “quite sublime” (using Saxe’s word) and resided “solely in the head of the general, as depending on time, place and other circumstances, which are essentially varying, so as never to be twice the same in all respects.” Here is how he distinguished between the two:

Tactics is easily reduced to firm rules because it is entirely geometrical like fortifications. Strategy appears to be much less susceptible to this, since it is dependent upon innumerable circumstances — physical, political, and moral — which are never the same and which are entirely the domain of genius.<sup>70</sup>

Thus, tactics could depend on scripts that could be developed in advance and followed mechanically. It was extremely important, but intellectually undemanding. Strategy, however, came into play when there was no script, when the circumstances were unique and varied.

A number of authors also addressed the potential value of the term strategy. In 1779, the Portuguese Marquis de Silva published *Pensées sur la Tactique, et la Stratégique*. For Silva, strategy was the science of the generals and employed and combined the different branches of tactics.<sup>71</sup> In 1783, there was the first reference to “grand strategy,” although in a book now largely forgotten, by Colonel Nockhern de Schorn. He defined strategy as, “The knowledge of commanding armies, one comprehending the higher and the other the lower branches of the art.” He then divided strategy into the higher (*La Grande Stratégie*) and lower (*La Petite Stratégie*) in the following way:

The first embraces all that a commander in chief, and all that his subordinate generals

should be acquainted with; and the second, which may be called le petit guerre, the diminutive of the first, appertains to the staff and to a certain proportion of the subaltern officers.<sup>72</sup>

Yet when it came to classification, the most influential work of the 1770s dealt with the

## In 1783, there was the first reference to “grand strategy.”

distinction between the higher and the lesser parts of the art of war without reference to strategy. In his *Essai Général de Tactique*, published in 1772, Jacques-Antoine-Hippolyte, Comte de Guibert, made his distinction solely on the basis of tactics. Tactics were the “foundation” of the science of war, “since they teach how to constitute troops, appoint, put in motion, and afterwards to fight them.” He divided tactics into two parts: “the one elementary and limited, the other composite and sublime.” Again, note the use of Saxe’s word “sublime.” Elementary tactics contained “all detail of formation, instruction, and exercise of a battalion, squadron, or regiment.” The higher level, to which all other parts were “secondary,” contained “every great occurrence of war” and was “properly speaking ... the science of the generals.” This part was “of itself everything, since it contains the art of conveying action to troops.”<sup>73</sup> What was art and what was science was constantly in flux over this period, and the terms often seemed to be used interchangeably,<sup>74</sup> yet if generalship was a matter of science and not just genius, then there was a possibility of a script that could help the general think through possibilities. In 1779, Guibert, in *Défense du Système de Guerre Moderne*, referred to

69 Paul Gédéon Joly de Maizeroy, *Traité de tactique*, Two volumes (Paris: J. Merlin, 1767).

70 Maizeroy, *Theorie de la guerre*.

71 Marquis de Silva, *Pensées sur la Tactique, et la Stratégique* (Impr. Royale, 1778). On Silva, see Black, *Plotting Power*, 133-35.

72 F. De Nockhern Schorn, *Dees Raisonnees Sur Un Systeme General Suivi Et De Toutes Les Connoissances Militaires Et Sur Une Methode Etudier Lumineuse Pour La Science De La Guerre Avec Ordre Et Discernement En Trois Parties Avec Sept Tables Methodiques* (Nuremberg et Altdorf: chez George Pierre Monath, 1783), 198-9. In his detailed discussion of the French debate of the time Black does not mention this book.

73 Jacques Antoine Hippolyte Comte de Guibert, *Essai Général de Tactique* (1770). Translation in Heuser, *The Strategy Makers*, 161. This is based on Lt. Douglas’s translation from 1781. See also Jonathan Abel, *Guibert: Father of Napoleon’s Grande Armée* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2016); Beatrice Heuser, *Strategy Before Clausewitz: Linking Warfare and Statecraft, 1400-1830* (London: Routledge, 2017).

74 Beatrice Heuser, “Theory and Practice, Art and Science in Warfare: An Etymological Note,” ed. Daniel Marston and Tamara Leahy, *War, Strategy and History: Essays in Honour of Professor Robert O’Neill* (Canberra: ANU Press, 2016).

*la stratégique*.<sup>75</sup> But this book was largely ignored. It was the earlier *Essai Général de Tactique* that remained the most influential text of this period. As noted below, it was Guibert's original classification that stuck with Napoleon Bonaparte.

## The German Development of Strategy

The Francophone debate, therefore, was bound up with this question of levels of command and the role of the sublime or genius. In the German-speaking world, the development was different. The Austrian Johann W. von Bourscheid, who translated Leo's *Taktika* into German in 1777, also referred to "strategie" and urged readers to develop their understanding of this approach to military affairs.<sup>76</sup> One of the more original contributions to the German literature of this period was made by Georg Heinrich von Berenhorst (1733 to 1814). He was wary of extreme rationalism, stressing genius rather than a search for rules to unlock the secrets to military success. Too much depended on factors that were "unpredictable and incalculable," including "blind chance."<sup>77</sup> He followed Guibert in failing to discuss strategy, but not in relying on a sharp distinction between a higher and lower form. Instead, he identified many potential subdivisions of the art of war.<sup>78</sup>

The most influential figure in establishing strategy as a distinctive realm of analysis was Heinrich von Bülow, son of a minor nobleman, who had served in the Prussian army. His military career had not advanced far and his independence of mind did not endear him to the authorities. He ended up in prison for his criticisms of the Prussian failure at Austerlitz. His *Spirit of the Modern System of War*, published in 1799, was in the "Stratarithmetrie" tradition, involving the application of geometrical

and mathematical principles.

Commentators have not been kind to Bülow. Clausewitz considered him a charlatan and dismissed his book as the "Children's military companion."<sup>79</sup> Even his English translator was skeptical. Yet, according to Palmer, Bülow can be credited with "giving currency, as words of distinct meaning" to strategy and tactics, though his definitions were not "generally accepted."<sup>80</sup> It was certainly the case that his work reached Britain before other continental works, with the appearance of Malorti de Martemont's translation in 1806, and his influence lingered through the 19th century.

His mathematics was suspect, while his resistance to the idea of battle put him at odds with the developing Napoleonic method. ("If we find ourselves obliged to fight a battle, mistakes must have been committed previously.") Yet, if it was not quite in the spirit of its time, in some respects it now has a contemporary feel. At his theory's heart was an army's relation to its base, objective, and "lines of operations." Rather than fight a "hostile army," better to attack the means by which this army kept itself supplied, which meant that the "flanks and rear must be the objective of operations," even in an offensive war, and frontal operations should be avoided.

In a rare sign of a debate about potentially different meanings of the term, Bülow saw his concepts of "Strategics" as different from the French concept of "la stratégique." In an observation, significant in the light of my earlier discussion, he considered the French concept as being too limited for it was defined by "the science of the stratagems of war." Alternatively, he noted, that: "Some, tracing the term to its origins, have denominated it the *General's Art*." Bülow deemed this to be too extensive, "for the *General's Art* comprehends the whole art of war, which consists

75 R. R. Palmer, "Frederick the Great, Guibert, Bülow: From Dynastic to National War," Peter Paret ed., *Makers of Modern Strategy: From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 107.

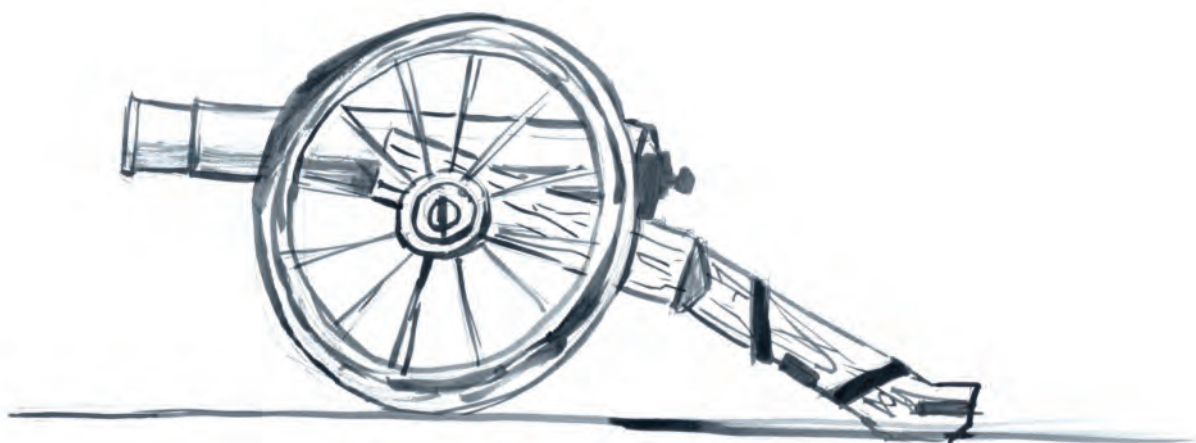
76 Johann W. von Bourscheid, trans. *Kasier Leo des Philosophen Strategie und Taktik in 5 Bänden* (Vienna: Joseph Edler von Kurzboeck, 177-1781); Heuser, *The Strategy Makers*, 3; Hew Strachan, "The Lost Meaning of Strategy," *Survival* 47 no. 3 (August 2005): 35; J-P Charnay in Andre Corvisier, *A Dictionary of Military History and the Art of War*, ed., John Childs (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 769.

77 Gat., *The Origins of Military Thought*, 155.

78 These were: the "elementary," which was essentially about how to prepare soldiers for battle; the movement of larger formations, such as a battalion, in order of battle and 'lets them advance towards the enemy who is within a shot's or a throw's reach, or lets them retreat'; the "higher" science of war, based on tactics, and involving the "art of marching with the entire army or substantial parts thereof, to advance, to retreat ... of establishing ... strongholds; of choosing campsites; of using the surface of the earth; and, lastly, the great art of making apposite, reliable plans and to ... adapt them cleverly to new developments, or to abandon them and to replace them by others." Georg Heinrich von Berenhorst, *Betrachtungen über die Kriegskunst, über ihre Fortschritte, ihre Widersprüche und ihre Zuverlässigkeit*, (Osnabrück, Biblio Verlag, 1978), 7f. Citation and translation from Heuser, *Etymology*, 181-2. On Berenhorst see Gat, *The Origins of Military Thought*, 150-5.

79 Carl von Clausewitz, "On the Life and Character of Scharnhorst," in *Historical and Political Writings*, ed. and trans. Peter Paret and Daniel Moran (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992), 103. In *On War*, it became a "toy," resting 'on a series of substitutions at the expense of truth,' 409. Howard describes it as "rocoo absurdity." Michael Howard, *Studies in War and Peace* (London: Temple Smith, 1970), 25. On von Bülow, see Gat, *The Origins of Military Thought*, 79-94.

80 Palmer, *op.cit.*, 115.



of Strategics and Tactics, sciences being essentially different.”<sup>81</sup> His view was that this was not a matter of sublime military genius, but the sensible application of mathematical models: “the sphere of military genius will at last be narrowed, that a man of talents will no longer be willing to devote himself to this ungrateful trade.”<sup>82</sup> This need not be a “sublime” art, but a disciplined application of set mathematical formulae. The importance of Bülow, therefore, lay in his insistence that scripts were possible and necessary. Good strategy could follow well-founded scripts.

He also established the circumstances in which these scripts were relevant. In his opening chapter, he had asserted that

all operations of which the enemy was the object, were operations of Tactics; and that those of which he was merely the aim and not the direct object, were made a part of Strategics.

Later, he saw a problem in that it was possible to march in column formation preparatory to battle without actually engaging (this being a time when the range of sight was longer than the range of cannon). So, “a general may manoeuvre tactically before an army, and in sight of it, to make a show of attacking it, without having the least intention of it. Here we have Tactics, and no battle.” Bülow, therefore, put aside the question of intent and

made his definition on the basis of position and proximity. He defined strategics as “the science of the movements in war of two armies, out of the visual circle of each other, or, if better liked, out of cannon reach.” By contrast, tactics were “the science of the movements made within sight of the enemy, and within reach of his artillery.”<sup>83</sup> With strategics, there should be no apprehension of attack, and so no immediate readiness to fight. It consisted of “two principal parts; marching and encamping.” There were also two parts to tactics — “the forming of the order of battle, and battles, or actual attack and defence.” Taken together, this constituted the whole of the art of war:

Tactics are the completion of Strategics; they accomplish what the other prepares; they are the ultimatum of Strategics, these ending and in a manner flowing into those. The rules of one were applicable to the other. The focus was geographical, giving priority to the importance of the land held, which explains his lack of enthusiasm for battle.

In both these respects, a focus on the land held and the potential value of mathematics, Bülow was followed by the Austrian Archduke Charles, one of the more accomplished Habsburg generals. In his 1806 *Principles of the Higher Art of War*, published as advice for generals, he showed his interest in “mathematical, evident truths” and in holding positions as much as defeating the enemy (a criticism Napoleon made forcibly of his practice). His *Grundsätze der Strategie* (“Principles of

81 Dietrich Heinrich von Bülow, *The Spirit of the Modern System of War*, trans. Malorti de Martemont, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

82 *Ibid.*, 228.

83 *Ibid.*, 88.

Strategy”), which appeared in 1814 and was soon widely translated (although not into English) must also take some credit for the dissemination of the term.<sup>84</sup> This may have been largely because of the prestige of the author as much as the novelty of the content. What was agreed was that strategy was the responsibility of the “supreme commander,” while tactics, “the way in which strategic designs are to be executed” was the responsibility of “each leader of troops.”<sup>85</sup>

Napoleon soon provided good reason to doubt both Bülow and Charles. He encouraged the idea that military genius was essential to military success, and that the test of success was the annihilation of the enemy army. Napoleon spoke of this genius as an inborn talent with which he had been fortunately blessed. It was the ability to see at a glance the opportunities for battle. This was the issue addressed by Clausewitz and Jomini, both of whom had fought in the Napoleonic wars, as it was unsatisfactory for the purposes of theory if this aptitude was intuitive and exceptional. They had to hold on to the possibility that it could be developed through experience and education, otherwise their writing had no purpose.<sup>86</sup>

Clausewitz published an anonymous review of Bülow in 1805 that included his formulation on the relationship between strategy and tactics, from which he did not deviate, and which made intent important. This had little impact at this stage. “Tactics constitute the theory of the use of armed forces in battle; strategy forms the theory of using battle for the purposes of the war.”<sup>87</sup> The same formulation appeared in some of his notes in 1811 and then in *On War*, where his formulation was far subtler than anything else produced by this time, moving beyond simple classification of activities.<sup>88</sup> He emphasized the need to think of fighting not as a single act but as a number of single acts — or “engagements” — each complete in itself. Tactics were about the form of an individual engagement, so it could be won, strategy about

how an engagement was to be used, and therefore its significance in terms of the overall objective of the campaign. He gave the example of ordering a column to head off in a particular direction with an engagement in mind, as being strategy, while the form taken by the column on its travels by way of preparation for the engagement would be tactics.<sup>89</sup>

In terms of levels of command, strategy was clearly superior to tactics, yet the point of his analysis in *On War* was that however much the strategist might set the terms for coming battles, the strategy would have to respond to the outcomes of the battles. Capturing perfectly the idea of a strategic script, Clausewitz explained that the strategist wrote a plan for the war, but it could only be in draft.<sup>90</sup> Tactical outcomes shaped strategic outcomes, which could only take shape “when the fragmented results have combined into a single, independent whole.”<sup>91</sup> Clausewitz did not make further subdivisions. In notes written in 1804, he had distinguished between elementary and higher tactics, the first appropriate to small units and the second to larger formations.<sup>92</sup> There is just a trace of this in *On War*, with a mere reference at one point to “elementary tactics.” Clausewitz’s approach depended on the dialectical relationship of tactics and strategy. One could not be considered independently of the other.<sup>93</sup>

## Clausewitz’s approach depended on the dialectical relationship of tactics and strategy.

It took time before Clausewitz was appreciated, and readers were often warned of the difficulty of his analysis. By contrast, the Swiss Baron Antoine-

84 *A Grundsätze der Kriegskunst für die Generale* (1806) had been published as *Principles of War*. Daniel Radakovich, who has translated it (Nimble Books, 2010) suggests a more accurate title would refer to “higher warcraft.”

85 Archduke Charles, Habsburg Commander in the wars against Napoleon, in 1806. Cited in Heuser, *Evolution of Strategy*, 6.

86 Clifford J. Rogers, “Clausewitz, Genius, and the Rules,” *The Journal of Military History* 66 (October 2002): 1167-1176; Jon T. Sumida, “The Clausewitz Problem,” *Army History* (Fall 2009): 17-21.

87 Cited by Peter Paret, *Essays on Clausewitz and the History of Military Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 100. The review was published anonymously. His ideas were developed in an unpublished manuscript, under the heading *Strategie*, and contains the same theme. Donald Stoker, *Clausewitz: His Life and Work* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 32-5.

88 Hew Strachan, *Carl von Clausewitz’s On War: A Biography* (London: Atlantic Books, 2007), 108.

89 Clausewitz, *On War*, 128-132.

90 *Ibid*, 177

91 *Ibid*, 206-8.

92 Strachan, Carl von Clausewitz’s *On War*, 87.

93 Antulio J. Echevarria II, *Clausewitz & Contemporary War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 140.

Henri de Jomini was generally considered a more straightforward and valuable thinker. Jomini, along with most of the new wave of military theorists of the late 18th and early 19th centuries, developed his thinking through a consideration of the campaigns of Frederick the Great of Prussia, although Napoleon's victory over the Austrians at Marengo in Italy in 1800 gave him his ideas on how the Napoleonic method might work.<sup>94</sup> He was stimulated by Bülow, although took a completely different tack. In his first major book, *Traité de grande tactique* (a title that betrays the influence of Guibert), he began to work out his theory.<sup>95</sup> He described war as being made up of "three combinations." The first was the "art of adjusting the lines of operations in the most advantageous manner, which has been improperly called 'the plan of campaign.'"<sup>96</sup> The second, "generally understood by strategy," was "the art of placing the masses of an army in the shortest space of time on the decisive point of the original or accidental line of operations." He saw this as no more than providing the "means of execution." The third was the "art of combat," which had been "styled tactics" and was the "art of combining the simultaneous employment of masses upon the important point of the field of battle." He did not suggest that these were alternative levels of command, only that a general accomplished in one of these combinations might be less effective with the other two.<sup>97</sup>

His ideas were fully formed in his *Précis de l'art de la guerre*, published in 1838. Here, Jomini defined strategy in terms of the preparation for battle, while tactics was bound up with the actual conduct of battle, a sequence that again followed Bülow. However, his approach was focused on annihilating the enemy army. Jomini's description of strategy was about making war "upon the map," taking a view of the whole theatre of operations and working out where to act. "Grand tactics" was about implementation. It was

the art of posting troops upon the battle-field according to the accidents of the ground, of bringing them into action, and the art of fighting upon the ground, in contradistinction to planning upon a map.

In his most concise formulation:

Strategy decides where to act; logistics brings the troops to this point; grand tactics decides the manner of execution and the employment of the troops.<sup>98</sup>

In contrast to Bülow, therefore, strategy was geared toward the campaign's overall concept rather than its execution, and it was not a substitute for grand tactics. At the same time, he also accepted that strategy did not depend solely on a general's genius, but could benefit through the application of timeless principles which he, Jomini, had been able to discern.

Thus, he wrote in the *Traité de grande tactique* that while new inventions threatened a "great revolution in army organization, armament and tactics," strategy would "remain unaltered, with its principles the same as under the Scipios and the Caesars, Frederick and Napoleon, since they are independent of the nature of the arms and the organization of the troops."<sup>99</sup> And then in the *Précis*, he suggested that strategy "may be regulated by fixed laws resembling those of the positive sciences."<sup>100</sup> This conclusion, which actively discouraged conceptual innovation, depended on a fixation with battle. As with Clausewitz, he was aware of the possibility of exceptions, but the model of war he most had in mind involved the destruction of the enemy's army so that they had no choice but to seek a political settlement on the victor's terms. This sharp focus on battle clarified the tasks for both tactics and strategy, and the forms of their potential interaction.

94 He later described a meeting with Napoleon in 1806 in which he told the emperor how he thought the Jena campaign would unfold. When asked who had told him, he replied "the map of Germany, Your Highness, and your campaigns of Marengo and Ulm." For a skeptical view of the relationship between Napoleon and Jomini, noting that all the evidence comes from the latter, see Gat, *The Origins of Military Thought*, 132-3.

95 On the interaction of von Bülow and Jomini, see Peter Paret, *The Cognitive Challenge of 1806* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 110-111.

96 He disliked the idea of a plan, as it was "impossible in a plan of operations to see beyond the second movement."

97 Henri Jomini, *Traité de grande tactique, ou, Relation de la guerre de sept ans, extraite de Tempelhof, commentée et comparée aux principales opérations de la dernière guerre; avec un recueil des maximes les plus importantes de l'art militaire, justifiées par ces différents événements* (Paris: Giguet et Michaud, 1805). In English translation as: Jomini, Antoine-Henri, trans. Col. S.B. Holabird, U.S.A., *Treatise on Grand Military Operations: or A Critical and Military History of the Wars of Frederick the Great as Contrasted with the Modern System*, 2 vols (New York: D. van Nostrand, 1865), 277, 432. This was published in English after the *Art of War*.

98 Jomini did envisage other "operations of a mixed nature," including "passages of streams, retreats, surprises, disembarkations, convoys, winter quarters, the execution of which belongs to tactics, the conception and arrangement to strategy," Antoine Henri de Jomini, *The Art of War*, trans. G.H. Mendell and W.P. Craighill [1838] (Texas: El Paso Norte Press, 2005), 79-100.

99 Jomini, *Treatise*, 48. On this point see Gat, *The Origins of Military Thought*, 114-5.

100 Charles, *The Art of War*, 321.

## Conclusion

Napoleon Bonaparte, who had provided the stimulus for these thoughts, gave little away while he was earning his reputation. And, for that matter, not much was revealed after his defeat at Waterloo. What was known about his approach to war was contained in a set of published maxims. In one of these, the emperor distinguished between what an “engineer or artillery officer” might need to know, which could “be learned in treatises,” whereas “grand tactics” (Guibert’s phrase) required experience and study of “the campaigns of all the great captains.”<sup>101</sup> Once exiled on St. Helena after his defeat at Waterloo, he kept himself informed on developments in military theory. His comments, generally bad-tempered and disparaging about the many authors he read, were well-recorded.

Only once did he discuss strategy, and it was when considering Archduke Charles’s book on the subject. “I hardly bother with scientific words,” he remarked, “and cannot care less about them.” He was skeptical about the value of books — there should not be so much “intellect” in war. “I beat the enemy without so much intellect and without using Greek words.” Nor could he make sense of the Archduke’s distinction between strategy and tactics, as the science and art of war. He had a higher opinion of Jomini’s formulation — “strategy is the art of moving troops and tactics the art of engaging them.” He then offered his own, and only known, definition: “strategy is the art of plans of campaign and tactics the art of battles.”<sup>102</sup> It left little scope for serious consideration of how to conduct war when the annihilation of the enemy army was neither practical nor appropriate.

For practitioners like Napoleon who seemed to have little use for the word, and theorists who analyzed its place in the operations of war, there was no agreed early definition of strategy, and its emergence was not announced with any great fanfare. It seeped into discussions of military strategy, but only really became a way of framing these discussions at the start of the 19th century, in part under the influence of Bülow and the Archduke Charles and the pressing need to make sense of Napoleon’s string of victories. All the early efforts at definition saw strategy as a purely military concept, interacting with tactics but not with policy. This included Clausewitz, who understood

better than most how political ends shaped military means. This is why there is a divergence between studies of strategy in practice over the 18th and 19th centuries, which invariably look at the interaction with policy, and the development of strategy as theory.<sup>103</sup>

This limitation was important not because it precluded theorizing about the relationship of policy to war, for Clausewitz showed how this could be done, but because it shaped the education of the officer class in Europe and North America, and the way in which they were encouraged to think about the responsibilities and possibilities of command. The Napoleon-Jomini view that the scripts of strategy could only be learned by studying those that worked well in the past meant that rather than being a new way of thinking, exploring the implications of a changing political context as well as technological innovations, strategy became profoundly conservative, looking to replicate the triumphs of the past. In my second article, I will demonstrate the impact of this narrow and conservative approach on British and American thinking on strategy in the 19th century, so that even when wars took place that might have questioned its validity, notably the 1861-1865 American Civil War and the 1870-1871 Franco-Prussian War, they did not. They did not lead to any revisions of the concept of strategy. It was only the shocking experience of World War I that led to attempts to broaden the meaning of strategy and seek new definitions. [i](#)

**Sir Lawrence Freedman** is professor emeritus of war studies at King’s College London. Freedman became professor of war studies at King’s College in 1982. In 2002, he became head of the School of Social Sciences and Public Policy at King’s College. In June 2009, he was appointed to serve as a member of the official inquiry into Britain and the 2003 Iraq War.

Before joining King’s College, Freedman held research appointments at Nuffield College Oxford, the International Institute for Strategic Studies, London, and the Royal Institute of International Affairs, London. Elected a fellow of the British Academy in 1995, he was appointed official historian of the Falklands Campaign in 1997.

His most recent books are *Strategy: A History* (2013) and *The Future of War: A History* (2017).

101 In the original French, this is “la grande tactique.” *Maximes de Guerre de Napoleon* (Paris: Chez Anselin, 1830), accessed at [https://ia800209.us.archive.org/26/items/bub\\_gb\\_ezQLTogcgfAC/bub\\_gb\\_ezQLTogcgfAC.pdf](https://ia800209.us.archive.org/26/items/bub_gb_ezQLTogcgfAC/bub_gb_ezQLTogcgfAC.pdf). This English translation, from Colonel D’Aguilar, first published as *The Officer’s Manual: Military Maxims of Napoleon* (Dublin: Richard Milliken & Son, 1831), replaces “la grande tactique” with the “science of strategy.”

102 Colson, *Napoleon on War*, 84.

103 Black, *Plotting Power*, is quite explicit on this point.