



November 8, 2007

THE STRATEGY OF TEACHING STRATEGY IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Gabriel Marcella

The U.S. Army War College Experience.¹

There is nothing equal to the intellectual delights of mutual discovery via the Socratic give-and-take in seminars at the U.S. Army War College (USAWC). Much like their counterparts in the various war colleges (Navy, Air Force, National, Industrial College of the Armed Forces, and Marine Corps), the students are accomplished, demanding, talented, and interesting. We have great colleagues teaching, writing, and interacting with the policy-strategy communities. The civil-military quality of the faculty is a model of professional collaboration. The personal and professional rewards are incalculable; so is the opportunity to contribute to our nation's defense. The USAWC has become a center of academic excellence, enriched by numerous initiatives, such as the International Fellows Program, the increased rigor of the master's program, the growth of a professional faculty, and the productivity of scholars whose publications reach the national and international marketplace of strategic studies and the highest levels of our government. Deservedly, the USAWC has become the destination of academic pilgrims from all over the world.

The Challenge of Teaching Strategy in the 21st Century.

The USAWC is a great institution. Nonetheless, we need to do a much better job at the core mission of teaching strategy. We teach about strategy, we don't teach how to develop strategy. We teach leadership and management, explore theories of war and strategy, budgeting, the national security decisionmaking process, the instruments of power, and current and future threats. We acquaint students with various national strategy documents, and teach joint processes and campaign planning. We offer a menu of electives that expand intellectual horizons, including a good dose of understanding foreign cultures.

We teach well, and innocently assume that these sequential efforts will synergistically yield strategists. Some students will put this learning together and become better strategists. Despite the excellence, our efforts at teaching the normative

concept of strategy in the complex political-military national and international contexts are timid. Understandably, the tyranny of time forces us to make triage within the 10 months. We skim over what ought to be the central component of the curriculum with the linear definition of strategy as “the calculated relationship between ends, ways, and means.” This elegant equation is good for framing the kinds of macro questions we need to answer to arrive at strategy, but it doesn’t tell us how to calculate. It might help allocate resources in the era of industrial warfare, but strategic pedagogy must include the human dimensions of the dynamic, multivariable, nonlinear interaction of opposing wills in the complex political-psychological realm of asymmetric 21st century conflict, where state and nonstate actors collide “under the critical gaze of global public opinion.”² Moreover, the “long war” will require a new kind of leader, intellectually agile and able to correlate the various instruments of national power. The parsimonious ends-ways-means continuum can default to a mechanical process where tangible resources dominate the intellectual effort, instead of the more subtle dimensions of the craft of strategy. Thus, it has the tendency to predispose budding strategists to rely on kinetics, which is what they know best.

Our teaching may reinforce the student proclivity to view strategy as the application of resources, therefore equating strategy to power. Strategy is a multiplier that adds value to power, some scheme to link political ends with the use of power. According to Richard Betts, strategy is the essential ingredient for making war either politically effective or morally tenable. Without strategy, war is mindless.³ David Jablonsky, prolific writer and brilliant instructor for a generation of USAWC students, cautioned: “. . . students weaned on the structural certitude of the five-paragraph field order and the Commander’s Estimate naturally find . . . structure comforting when dealing with the complexities of strategy.” He advised: “In an ever more interdependent world in which variables for the strategist within the ends-ways-means paradigm have increased exponentially, strategists are no nearer to a ‘Philosopher’s Stone’ than they ever were. Strategy remains the most difficult of all art.”⁴ Calling it art recognizes the inherently messy nature of the process in a democracy, with its multiple epicenters of influence deriving from personality, domestic politics, institutional agendas and culture, group think phenomena, opportunity, and the demands of the international environment on American leadership and power.⁵ Moreover, as Churchill once said: “even the best strategy must take the enemy into account.” We should add coalition partners, circumstances, will, resources, and the infinity of variables in human psychology.

Cumulative tactical and operational experience does not produce strategic acumen. Mastering the employment of force at the lowest levels and at the level of state power are often mutually exclusive skills.⁶ Sun Tzu admonished that tactics without strategy is the noise before defeat. Strategists must understand more than the efficient application of force. Accordingly, we don’t do well in teaching students how to translate policy guidance into military strategy. To aid this process, Colin Gray echoes Clausewitz in advocating a permanent dialogue between policymaker and soldier.⁷ Former Supreme Allied Commander in Europe General John R. Galvin urged: “We owe it to those who follow us to educate them and prepare them to assume the heavy responsibility of

providing military leadership and military advice in the service of the state; in other words, to make them (some of them, the best of them) military strategists.”⁸

Recommendations: Linking Theory to Strategy.

There is no doctrine for making strategists. Pericles, Bismarck, Churchill, and their like possessed innate genius, seasoned by experience (to include failure) and self-study, especially at the grand strategy level.⁹ The American way of war, which historically relied on plentiful resources, technology, kinetics, and geographic cushioning, predisposes us against strategic creativity.¹⁰ In fact, in the past our enormous advantage in resources masked flaws in strategy. Neither kinetics nor resource superiority will win future wars, while geography will no longer secure us. We, in this great schoolhouse, must do a better job of making the intellectual link between the theory of strategy and the making of strategy.

There is, frankly, very little literature on this. The available doctrine has to do with leadership, organization, logistics, intelligence, and operations, but nothing on the making of strategy.¹¹ The ongoing “transformation,” with its emphasis on the sinews of military power, has further orphaned strategy. Our experience in Iraq verifies this hard truth. Most of the literature leaves us with a rich lode of theory and military history. Thus, we must rely on proven pedagogical techniques, such as case studies that deal with both success and failure, mentoring from senior leaders known for their strategic creativity, self-study, and writing. At the same time, there is the terminological challenge of distinguishing grand strategy, military strategy, theater strategy, and strategic planning. While theory may be the coagulant common to all four, they are not the same. Grand strategy governs military strategy, which governs strategic planning and theater strategy. All of them should constantly hold operations accountable to political purpose. The future strategist must understand the three interrelated realms. Because of the revolution in communication technology and the 24-hour news cycle, in the 21st century it will be increasingly difficult for soldiers on the ground to differentiate operations from strategy; tactical operations can have dramatic strategic implications. Indeed, Clausewitz’s remarkable trinity of the people, armed forces, and the government now engages the global community.

USAWC students are, by virtue of having commanded units and managed great resources, passionate about synthesis, of putting everything together to solve the problem. Because of that experience, pedagogical theory holds that adult professionals need to see the application of learning. Moreover, learning is a social activity. Learning is also contextual, we learn based on what we know, believe, and fear.¹² Finally, we understand organizing principles better as we use them. Steve Fought, former professor at the Naval War College and dean at the Air War College, argues that war college students are impatient with theory. Therefore, they should confront problems to solve early in the curriculum:

They want the problem--now. So begin with a problem that stretches their capabilities, and let them flail. As flailing becomes failing, offer up theory to get them back on track. At some point, sometimes after they have hosed up the exercise completely, one of them will sheepishly ask: Has anybody ever done this before? . . . Talented, experienced adults are aggressively impatient. They demand proof of relevance. The best method of proof is not to "show them" but to have them convince themselves. The roadmap is application-theory-history, offered in seminar environment, through real-world cases, accompanied by active student participation in both the learning and teaching processes.¹³

Note that Fought advocates reversing the sequence of theory-history-application, the order which dominates how we teach at the USAWC. Such radical thinking may lift sensitive eyebrows among traditionalists wedded to the building block approach that begins with theory, proceeds to case study, and application. We must find a worthy balance between the two approaches. The goal is the same: to produce better strategists. Integrative learning is the key.

Below are 10 remedies, some short term and some longer term. They should be taken *in toto* as a comprehensive approach to pedagogy and strategy.

1. Develop an integrated strategy model as a pedagogical tool that can be applied to illustrate how all the instruments of national power are fused in the development and implementation of strategy at the various levels of peace and conflict. This should not be a mere chart on the wall, but rather fully developed writing on how strategy is made, in order to illustrate the nonlinear intellectual, human dimensions. We need to teach the DIME (diplomatic, informational, economic, and military) as integrated strategy, not as discrete elements simply tossed into the crucible when the military instrument is found wanting. To achieve these goals, we should summon the best minds on the teaching of strategy in the 21st century.

2. Develop strategy components in the core curriculum, where students would be required to develop strategy for contemporary national security and military problems. Students should develop a national security strategy, followed by a military strategy that would have to be budgeted and then applied to the real world. The intellectual challenge of developing grand national security strategy engenders the skill of thinking holistically, a talent which can be transmitted to developing military strategy. If students simply analyze current strategy documents written by professionals schooled in statecraft, they are spared the pedagogical rewards of having to grapple with the challenge of thinking and writing strategically. We deprive them of the benefits of their own creativity, the fruit of trying labor. Let us recall that the 1930s generation of students at the USAWC produced the Rainbow Plans. According to Henry Gole, another distinguished USAWC instructor of the 1990s: "The work produced by the students, staff, and faculty beginning in 1934 at the Army War College anticipated the very conditions faced by the United States in 1939-41."¹⁴ In those simpler days of yore, Major (later General) Albert C. Wedemeyer in 1941 wrote the victory plan for World War II.¹⁵ We should take note of the wisdom of that "greatest generation." To improve competence in strategy, students should write a paper on grand strategy and another on military strategy. They would accordingly learn the value of connectivity and constant

two-way feedback between the higher and lower realms of strategy, as well as the integration of the instruments of national power with military strategy.

3. Mine extensively the case study method so that students understand how to make strategy. Case studies are among the most effective tools for adult learning, they force students to become intellectually engaged in confronting the dilemmas of decisionmakers. In-depth case studies should be interwoven throughout the curriculum, not simply appended here and there, so that students fathom the correlation of theory with facts. The success of the Vietnam case study as well as the NSC 68 case study testifies to the pedagogical value of case studies. Possibilities abound: the decision to go to war, conflict termination, and post-conflict reconstruction and stabilization. There are some case studies available from Harvard and Georgetown, but they do not address gaps in strategic pedagogy. We should develop our own, tailored to the learning objectives we want to achieve, such as the appropriate strategies for the levels of war. For example, the USAWC should develop a companion text of case studies akin to the excellent *Army War College Guide to Policy and Strategy*. Such case studies should demonstrate the integration of national security strategy and military strategy, at all levels in the spectrum of conflict and phases of war, in addition to the instruments of national power. Faculty members should be given incentives to write the chapters.

4. Emphasize “total strategy,” the integration of the instruments of national power, in regional studies courses. Competence in strategy requires a sophisticated understanding of the state’s and society’s sources of power, strategic culture, and the employment of national and international resources to achieve the ends of policy. Since the United States is a global power with regional security responsibilities across the spectrum of conflict, students need to have some understanding of how to create and balance priorities within competing global, regional, functional requirements, and the interagency dimensions of these responsibilities. Regional studies are a fine vehicle for teaching about how the interagency works, of bringing to bear the kinetic and nonkinetic elements of power. Understanding the interagency synergy adds immensely to the kit bag of the budding strategist. Regional studies, along with case studies, are the best way to study and learn “total strategy” of the kind contained in NSC 68, the kind required by today’s complex unconventional challenges to national security.

5. Send faculty to periodic professional development tours in the policy and strategy communities to gain experience and confidence in strategizing, in making the link between policy, strategy, and operations. Such tours would also benefit the agency, bureau, or office in which the tours take place, thereby projecting the prestige of the USAWC. The payoffs in faculty development are extraordinary. They will learn how to link strategic theory with practice.

6. Change the content and pace of courses to emphasize problem solving, to include the writing of strategy, something not done much in the current curriculum except in the interagency focused National Security Policy Program. This approach would require that students have more time to analyze and write. Of all the forms of learning, writing is second only to actual experience. As mentioned above, the problem-solving

tasking should be introduced early in the curriculum and completed at logical intervals along the way. For example, students could be tasked to develop strategy for war termination and post-conflict reconstruction. The intellectual challenge and reward would have them evaluate and apply the gamut of strategic principles, from realism to idealism, the center of gravity, just war, war as policy by other means, the integration of the instruments of power, and many more.

7. Modify the calendar so as to allow maximum time for faculty and student preparation for problem-solving learning. For example, a crowded course schedule suboptimizes faculty preparation (such as maintaining familiarity with the policy and strategy communities and professional development) and student learning because of quick turnarounds, multiplicity of requirements, and competing nonacademic requirements.

8. Invite creative strategists to make presentations to students on the intellectual process for making strategy in given historical circumstances.¹⁶ Currently, such presentations by senior officials address more the “what” (often very operational in orientation) rather than the “how” of strategy. A supplement could be to create something along the lines of “seminar affiliates” for retired and perhaps even active duty senior officers, military and civilian, who would provide mentoring on how to make strategy. For senior leaders, the occasional immersion in a USAWC seminar would help acquaint them with the successor generation of officers.

9. Develop a Ph.D. program in strategy. Despite the excellence of American graduate education and various distinguished doctoral programs in history, political science, and international relations with emphasis on security studies, few deal with strategy. Strategy is many disciplines fused into art and science, with emphasis on the former. It is worth noting that the Royal Military College of Canada in Kingston, Ontario, has a superb Ph.D. in War Studies.¹⁷ The USAWC has the mandate, the resources (such as faculty and library), and the potential market to put together a small high quality doctoral level program in strategy, which would capture the principal disciplines that we deal with in the curriculum. Such a program would engender a level of academic excellence that the faculty would aspire to, as well as attract scholars of high quality to the faculty. Because 3 years are normally required to complete the Ph.D., which is very difficult for military careerists to accommodate, the program could recruit civilian students on a tuition basis. The program would fill a serious void in American graduate education. Finally, because the various war colleges have unique resources and similar mandates, they could creatively combine efforts into a consortium to support the Ph.D. program.

10. The last recommendation may be the most challenging: modifying the culture of the USAWC. The seminar-centric model of pedagogy has great rewards. It promotes bonding and mutual learning, qualities essential to cohesive military organizations. Interactive learning can bring out the best among seminar mates. But the seminar may not be the best mode for learning strategy. The USAWC should rebalance the seminar-based pedagogy with scheduled time for individual study. This would bring it closer to the academic culture of a graduate level institution.

These are potentially revolutionary initiatives. Implementing them will require a different approach to the curriculum and a different form of faculty preparation, because the pedagogical emphasis would be on analyzing problems and developing strategy while maintaining a sufficient foundation in theory. Such an approach to teaching would be very demanding on the faculty's creativity because it is a different way of imparting learning. Accordingly, it would require moving away from a curriculum sequence that is heavy in continuous seminar instruction and student recitation. Because of the 10-month master's program, the faculty maintains a relentless pace. The pace is hard to sustain, notably for new instructors who must quickly master a vast amount of multidisciplinary material to be effective in the classroom.

The USAWC is a great institution whose potential we have not fully tapped. We need to retire old approaches gracefully, move forward creatively, and become the nation's preeminent center for teaching strategy. This paper urges that the USAWC and the strategy community writ large begin a much needed dialogue on the making of strategy for the 21st century. It would be well to revisit the dialogue on a regular basis lest we become comfortable in our academic citadels.

ENDNOTES

1. The author thanks USAWC faculty colleagues for their insights, comments, and provocations: Mike Matheny, Antulio Echevarria, Doug Johnson, Tami Biddle, Nate Freier, Clair Gilk, and Mike George.

2. David J. Kilcullen, "New Paradigms for 21st Century Conflict," *EJournalUSA*, p. 2, in usinfo.state.gov/journals/itps/0507/1jpe/kilcullen.htm, accessed September 11, 2007.

3. Richard Betts, "Is Strategy an Illusion?" *International Security*, Fall 2000, pp. 5-50.

4. David Jablonsky, "Why Is Strategy Difficult?" in Boone Bartholomees, ed., *U.S. Army War College Guide to Policy and Strategy*, Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, July 2004, pp. 143, 153. According to alchemy, the philosopher's stone would turn base metal into gold.

5. Michael D. Pearlman, *Warmaking and American Democracy: The Struggle Over Military Strategy, 1700 to the Present*, Lawrence: Kansas University Press, 1999.

6. Lieutenant Colonel Nathan Freier, "Learning for Adaptation," unpublished manuscript, U.S. Army War College.

7. Colin Gray, *Irregular Enemies and the Essence of Strategy: Can the American Way of War Adapt?* Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, March 2006, p. 6.

8. John R. Galvin, "What's the Matter with Being a Strategist?" *Parameters*, Summer 1995, p. 161.

9. To be fair to the historical record and to the difficulty of the art of strategy, they also made mistakes, Pericles and Churchill notably.

10. See the writings of Samuel Huntington, Russell Weigley, Antulio Echevarria, Colin Gray, and Nigel Aylwin-Foster on the American way of war and strategy.

11. The volume edited by Williamson Murray, MacGregor Knox, and Alvin Bernstein, *The Making of Strategy: Rulers, States, and War*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994, is an excellent comparative study of how nations and statesmen approached the making of grand strategy.

12. George E. Hein, "Constructivist Learning Theory," Institute for Inquiry, www.exploratorium.edu/ifi/resources/constructivistlearning.html, accessed October 13, 2007.

13. Steve Fought, "The War College Experience," *Academic Exchange Quarterly*, June 24, 2004, pp. 1, 2, www.thefreelibrary.com/The+war+college+experience-0121714082, accessed October 7, 2007.

14. Henry Gole, *The Road to Rainbow: Army Planning for Global War, 1934-1940*, Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2003, p. 31.

15. Charles E. Kirkpatrick, *An Unknown Future and a Doubtful Present: Writing the Victory Plan of 1941*, Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 1992.

16. Candidates include Major General David Huntoon, who as Major David Huntoon planned *Just Cause*. Similarly, General David Barno and General Fred Woerner, respectively, for Afghanistan and Central America. On the civilian side, John Finney and Len Hawley are recommended.

17. The RMC has a master's level program and a Ph.D. program. The latter includes such fields as international relations, war, defense economics, diplomatic history, strategic planning, intelligence, ethics, civil-military relations, World War II and total war, armed forces and society, interagency process, modern warfare, insurgency and terrorism, conflict termination, and reconstruction.

The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Department of the Army, the Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government. This paper is cleared for public release; distribution is unlimited.

More information on the Strategic Studies Institute's programs may be found on the Institute's homepage at www.StrategicStudiesInstitute.army.mil.