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The Role of Emotions in Military Strategy

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Emotions are ubiquitous in the conduct of military strategy. Although strategic studies scholarship has increasingly emphasized the importance of emotions, their treatment in the field lacks a clear research focus. This paper offers a basis for thinking about the role of emotions in military strategy. More specifically, there are three main areas that lie at the intersection of emotions and military strategy that deserve our attention. These areas include the character of war and emotional stimuli, emotional influence on strategic choices, and the relationship between emotional manipulation and the pursuit of victory. By directing the attention of scholars to the salient role of emotions in strategic practice, this paper provides a stepping stone for systematic research in this area that will contribute to improvements in the conduct of strategy.

Emotions are integral to all human endeavor, although this has not always been accepted. As late as the 1980s, philosopher Jerome Shaffer observed that “from a rational and moral point of view, I can see no possibility of a general justification of emotion. And it is easy enough to imagine individual lives and even a whole world in which things would be much better if there were no emotion.”¹ The subsequent decades of psychological research have proven him wrong.² We now know that emotions are necessary for people to navigate the uncertainty and complexity of the world. Emotions make us care about things that are relevant to our well-being and survival. Even more, they enable us to choose between competing values and objectives at any given moment. They help us to construct our temporary objectives and to pursue them in ways appropriate to a given situation. There is now

strong evidence available that people without the capacity to experience emotions are unable to run their lives effectively.³ In the words of the primatologist Frans de Waal, “emotions may be slippery, but they are also by far the most salient aspect of our lives. They give meaning to everything.”⁴ Emotions clearly provide meaning to various aspects of our social activities, including war.

Several academic fields concerned with the study of war have increasingly relied on emotion sciences to correct their assumptions and enhance the real-world relevance of their work. The field of international relations, for example, experienced a significant “emotion turn” two decades ago.⁵ The initial forays were soon followed by a stream of special journal issues, edited volumes, and monographs on empirical, theoretical, and methodological issues related to the study of emotions and international relations.⁶ Meanwhile, political psychologists have enhanced

1 Jerome A. Shaffer, “An Assessment of Emotion,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 20, no. 2 (April 1983): 169, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20013996>.

2 Dacher Keltner, Keith Oatley, and Jennifer M. Jenkins, *Understanding Emotions*, 3rd ed. (Hoboken: Wiley, 2014).

3 Antoine Bechara et al., “Double Dissociation of Conditioning and Declarative Knowledge Relative to the Amygdala and Hippocampus in Humans,” *Science* 269, no. 5227 (August 1995): 1115–18, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2888057>.

4 Frans De Waal, *Mama’s Last Hug: Animal Emotions and What They Tell Us About Ourselves* (New York: Norton and Company, 2019), 9–10.

5 Neta C. Crawford, “The Passion of World Politics: Propositions on Emotion and Emotional Relationships,” *International Security* 24, no. 4 (Spring 2000): 116–56, <https://doi.org/10.1162/016228800560327>.

6 Linda Ahall and Thomas Gregory, eds., *Emotions, Politics and War* (New York: Routledge, 2015); Johan Ariffin, Jean-Marc Coicaud, and Vesselin Popovski, eds., *Emotions in International Politics: Beyond Mainstream International Relations* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Todd H. Hall, *Emotional Diplomacy: Official Emotion on the International Stage* (London: Cornell University Press, 2015); Todd H. Hall and Andrew A. G. Ross, “Affective Politics after 9/11,” *International Organization* 69, no. 4 (Fall 2015): 847–79, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0020818315000144>; Kennet Lynggaard, “Methodological Challenges in the Study of Emotions in Politics and How to Deal with Them,” *Political Psychology* 40, no. 6 (December 2019): 1201–15, <https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12636>; Robin Markwica, *Emotional Choices: How the Logic of Affect Shapes Coercive Diplomacy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); and Eric Van Rythoven and Mira Sucharov, eds., *Methodology and Emotion in International Relations: Parsing the Passions* (New York: Routledge, 2019).

our knowledge about the role of emotions in domestic politics, which is the mainspring of war.⁷ Critical security studies scholars have incorporated emotion research into their research on deterrence and securitization, both salient aspects of security in the contemporary world.⁸ Peace and conflict studies scholars have also emphasized the relevance of emotions to war termination.⁹ The field of emotion history has gained much attention recently, even among military historians.¹⁰ Simultaneously, lively interdisciplinary debates have been raging about the phenomenon of collective emotions.¹¹ These trends demonstrate how recent research on emotions from the fields of psychology and neuroscience can significantly contribute to academic progress in other fields.

Despite this progress, we know little about how emotions matter with regard to the practice of military strategy, which is the pursuit of victory through military power.¹² The little that we do know about the role of emotions in military strategy comes from classical strategy scholars, most of them diligent

followers of Carl von Clausewitz, who considered emotions to be integral to strategic practice.¹³ Colin Gray, an irredeemable Clausewitzian, emphasized that emotions are part and parcel of strategic conduct. However, due to his broad research scope, he rarely went beyond vague assertions about the importance of emotions to the human dimension of strategy.¹⁴ More in-depth investigations of the issue have only occurred in the last few years. For example, Kenneth Payne explored the topic in several works. In particular, he shed light on how emotions affect decision-making in war and how the gradual integration of AI into militaries may limit the role of emotions in war.¹⁵ From a different perspective, Michael Rainsborough has shown how differently the West and the East think about manipulating emotions for strategic purposes.¹⁶ From yet another angle, my own work has explored the relationship between specific emotions and the adversary's will to fight and theorized ways in which these emotions can be elicited in strategic practice.¹⁷ Most recently, Lukas Milevski

7 Ted Brader and George E. Marcus, "Emotion and Political Psychology," in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Psychology*, ed. Leonie Huddy, David O. Sears, and Jack S. Levy, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); David Patrick Houghton, *Political Psychology: Situations, Individuals, and Cases*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2014); and W. Russell Neuman et al., eds., *The Affect Effect: Dynamics of Emotion in Political Thinking and Behavior* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

8 Linda Ahall and Thomas A. Gregory, "Security, Emotions, Affect," *Critical Studies on Security* 1, no. 1 (2013): 117–20, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21624887.2013.790217>; Frank Sauer, *Atomic Anxiety: Deterrence, Taboo and the Non-Use of U.S. Nuclear Weapons* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Amir Lupovici, *The Power of Deterrence: Emotions, Identity, and American and Israeli Wars of Resolve* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); and Eric Van Rythoven, "Learning to Feel, Learning to Fear? Emotions, Imaginaries, and Limits in the Politics of Securitization," *Security Dialogue* 46, no. 5 (October 2015): 458–75, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2F0967010615574766>.

9 Stephane Baele, Olivier Sterck, and Elisabeth Meur, "Theorizing and Measuring Emotions in Conflict: The Case of the 2011 Palestinian Statehood Bid," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 60, no. 4 (September 2014): 718–47, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002714550083>; Daniel Bar-Tal, "Why Does Fear Override Hope in Societies Engulfed by Intractable Conflict, as It Does in the Israeli Society?" *Political Psychology* 22, no. 3 (September 2001): 601–27, <https://doi.org/10.1111/0162-895X.00255>; and Eran Halperin, *Emotions in Conflict: Inhibitors and Facilitators of Peace Making* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

10 Benjamin Deruelle, "Introduction: War and Emotion in Early Modern Europe," *British Journal for Military History* 6, no. 2 (July 2020): 3–22, <https://doi.org/10.25602/GOLD.bjmh.v6i2.1415>; Johannes Lang, "New Histories of Emotion," *History and Theory* 57, no. 1 (March 2018): 104–20, <https://doi.org/10.1111/hith.12048>; Jane Lydon, *Imperial Emotions: The Politics of Empathy Across the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019); William M. Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Erika Kuijpers and Cornelis van der Haven, eds., *Battlefield Emotions 1500–1800: Practices, Experience, Imagination* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016); and Jan Plamper, *The History of Emotions: An Introduction*, trans. Keith Tribe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

11 Neta C. Crawford, "Institutionalizing Passion in World Politics: Fear and Empathy," *International Theory* 6, no. 3 (November 2014): 535–57, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1752971914000256>; Todd H. Hall and Andrew A. G. Ross, "Rethinking Affective Experience and Popular Emotion: World War I and the Construction of Group Emotion in International Relations," *Political Psychology* 40, no. 6 (December 2019): 1357–72, <https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12608>; Gerben A. van Kleef and Agneta H. Fischer, "Emotional Collectives: How Groups Shape Emotions and Emotions Shape Groups," *Cognition and Emotion* 30, no. 1 (September 2016): 3–19, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02699931.2015.1081349>; and Jonathan Mercer, "Feeling like a State: Social Emotion and Identity," *International Theory* 6, no. 3 (November 2014): 515–35, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1752971914000244>.

12 This is the classical understanding of military strategy derived from the following works: Antulio Echevarria II, *Military Strategy: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); Colin S. Gray, *Strategy Bridge: Theory for Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Edward N. Luttwak, *On the Meaning of Victory: Essays on Strategy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986); Lukas Milevski, "Enunciating Strategy: How to Talk about Strategy Effectively," *Military Strategy Magazine* 7, no. 1 (Spring 2020): 18–25, <https://www.militarystrategymagazine.com/article/enunciating-strategy-how-to-talk-about-strategy-effectively/>; William F. Owen, "Modern Errors in Discussions on Strategy," *Infinity Journal* 5, no. 4 (Summer 2017): 37–39, <https://www.militarystrategymagazine.com/article/modern-errors-in-discussions-on-strategy/>; and Hew Strachan, "The Lost Meaning of Strategy," *Survival* 47, no. 3 (2005): 33–54, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396330500248102>. Note that military strategy in this sense does not cover deterrence, which is a diplomatic rather than a strategic phenomenon. Recent deterrence scholarship has actually done a great job of incorporating research on emotions. See, for example, Markwica, *Emotional Choices*.

13 Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989).

14 Colin S. Gray, *Theory of Strategy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 15.

15 Kenneth Payne, *Strategy, Evolution, and War: From Apes to Artificial Intelligence* (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2018); and Kenneth Payne, *The Psychology of Strategy: Exploring Rationality in the Vietnam War* (London: Hurst and Company, 2015).

16 M.L.R. Smith, "Politics and Passion: The Neglected Mainspring of War," *Infinity Journal* 4, no. 2 (Fall 2014): 32–36, <https://www.militarystrategymagazine.com/article/politics-and-passion-the-neglected-mainspring-of-war/>.

17 Samuel Zilincik, "Strategy and the Instrumental Role of Emotions," *Strategy Bridge*, Sept. 25, 2018, <https://thestrategybridge.org/the-bridge/2018/9/25/strategy-and-the-instrumental-role-of-emotions>.

studied how the conduct of battle, or its imminent prospect, can elicit different emotions in commanding generals and how these emotions then affect decision-making and behavior.¹⁸ Meanwhile, Isabelle Duyvesteyn and James E. Worrall have argued that the field of strategic studies has to incorporate the study of emotions if it is to remain relevant.¹⁹ All these treatments have revealed important insights about the role of emotions in military strategy, but they were piecemeal efforts rather than systematic approaches. Since military strategy tends to be a highly emotional phenomenon, the role of emotions in strategic practice requires more disciplined attention.

This paper offers a basis for how to think about the role of emotions in military strategy. Drawing on the core precepts of classical strategic theory, it delineates three main areas that deserve further investigation. The first area concerns understanding the character of war through the exploration of emotional stimuli. The main purpose of strategy is to understand the character of war. That character is predominantly shaped by what people in a given war care about and emotional stimuli are, by definition, issues that people care about. Emotional stimuli are thus key to understanding the character of war.

The second area concerns the relationship between emotions and strategic choices. To a significant extent, military strategy is about choices — specifically, choices about whether to employ military power, how to sequence its application, and what exact tools to use for its application. Emotions function as a mechanism that enables the relevant actors to make these choices because they direct cognitive processes to what really matters in any given context. Without emotions, strategists would be unable to make prompt decisions about the application of military power. Understanding how emotions affect choices about the use of military power thus can help us to appraise the direction in which strategists seek to steer a war.

The third area concerns the relationship between emotional manipulation and the pursuit of victory. Victory — the imposition of one's will upon an adversary — is the end-state that military strategy seeks to reach. Emotions are important for the

achievement of victory because they enable the sustainment of the war effort at home and disrupt its sustainment for the adversary. As a result, the practice of military strategy can be conceived of as emotional manipulation on a large scale, conducted for the purpose of achieving victory. Altogether, a systematic exploration of these three areas can significantly improve our understanding of emotions and their role in military strategy.

The paper is structured in the following way: Section two characterizes emotions, discussing where they come from, how they work, and how they affect cognition and behavior. Section three draws on the precepts of strategic theory to delineate the three research areas described above. The following three sections explore the three prospective research areas in more depth. Finally, the conclusion discusses the implications of the argument for future research on emotions and strategy.

The Characteristics of Emotions

Emotions are stimulated feelings that shape cognition and behavior. This definition is perhaps too simplistic for psychologists or neuroscientists, but it is good enough for students of military strategy. It is simplistic because emotions really are “complex, organized subsystems consisting of thoughts, beliefs, motives, meanings, subjective bodily experiences, and physiological states.”²⁰ Nevertheless, the initial definition is sufficient because the main purpose of emotions is to orchestrate all these processes to enable people to cope with the stimuli provided by our uncertain and ever-changing environment.²¹ Therefore, for students of military strategy, what matters the most is that emotions are a reaction to stimuli and that they influence cognition and behavior.

An emotional stimulus is something we care about, something we consider relevant to our survival or well-being.²² The kind of emotion that a specific stimulus elicits depends on the meaning we assign to it.²³ For example, if we consider something to constitute a threat, we are likely to experience fear. In contrast, if we consider the same phenomenon

18 Lukas Milewski, "Battle and Its Emotive Effects in War Termination," Changing Character of War Conference, Oxford, 2019.

19 Isabelle Duyvesteyn and James E. Worrall, "Global Strategic Studies: A Manifesto," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 40, no. 3 (2017): 349, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2016.1269228>.

20 Ira J. Roseman, "A Model of Appraisal in the Emotion System: Integrating Theory, Research, and Applications," in *Appraisal Process in Emotion: Theory, Methods, Research*, ed. Klaus R. Scherer, Angela Schorr, and Tom Johnstone (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 67.

21 Keltner, Oatley, and Jenkins, *Understanding Emotions*, 238–39.

22 Tobias Brosch, Gilles Pourtois, and David Sander, "The Perception and Categorisation of Emotional Stimuli: A Review," *Cognition and Emotion* 24, no. 3 (2010): 377–400, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02699930902975754>.

23 N.H. Frijda, "The Laws of Emotion," *American Psychologist* 43, no. 5 (1988): 349, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.43.5.349>.



to be an opportunity, we are likely to feel joy or excitement.²⁴ These emotional effects are not tied to a specific stimulus. Instead, they can carry over to other situations and influence decision-making and behavior that is unrelated to the original stimulus. Psychologists call these carry-over effects “incidental emotions,” while the emotions that are directly related to choices and behavior toward the eliciting stimulus are known as “integral emotions.”²⁵ In times of war, emotional stimuli abound, and it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between incidental and integral emotions as a war progresses.

Emotions affect cognition. Indeed, for some scientists, they are an essential part of cognition.²⁶ They influence everything from attention, to judgment, to beliefs and thoughts, to perceptions, to memory. Each emotion affects cognition differently but their common function is to prioritize between competing values and objectives,²⁷ some of which are mutually exclusive. Emotions help us to do this by drawing attention to the stimuli that matter for us in a particular context.²⁸ Emotions further affect our judgment, enabling us to evaluate the stimuli in terms of how they help or hinder us in achieving our goals.²⁹ Similarly, emotions influence the content and the breadth of our thoughts.³⁰ Furthermore, they make us see the world differently, adjusting our perception of probabilities and risks.³¹

Emotions also enable us to remember emotionally charged events better than those not associated with strong emotions.³² In short, emotions enable us to prioritize by making us care about what has happened in the past, what is happening now, and what will happen in the future. They help us to select among competing values to deal with the situation at hand. Neuroscientific and psychological research is now clear: No reasonable or rational decision-making is possible without emotions.³³ Therefore, emotions are necessary for effective decision-making, including in war.

Emotions also shape behavior, including the behavior of actors in a war. Emotions motivate people to act in certain ways to achieve the goals selected by their emotions.³⁴ Specific emotions differ widely in terms of what kinds of goals they lead us to prefer and in the courses of action that they motivate. Fear, for example, motivates the search for security, which can be achieved through freezing, fleeing, fighting, or befriending.³⁵ Thus, in the military context, fear may motivate both submission to the will of the adversary and continual resistance. For emotions that can motivate multiple courses of action, selecting the appropriate behavior depends on the situation at hand.

Anticipating future emotions is just as important as emotional experiences themselves.³⁶ As James

24 Richard S. Lazarus, "Relational Meaning and Discrete Emotions," in *Appraisal Process in Emotion: Theory, Methods, Research*, ed. Klaus Scherer, Angela Schorr, and Tom Johnstone (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 64.

25 Jonathan Renshon and Jennifer Lerner, "Decision-Making, the Role of Emotions in Foreign Policy," in *The Encyclopedia of Peace Psychology*, ed. Daniel J. Christie (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2012), 1–6.

26 John Tooby and Lena Cosmides, "The Evolutionary Psychology of the Emotions and Their Relationship to Internal Regulatory Variables," in *Handbook of Emotions*, ed. Michael Lewis, Jeannette M. Haviland-Jones, and Lisa Feldman Barrett, 3rd ed. (New York: Guilford, 2008), 114–37.

27 Jennifer S. Lerner et al., "Emotion and Decision Making," *Annual Review of Psychology* 66, no. 1 (January 2015): 799–823, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-psych-010213-115043>.

28 Keltner, Oatley, and Jenkins, *Understanding Emotions*, 246–47.

29 Bennet W. Helm, "Emotions as Evaluative Feelings," *Emotion Review* 1, no. 3 (July 2009): 248–55, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1754073909103593>.

30 Lerner et al., "Emotion and Decision Making," 12–17.

31 David DeSteno et al., "Beyond Valence in the Perception of Likelihood: The Role of Emotion Specificity," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 78, no. 3 (April 2000): 397–416, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.78.3.397>; and James N. Druckman and Rose McDermott, "Emotion and the Framing of Risky Choice," *Political Behavior* 30, no. 3 (September 2008): 297–321, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-008-9056-y>; and Jennifer S. Lerner and Dacher Keltner, "Fear, Anger and Risk," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 81, no. 1 (July 2001): 146–59, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.81.1.146>.

32 Elizabeth A. Kensinger and Jaclyn H. Ford, "Retrieval of Emotional Events from Memory," *Annual Review of Psychology*, no. 71 (January 2020): 251–72, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-psych-010419-051123>.

33 Elizabeth A. Phelps, Karolina M. Lempert, and Peter Sokol-Hessner, "Emotion and Decision Making: Multiple Modulatory Neural Circuits," *Annual Review of Neuroscience*, no. 37 (July 2014): 263–87, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-neuro-071013-014119>; and Antonio Damasio, *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (New York: Penguin Books, 2005).

34 Frijda, "The Laws of Emotion," 351.

35 Ira J. Roseman, Cynthia Wiest, and Tamara S. Schwartz, "Phenomenology, Behaviors, and Goals Differentiate Discrete Emotions," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 67, no. 2 (1994): 217, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.67.2.206>; Thierry Steimer, "The Biology of Fear- and Anxiety- Related Behaviors," *Dialogues in Clinical Neuroscience* 4, no. 3 (September 2002): 231–49, <https://dx.doi.org/10.31887%2FDCNS.2002.4.3%2Fsteimer>; and Shelley E. Taylor, "Tend and Befriend: Biobehavioral Bases of Affiliation Under Stress," *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 15, no. 6 (December 2006): 273–77, <https://doi.org/10.1111%2Fj.1467-8721.2006.00451.x>.

36 Roy F. Baumeister et al., "How Emotion Shapes Behavior: Feedback, Anticipation, and Reflection, Rather than Direct Causation," *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 11, no. 2 (May 2007): 167–203, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1088868307301033>; Marco Perugini and Richard P. Bagozzi, "The Role of Desires and Anticipated Emotions in Goal-Directed Behaviours: Broadening and Deepening the Theory of Planned Behaviour," *British Journal of Social Psychology* 40, no. 1 (March 2001): 79–98, <https://doi.org/10.1348/014466601164704>.

Gross explains, people tend to pursue endeavors that they anticipate will make them experience positive emotions and avoid negative ones. However, sometimes even negative emotions such as anger or sadness may be beneficial and, therefore, may be pursued on purpose.³⁷ We anticipate our own and others' emotional responses and manipulate our environment based on these anticipations. Emotional anticipation is a core mechanism behind emotional regulation — changing the emotional experience for oneself or some other people.³⁸ The use of humor, for instance, is a common way to change the emotions of others in everyday life.³⁹ In war, seeking victory and avoiding defeat are common means of eliciting positive emotions at home and negative ones for one's adversary.⁴⁰ Whether consciously or subconsciously, emotional anticipation and the ensuing regulation are inherent parts of our lives, in both peace and war.

Finally, although emotions are always experienced by individuals, they can also spread in groups. Emotions are contagious and this quality enables groups to share similar emotions and to act upon them collectively.⁴¹ In smaller groups, emotions spread through contact between individuals.⁴² People tend to communicate their emotions through their facial and verbal expressions. Others may recognize these expressions, relate to them, and feel similar emotions in turn. In larger groups, emotions spread through shared appraisals of a given situation that are often, but not always, rooted in a sense of common identity.⁴³ This is why, after a military disaster, a large portion of the defeated state may feel angry, scared, or sad, even if neither they nor their relatives were harmed.⁴⁴ A society is not a unitary emotional actor but rather is an amalgamation of different emotional groups.⁴⁵

Military Strategy: Where Do Emotions Fit In?

Military strategy is the pursuit of victory through military power. There are multiple models for visualizing and analyzing strategy, but for the purpose of this paper, it is both necessary and sufficient to focus on the main functions that strategy is supposed to serve. Three such functions stand out as particularly prominent in the writings of strategic theorists: Strategy serves to understand the character of the war at hand, strategy is supposed to direct the course of war, and strategy is about the achievement of victory. Emotions play an important role in the fulfillment of all these functions.

First of all, strategy seeks to understand the character of the war at hand. Hew Strachan observes that “strategy’s primary mission is to enable an understanding of the character of the war to which armed forces are being committed.”⁴⁶ Similarly, Antulio Echevarria points out that the most important, and the only real, principles of war are to understand the nature of war in general and the nature of the particular war at hand.⁴⁷ The character of each war is shaped by many factors from politics to technology, as well as the interaction between these factors. Nonetheless, since strategy is inherently a human endeavor, people, notably their choices and their behavior, are most consequential for the character of any war. Thus, if one wishes to understand the character of a given war, one can do worse than to explore what people in that particular war care about. Such an understanding will help us to understand the changes in the character of a war as it unfolds. This is where emotions, especially emotional stimuli, enter the picture. As explained in the preceding section, emotional stimuli are those issues that

37 James J. Gross, "Emotion Regulation: Current Status and Future Prospects," *International Journal for the Advancement of Psychological Theory* 26, no. 1 (2015): 5, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1047840X.2014.940781>.

38 Sander L. Koole, "The Psychology of Emotion Regulation: An Integrative Review," *Cognition and Emotion* 23, no. 1 (2009): 4–41, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02699930802619031>.

39 Andrea C. Samson and James J. Gross, "The Dark and Light Sides of Humor: An Emotion Regulation Perspective," in *Positive Emotion: Integrating the Light Sides and Dark Sides*, ed. June Gruber and Judith T. Moskowitz (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 169–82.

40 For a discussion about emotion regulation in politics, see Maos Moshe and James Gross, "Emotion Regulation: Implication for Politics," Panel on the Politics of Non-Proportionate Policy Response, ECPR Joint Sessions of Workshops, Warsaw, Poland, 2015, <https://ecpr.eu/Events/Event/PaperDetails/22670>; and Max Nurnus, *Bringing Emotions Back In: A Study on the Relationship Between Power and Emotions in International Relations*, Ph.D. Diss., Seoul National University, February 2019, <http://s-space.snu.ac.kr/bitstream/10371/152095/1/000000155836.pdf>.

41 Mercer, "Feeling like a State: Social Emotion and Identity."

42 Kleef and Fischer, "Emotional Collectives," 8.

43 Kleef and Fischer, "Emotional Collectives," 6; and Hall and Ross, "Rethinking Affective Experience and Popular Emotion."

44 A good discussion about this kind of emotional contagion on a larger scale can be found in Stephen Peter Rosen, *War and Human Nature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 99–134.

45 Jacques E. C. Hymans, *The Psychology of Nuclear Proliferation: Identity, Emotions, and Foreign Policy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 462.

46 Hew Strachan, "Strategy as a Balancing Act: The UK's Dilemma," *The RUSI Journal* 153, no. 3 (2008): 8.

47 Antulio Echevarria, "Principles of War or Principles of Battle?", in *Rethinking the Principles of War*, ed. Antony D. Mclvor (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2005), 58–78.



people care about. Hence, we may learn what the people in a war care about by studying emotional stimuli.⁴⁸ Importantly, studying emotional stimuli helps us to understand what the strategists do not care about, which may be equally illuminating. Therefore, emotional stimuli provide us with a window into the salient aspects of a war's character.

Second, military strategists seek to direct the course of a war by constantly choosing among competing options. To a large extent, strategy is about decisions people make concerning the use of military power. Choices about the use of military power are usually tough because they require weighing out different and often contradictory values. Therefore, strategic choices are about prioritizing. For example, Beatrice Heuser argues that strategy is about preferring one enemy instead of another, one front over another, and one service over another.⁴⁹ Perhaps overstating the issue a bit, Clausewitz observes that "a skilful ordering of priority of engagements ... is what strategy is all about."⁵⁰ It follows that strategists have to select priorities related to three basic questions at all times and places: whether to apply military power, how to sequence its application, and by what means. Emotions enable this kind of strategic choice because they direct our cognitive processes toward the stimulus that matters the most in the given moment.⁵¹ Simply put, emotions make us capable of deciding about the use of military power.

Third, military strategy is about achieving victory, meaning the imposition of one's will upon the adversary. As Lukas Milevski points out "the whole purpose of strategy as classically understood is to negate itself, to bring about a situation in which it is no longer necessary ... because one belligerent has successfully imposed his will upon his opponent."⁵² While choices are important, it is only through the actual performance, the employment of military power, that victory can be achieved.⁵³ In the broadest terms, the achievement of victory requires the

sustainment of military capability and the will to use it at the home front, as well as the disruption of the adversary's capability and will to resist.⁵⁴ Emotions are salient in the achievement of both preconditions. Emotions constitute the fuel that enables strategic performance in the first place because they sustain or even increase the will of the society to carry on fighting. They may also shatter the adversary's will to fight, for example by altering risk perceptions and motivating submissive behavior. Alternatively, emotions may disrupt the adversary's capability to control its society by nurturing adversity between the government, the population, and the armed forces. The practice of military strategy can hence be understood as large-scale emotional manipulation conducted for the purpose of victory.

In sum, military strategy students should incorporate emotions into their research by focusing on emotional stimuli in war, emotional influence on strategic choices, and emotional manipulation as a mechanism for the achievement of victory. The next three sections discuss each of these areas in more detail.

Emotional Stimuli and the Character of War

War, more so than other social activities, is particularly fertile ground for emotional stimuli because it is inherently uncertain and significantly affects people's well-being. Uncertainty is inherent to war mostly because of its interactive nature.⁵⁵ The actors in a war actively try to pursue their objectives and to frustrate the efforts of their adversary. This interaction produces uncertainty for all participants because they seldom know what the other side is going to do in the next moment. Since emotions are the main mechanism that people have to cope with uncertainty, they are likely to proliferate in war. War is also likely to produce emotional stimuli because it carries with it the possibility of death, harm, and

48 Claire Yorke has recently pursued a similar argument, pointing out that statesmen seeking to exercise influence should seek to understand the "atmospherics" of a particular society, i.e., the prevalent moods of the relevant population segments. See Claire Yorke, "Reading the Mood: Atmospheric and Counterterrorism", *The RUSI Journal* 165, no. 1 (2020): 64–73. While I agree with the argument, I would propose that focusing on stimuli rather than moods is more beneficial because such an approach conveys the advantage of understanding not only how particular individuals or collectives feel, but also toward what issues those feelings are directed. Since the subsequent cognitive and behavioral influence depends on both the character of the emotion and the stimulus that elicits the emotion, the exploration of emotional stimuli warrants attention.

49 Beatrice Heuser, *Strategy Before Clausewitz: Linking Warfare and Statecraft, 1400–1830* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 1–2.

50 Clausewitz, *On War*, 228.

51 Payne, *The Psychology of Strategy*, 49; and Jonathan Mercer, "Emotion and Strategy in the Korean War," *International Organization* 67, no. 2 (April 2013): 221–52, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818313000015>.

52 Lukas Milevski, "Choosing Strategy: Meaning, Significance, Context," *Infinity Journal* 6, no. 2 (Summer 2018): 15–18, <https://www.militarystrategymagazine.com/article/choosing-strategy-meaning-significance-context/>.

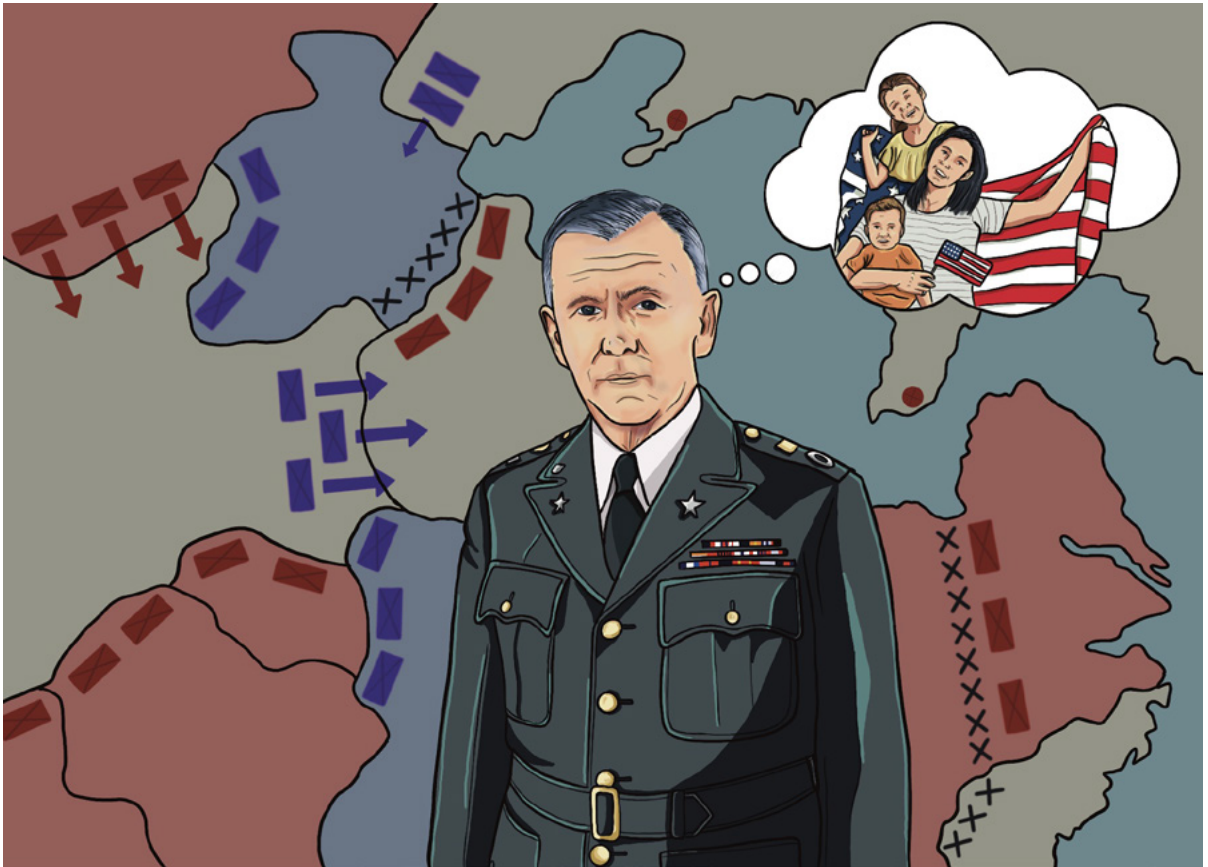
53 Lukas Milevski, "Western Strategy's Two Logics: Diverging Interpretations," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 2019.

54 Echevarria, *Military Strategy: A Very Short Introduction*, 1.

55 Clausewitz, *On War*, 104.



The practice of military strategy can hence be understood as a large-scale emotional manipulation conducted for the purpose of victory.



status degradation.⁵⁶ While it sometimes creates opportunities to satisfy one's desires, more often it signifies mere misery and destruction.⁵⁷ In all cases, war stimulates strong concerns for survival and well-being and, therefore, is a perfect environment for emotional stimuli to thrive in.

Systematic thinking about emotional stimuli in war requires categorization. The basic categories of emotional stimuli correspond to the main concerns of belligerents in a war. In the broadest sense, these are violence, chance and friction, and politics.⁵⁸ Just as in Clausewitz's thinking, the boundaries between these categories are not solid and there are overlaps. Nevertheless, differentiating between them is important because different stimuli elicit different kinds of emotions.

Violence, especially reciprocal violence, is the defining feature of war. By violence I mean inflicting intentional physical harm on other people.⁵⁹ Because violence suggests the prospect of harm and death, it acts as a strong emotional stimulus for people who encounter it. Those experiencing violence in battles may well feel intense and diverse emotions because of the very real and immediate dangers of close combat.⁶⁰ The farther away from the battle people are, the more their emotions vary depending on their interpretation of the situation. A military setback can stimulate sadness, fear, or anger, while success may stimulate a sense of relief or pride. Yet, ultimately, the emotional experience depends on the strategist's appraisal of the whole situation. For example, after the bloody battle of Malplaquet

56 Jonathan Renshon, *Fighting for Status: Hierarchy and Conflict in World Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017); Rosen, *War and Human Nature*; and Dominic D.P. Johnson, Richard W. Wrangham, and Stephen Peter Rosen, "Is Military Incompetence Adaptive? An Empirical Test with Risk-Taking Behaviour in Modern Warfare," *Evolution and Human Behavior* 23, no. 4 (July 2002): 245–64, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1090-5138\(01\)00087-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1090-5138(01)00087-3).

57 Azar Gat, *The Causes of War and the Spread of Peace: But Will War Rebound?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

58 This categorization is derived directly from Clausewitz's trinity. See Clausewitz, *On War*, 89. For a comparison with a categorization of emotional stimuli in international relations, see Hall and Ross, "Affective Politics After 9/11," 854–55.

59 Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 19.

60 Leo Murray, *Brains and Bullets: How Psychology Wins Wars* (London: Biteback Publishing, 2013); Brian Sandberg, "His Courage Produced More Fear in His Enemies than Shame in His Soldiers: Siege Combat and Emotional Display in the French Wars of Religion," in *Battlefield Emotions 1500-1800*, 127–48; Marian Füssel, "Emotions in the Making: The Transformation of Battlefield Experiences During the Seven Years' War (1756–1763)," in *Battlefield Emotions 1500-1800*, 149–72; and Siniša Malešević, "The Act of Killing: Understanding the Emotional Dynamics of Violence on the Battlefield," *Critical Military Studies* 7, no. 3 (2019): 313–34, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23337486.2019.1673060>.

in 1709, the commanding general of the French armies, Marshal Claude Louis Hector de Villars, expressed elation and perhaps even happiness at his adversaries' military success. Understanding the Pyrrhic character of the adversaries' tactical victory, he wrote to the French king that "if God gives us the grace to lose another similar battle, your Majesty can count on his enemies being destroyed."⁶¹ There is no theoretical limit to the spectrum of emotions associated with violent stimuli, though in practice some emotions may occur more often than others.

Chance and friction are inevitable, though often under-appreciated, elements of strategic practice. Chance refers to events that are beyond the belligerents' control or intention. Friction refers to organizational and technological obstacles that belligerents may face. Both phenomena often go hand-in-hand and are common stimuli of emotions in the conduct of military strategy. Experiencing logistical difficulties is the paramount example of how chance and friction can cause emotional responses. The Persian king and military strategist Xerxes I, for instance, famously had the waters of the Hellespont whipped after his bridges were destroyed by a storm, because it delayed his invasion of Greece. At another time, a mountain blocking his path inspired him to write an angry letter to the pile of rocks.⁶² These are humorous and perhaps fictional examples, but they convey an important point: There is much in our lives that is beyond our control, and yet we still care deeply about them. Across history, natural disasters have often produced "loss and horror, and with it suffering, pain, confusion, shock, chaos, trauma," but the emotional responses have varied widely, including "fear, sorrow, guilt or repentance, but also awe, wonder, or even blame, hate and vengeance."⁶³ Yet, it does not take a hurricane to alter someone's emotions. Even slight changes in the outdoor temperature or sunlight can have some impact on the emotions we experience.⁶⁴ Chance and friction are, therefore, omnipresent and salient emotional stimuli that deserve close scrutiny.

Politics is simply the pursuit of human desires within and between social communities.⁶⁵ Politics penetrates war in all its moments and is thus a particularly common emotional stimulus. Again, the type of emotion that results from politics varies depending on the meaning that people ascribe to the particular manifestation of politics in any given moment. Often, those responsible for the employment of military power become frustrated with political interference into what they erroneously consider to be solely a military affair. For example, Austrian Gen. Raimondo Montecuccoli once got extremely angry at his government in Vienna because it extensively limited his freedom of action during the wars against France in the early 1670s.⁶⁶ Working with some military colleagues can be equally frustrating. For example, Braxton Bragg, a Confederate general during the American Civil War, elicited hatred in everyone he was supposed to cooperate with.⁶⁷ Yet, politics can also be a source of positive emotions. For example, when an ally comes to one's aid in a war, the latter is likely to feel hope, relief, or even "the greatest joy," as in the case of British Prime Minister Winston Churchill when the United States finally entered World War II.⁶⁸ Politics provides belligerents with an inexhaustible and diverse pool of emotional stimuli.

The key for a scholar of strategy is to disentangle integral emotions from the incidental ones. This is a challenging task. The hatred that originates from personal disagreements can carry over to the decision-making about the use of military power. Sadness about the death of a friend in battle can influence choices about political alliances. Nonetheless, only by tracing emotions back to their original stimuli can students understand the subsequent choices and people's behavior in war. The next two sections elaborate further on the complex relationship between emotional stimuli, strategic choices, and the pursuit of victory.

61 John A. Lynn, *The French Wars 1667–1714: The Sun King at War* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2002), 70.

62 Richard Stoneman, *Xerxes: A Persian Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 4–5.

63 Jennifer Spinks and Charles Zika, "Introduction: Rethinking Disaster and Emotions, 1400–1700," in *Disaster, Death and the Emotions in the Shadow of the Apocalypse, 1400–1700*, ed. Jennifer Spinks and Charles Zika (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016), 5. For a variety of emotional responses to natural disasters, see also Geoffrey Parker, *Global Crisis: War, Climate Change and Catastrophe in the Seventeenth Century* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013).

64 Liisi Kõõts, Anu Realo, and Jüri Allik, "The Influence of the Weather on Affective Experience," *Journal of Individual Differences* 32, no. 2 (May 2011): 74–84, <https://doi.org/10.1027/1614-0001/a000037>.

65 Gat, *The Causes of War and the Spread of Peace*, 248–49.

66 John A. Mears, "Count Raimondo Montecuccoli: Servant of a Dynasty," *The Historian* 32, no. 3 (May 1970): 403–04, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6563.1970.tb01146.x>.

67 Williamson Murray and Wayne Wei-Siang Hsieh, *A Savage War: A Military History of the Civil War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016), 299.

68 Winston S. Churchill, *Memoirs of the Second World War* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1959), 506.



Emotions and Strategic Choices

Strategic choice is a core element of strategic practice. Making a strategic choice means making decisions about the employment of military power. While there are countless possible contexts in which military power might be used and, therefore, an infinite pool of potential questions facing a strategist, three questions are general enough that they are likely to be relevant in most scenarios. The first question is whether to apply military power at all. This is arguably the most important

All these choices are fundamentally emotional because emotions enable strategic practitioners to decide among competing options in any given moment.

question because the decision to employ or not to employ military power has significant physical and psychological consequences for all belligerents. The second question is how to sequence the application of military power. This question logically follows from the first one and brings more specificity to the table because it zooms in on the contextual aspects of the situation. The final question is what means to use in the employment of military power. All these choices are fundamentally emotional because emotions enable strategic practitioners to decide among competing options in any given moment.

The first question that the strategist needs to resolve is whether to apply military power at all. Some emotions, such as anger or hatred, motivate the application of military power by making the strategist more likely to seek risk or by giving him the desire to eradicate the adversary's society.⁶⁹ Other emotions, such as fear, surprise, or sadness, may motivate a strategist to refrain from fighting by increasing pessimism about the probability of success.⁷⁰ Despite these tendencies, much depends on the original stimulus. In the *Illiad*, for example, the Greek hero Achilles chose to abstain from fighting when offended

by his commander, the Mycenaean King Agamemnon. Anger motivated the famous hero to punish Agamemnon by not helping the Greeks in their fight against the Trojans. However, when the Trojan Prince Hector killed Achilles' close friend Patroclus, Achilles chose to fight to punish the Trojans. In this instance, anger triggered by domestic politics made Achilles refrain from fighting, while anger triggered by violence made him fight.⁷¹ It was a constant fear of defeat in battle that motivated the Union Gen. George McClellan to avoid meeting the Confederate forces on the battlefield throughout much of his career during the American Civil War.⁷²

Likewise, recent research suggests that for Japanese elites during World War II, the fear of a domestic revolution may have ultimately motivated their surrender.⁷³ However, at another time and place, a growing fear of domestic unpopularity motivated the

Spartan King Cleombrotus I to engage the Thebans in the fateful battle of Leuctra in 371 BC.⁷⁴

Anticipating future emotions can play as big a role in these choices as the emotional experience itself. Some strategists may choose not to fight in order to avoid future feelings of guilt, while others may do the reverse in order to feel proud. The anticipation of gratitude may spur one strategist to fight on an ally's behalf, while anticipation of the third party's anger may have the opposite effect.⁷⁵ The choice to fight, or to abstain from fighting, is always emotional. But these examples illustrate that the stimuli themselves are as important as the character of the emotions.

The second question that strategic practitioners face is how to sequence the application of military power: which adversary to attack first, where to fight, and when to fight. Here, too, the influence of emotion on strategic choice depends partially on the character of each emotion. For example, if a strategist faces two adversaries, he will likely attack the one he hates more. This is even more likely if he fears the other adversary. In practice, multiple emotions can shape strategic choice at the

69 Agnetta Fischer, Eran Halperin, and Daphna Canetti, "Why We Hate," *Emotion Review* 10, no. 4 (October 2018): 309–20, <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1754073917751229>; and Jennifer Lerner and Larissa Z. Tiedens, "Portrait of The Angry Decision Maker: How Appraisal Tendencies Shape Anger's Influence on Cognition," *Journal of Behavioral Decision Making* 19, no. 2 (April 2006): 115–37, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/bdm.515>.

70 Zilincik, "Strategy and the Instrumental Role of Emotions."

71 Glenn W. Most, "Anger and Pity in Homer's *Iliad*", in *Ancient Anger: Perspectives from Homer to Galen*, ed. Susanna Braund and Glenn W. Most (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 50.

72 Murray and Hsieh, *A Savage War*, 113.

73 Jeremy A. Yellen, "The Specter of Revolution: Reconsidering Japan's Decision to Surrender," *The International History Review* 35, no. 1 (February 2013): 205–26, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24701346>.

74 Xenophon, *Hellenica, Books VI and VII, Anabasis, Books I-III*, ed. Carleton L. Brownson (London: William Heinemann LTD, 1961), 55–56.

75 Machiavelli pursued this kind of reasoning in several places in his writings. See, for example, Niccolò Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield and Nathan Tarcov (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 159.

same time. The Jewish insurgents who attacked each other instead of the Roman legion knocking on Jerusalem's doors in 70 AD could have been motivated by mutual hatred as well as by the fear of diminishing resources.⁷⁶

The selection of the adversary is inherently tied to the selection of the geographic location in which to do the fighting. In general, fears of a two-front confrontation often motivate strategists to seek victory on one front before moving all their forces to secure the other. But fear can also motivate leaders to disperse their troops instead of concentrating them in one place. For example, Adolf Hitler was so scared of being surprised by a counter-attack that he dispersed his forces across the front with the Soviet Union instead of focusing them on one decisive point.⁷⁷

As for when to fight, strategists generally choose to attack sooner rather than later when they fear the deterioration of conditions. Japanese strategists arguably felt this kind of fear before they decided to launch attacks on Pearl Harbor.⁷⁸ Additionally, envy combined with an anticipation of pride may motivate strategists to attack sooner rather than later, before their colleagues have the opportunity to steal the fame for themselves. This was one of the reasons why the American Gen. Mark Clark focused his forces on capturing Rome instead of hurling them against the withdrawing German forces during the final stages of the Italian campaign during World War II.⁷⁹ These examples show that the influence of emotions on the sequencing of violence deserves more attention. Above all, they demonstrate that distinct emotions may shape strategic choices differently and that much depends on the stimuli themselves.

The third question relates to the means by which military power is to be applied: What kind of military power should a strategist use, and which tactics should he employ? In general, emotions that make people risk-averse and pessimistic, such as fear or sadness, motivate reliance on cheaper forms of military power, such as cyber power or airpower.

Conversely, emotions that encourage risk-taking, such as anger, make strategists feel in control of the situation and motivate them to attack the adversary even with more expensive forms of military power, such as landpower. For example, a study by Kerstin Fisk and her colleagues indicated that both fear and anger may motivate people to support the use of airpower to eliminate the threat of terrorism. However, the authors point out that this consensus is unlikely to hold for using landpower because its employment bears inherently higher risks.⁸⁰

Emotions also shape choices about what tactics to employ, although it is hard to generalize beyond what has already been said about particular emotions. Fear and sadness encourage playing it safe, while anger and hatred may motivate daring, even reckless endeavors. Yet what is safe and reckless is heavily context-dependent. For example, when the Prussian armies besieged Paris during the Franco-Prussian war of 1870–1871, Prussia had to decide whether to bombard the city into submission or starve its inhabitants. In the end, Prussia's leaders decided to attack, a decision that was rooted in distinct emotions. The Prussian public, motivated by anger and hatred, demanded bombardment as punishment for the historical grievances suffered at the hands of France.⁸¹ The chancellor, Otto von Bismarck, advocated the same course of action out of fear that a third party might enter the conflict on behalf of France. This fear made him see bombardment as the most effective means to achieve a favorable peace in time.⁸²

A specific kind of context-sensitivity is required when exploring the influence of emotional anticipation. Military strategists often make choices about the application of violence based on the desire to elicit or avoid eliciting specific emotions. For example, some insurgent groups have recently abstained from indiscriminate violence so as not to provoke hatred in the adversary's society.⁸³ Hence, from the selection of means at the highest level to the particular tactics that are used on the ground, emotions always exercise influence on strategic choice.

76 For a discussion about these stimuli, see James J. Bloom, *The Jewish Revolts Against Rome, A.D. 66–135* (London: McFarland & Company, 2010), 156–58.

77 Robert Pois and Philip Langer, *Command Failure in War: Psychology and Leadership* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 179.

78 Dale C. Copeland, "A Tragic Choice: Japanese Preventive Motivations and the Origins of the Pacific War," *International Interactions* 37, no. 1 (2011): 116–26, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03050629.2011.546722>.

79 Glenn King, *From Salerno to Rome: General Mark W. Clark and the Challenges of Coalition Warfare* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Lucknow Books, 2007), 68.

80 Kerstin Fisk, Jennifer L. Merolla, and Jennifer M. Ramos, "Emotions, Terrorist Threat, and Drones: Anger Drives Support for Drone Strikes," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 63, no. 4, (April 2019): 976–1000, doi.org/10.1177/0022002718770522.

81 Michael Howard, *The Franco-Prussian War* (London: Routledge, 2005), 279.

82 Howard, *The Franco-Prussian War*, 308.

83 Roger D. Petersen, *Western Intervention in the Balkans: The Strategic Use of Emotion in Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 95–96.



Emotional Manipulation and the Pursuit of Victory

Emotional manipulation is the practice of deliberately or accidentally changing the emotions of particular individuals or groups. Emotional manipulation makes it possible to gain an advantage over the adversary even before one uses military power. For example, by using propaganda, one can increase the willingness of one's society to wage war or do the reverse to the adversary. Yet, from the perspective of military strategy, the most interesting form of emotional manipulation relates to the use of military power. When strategic practitioners use military forces, they intentionally or accidentally change emotions both at home and abroad. Emotional effects produced in this way affect both belligerents and their respective societies, although to varying degrees. These emotional effects can make or break the sustainment of the war effort of either belligerent. Emotional manipulation is thus a part of military strategy from its inception up until its termination — that is, the achievement of victory for either side.

Emotional manipulation at home can help strategists to sustain the war effort. Yet the usefulness of evoking specific emotions for this purpose varies greatly. Concerning the strategist's own feelings, emotions such as sadness and surprise are seldom desirable because they either decrease the overall willingness to fight or suspend the decision-making process altogether. Fear can be somewhat useful to motivate the careful conduct of war, although it is likely to decrease the strategist's will to fight in the process, at least when that fear is felt with regard to the adversary. Anger, hatred, or the anticipation of pride may contribute to the sustainment of the war effort but, at the same time, may lead a strategist to pursue reckless actions. Emotions can thus motivate the strategist to keep fighting but they usually come with some drawbacks.

Of course, the role of emotions in sustaining the domestic war effort does not only concern strategists but all of society. Niccolo Machiavelli understood this point very well when he urged strategists to make themselves loved or feared but never hated.⁸⁴ As Rainsborough points out, Western strategic thinking has generally paid little attention to how important it is to ignite domestic populations' emotions in order to sustain

the strategic effort.⁸⁵ Likewise, effective emotional manipulation can constitute the difference between armed forces who are willing to fight and die for their society and those who refuse to fight, fight badly, desert, or even revolt.⁸⁶ Therefore, evoking favorable emotions on the home front may be a prerequisite for victory, especially during long wars of attrition when securing support for the war effort is imperative.

Emotional manipulation abroad can contribute directly to victory, by shattering the adversary's will or by motivating the adversary to pursue reckless courses of action. Emotions such as fear, sadness, and surprise are likely to do the former. These emotions decrease the adversary's will to fight by making it more risk-averse or even paralyzing its decision-making process altogether. Equally importantly, the anticipation of emotions associated with the prospect of significant loss, such as sadness, can make the adversary less willing to fight. In contrast, anger and hatred are likely to make the adversary more willing to fight. However, provoking these emotions may contribute to a strategist's overall victory in war because they, too, can motivate reckless action in an adversary.⁸⁷ Careless actions, in turn, can lead to the loss of essential military resources. This was the case for Spartan King Agesilaus II who, motivated by his hatred of the city of Thebes, repeatedly attacked the city. His army got weaker with every engagement while his opponents adapted and become stronger, gradually shifting the relative balance of military capabilities in the favor of Thebes. As always, the stimulus that produces the emotions, or their anticipation, matters a great deal when it comes to the influence of these emotions on the adversary's willingness to fight.

Emotional manipulation can also contribute to victory in a more indirect way, by disrupting relations within the adversary's society. An adversary is not a unified actor. In addition to strategists, there are also civilians and the armed forces to consider. Emotions that produce or enhance adversity between these societal elements are most useful for achieving victory. The most useful emotions for this aim include obvious candidates such as hatred and anger but also envy, resentment, or frustration. During the Peloponnesian war, the Athenian leader Pericles was scared of this kind of emotional manipulation. He anticipated the anger of the

84 Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. James B. Atkinson (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2008), 269–78.

85 Smith, "Politics and Passion: The Neglected Mainspring of War."

86 To understand how much an army's will to fight matters in contemporary strategic practice, see Carter Malkasian, *The American War in Afghanistan: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021).

87 Petersen, *Western Intervention in the Balkans*, 36.

Athenian population once the latter saw the Spartans ravaging Athenian lands but sparing Pericles' property because of his amicable relations with the Spartan King Archidamus II.⁸⁸ Alternatively, if the adversary's armed forces get frustrated with the government, they may desert or even organize to overthrow the political elites, as the Praetorian Guard in Rome did several times. In these ways, strategic practice may plant the seeds for societal disruption through emotional manipulation.

Scholars have already identified some general patterns of how military power can elicit particular emotions on the adversary's side. In my own work, I have proposed that employing overwhelming force may elicit fear, utilizing speed and deception can elicit surprise, and defeating an adversary in protracted warfare can produce sadness.⁸⁹ Roger Petersen has argued that fear can be elicited by unlimited and indiscriminate killing while anger can be provoked by limited discriminate killing.⁹⁰ Agneta Fischer and her colleagues have argued that the protracted use of military power can elicit hatred.⁹¹ Focusing on military power applied through cyberspace, Rose McDermott has theorized that cyber attacks can elicit fear, anger, surprise, or disgust, depending on whether the attacks target

distinct emotions. For example, harming one's own population, even if by accident, is likely to produce strongly negative emotions, such as anger and hatred, toward the strategist. Chiang Kai-shek evoked such hatred by employing a scorched-earth policy in large portions of China during the second war with Japan.⁹² It is also plausible that positive emotions, such as pride, happiness, and excitement, can be elicited by conducting successful military operations against an adversary, yet the influence of these emotions is far less significant than the influence of negative emotions. Due to the relative lack of existing research, the topic of emotional manipulation on the home front is fertile ground for further exploration.

Conclusion

Emotions are at the core of strategic practice. War, the environment in which strategy takes place, is fertile ground for emotional stimuli because it is full of uncertainty and it impacts the well-being of individuals and collectives. In general, people in war have emotional reactions to violence, chance and friction, and politics. It is imperative to know what it is that people feel emotional about because that reveals what they care about, and people shape the character of each war based on what they care about. Therefore, if we wish to understand the character of any specific war, it is useful to focus on the issues that people in war find particularly emotional.

Additionally, emotions shape the choices that strategists make about the employment of military power. At the most fundamental level, emotions enable strategic choices by drawing strategists' attention toward what matters to them in any given moment. They help strategists to decide whether to employ military power or not, how to employ it, and what kind of means to use in that employment.

Emotions are also salient to the pursuit of victory. They are essential to sustaining the war effort at home because they can motivate strategists and

Emotional manipulation can also contribute to victory in a more indirect way, by disrupting relations within the adversary's society.

civilian infrastructure, elections, military forces, or domestic cyber systems respectively.⁹² Although these claims require more empirical support, they provide a strong basis for conducting further research because they offer generalizations that can be tested and subsequently modified according to real-world evidence.

However, these theories have largely evaded discussions about how emotional manipulation works on the home front. Nonetheless, some generalizations can be made based on the profile of

88 Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Rex Warner (New York: Penguin Books, 1974), 2:13.

89 Zilincik, "Strategy and the Instrumental Role of Emotions."

90 Petersen, *Western Intervention in the Balkans*, 56.

91 Fischer, Halperin, and Canetti, "Why We Hate."

92 Rose McDermott, "Some Emotional Considerations in Cyber Conflict," *Journal of Cyber Policy* 4, no. 3 (2019): 321, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23738871.2019.1701692>.

93 Hans Van de Ven, *China at War: Triumph and Tragedy in the Emergence of the New China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018), 119.




their societies to wage war until victory is achieved. Conversely, emotions can also shatter an adversary's will to fight, or at least disrupt its sustainment of the war effort. The achievement of victory, then, at least partially depends on how successfully strategic practitioners manipulate the emotions of the belligerents in a war.

It is high time that the role of emotions in the practice of military strategy gets the attention that it deserves. This article has argued that the three research areas proposed above are particularly relevant for further work in this area. At the same time, there is much room for further refinement of the proposed ideas in this paper. Although future research may reveal deficiencies in some of the conceptualizations presented here, the crux of the argument should prevail.

One dominant theme is worthy of particular emphasis. Any serious study of emotions in military strategic practice requires striking the right balance between making generalizations and being sensitive to a given context. This paper identified certain patterns of how emotions emerge and are influential based on the characteristics of the specific emotions and the works of other scholars. Future scholarship can build upon these patterns and develop new ones, whether by making deductions from emotion theories or by making inductions from case studies. At the same time, it is always important to remain sensitive to the context or, more specifically, to the particular stimuli that cause the emotions in any given situation. Different stimuli may fundamentally change how emotions influence people in times of war. Paying attention to emotional stimuli gives students of military strategy a better appreciation of contextual nuance. Navigating this complexity should come easy to scholars who are already accustomed to studying perhaps the most complex of all social interactions — war.

There is much that students of military strategy can learn about the role of emotions in strategy by looking to the work produced from other disciplines, although such work is scattered across fields that seldom communicate with each other. Historical research, for example, has much to say about what strategists have cared about in past wars, while international relations scholarship has produced insightful observations about decision-making in war. Works from political science, conflict studies, and critical security studies can also provide clues as to how to harness emotional effects for political purposes. It is now up to the scholars of strategic studies to collect the pieces and build them into a coherent explanation of how exactly emotions matter in strategy.

One key advantage of conducting research in

these areas is that the insights derived from this research can be immediately useful in strategic practice. Based on this research, strategic practitioners can better grasp the complex character of a given war and thus avoid taking actions that may have little effect or that may even be counterproductive. They can also better understand their own emotional motivations for the choices they make and hence reflect on whether these choices are really appropriate to the situation. Similarly, strategists can better anticipate the choices that their adversaries may make. Finally, by being aware of the emotional aspects of military strategy, those responsible for its conduct can be more successful in the pursuit of victory. 

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