

Deliberation on Utility of Force in the Twenty-First Century

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Abstract

Despite tactical dominance and technical battlespace awareness, the United States is not achieving the results its overwhelming military capabilities seem to promise. This is indicative of a failure in operational art caused by a misapplication of force and misunderstanding its utility when used for purposes not intended and ultimately ill-suited. The utility of force resides in its ability to achieve, to the appropriate degree, regarding the amount of force required and utilized, a military objective aligned to and nested within the greater political goal. To better engage today's adversaries, our strategic leaders and military practitioners need to embrace a new paradigm regarding applications of military force as they formulate strategies, plan campaigns, and conduct operations in pursuit of national interests. By challenging the underlying assumptions regarding the utility of force, our leaders can properly address the current cycles of confrontation and conflict. Ultimately, other instruments of national power must be relied upon – and bolstered where necessary. The use of force can create at best a stalemate. Other levers of national power must be applied to achieve the desired endstate or policy objective.

Deliberation on Utility of Force in the Twenty-First Century

Here [Homer's *Iliad*] we see force in its grossest and most summary form – the force that kills. How much more varied in its process, how much more surprising in its effects is the other force, the force that does *not* kill...

—Simone Weil¹

Renowned military theorist Carl von Clausewitz defined war as “an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will.”² Since 9/11/01, with the beginning of the “Global War on Terrorism,” expert analysis indicates that Muslim Extremism, which has manifested itself in forms antithetical to the national interests of many nations, is on the rise. Coordinated military operations across the globe, conducted by the United States and other allies and coalition partners, in places such as Afghanistan, Iraq, the Philippines, the trans-Sahel, Libya, Yemen, and now Syria, have had only limited success in countering these adversaries. Despite its tactical dominance and extraordinary technical battlespace awareness, the United States is not achieving the results its overwhelming military dominance seems to promise.

Failure to achieve operational and strategic objectives against current ideologically oriented enemies may be indicative of something besides a merely determined adversary and a flawed grand strategy. Rather, the strain between what our nation has called upon its military to accomplish and what it has been able to accomplish may be better understood as a misapplication of force and misunderstanding of its utility when it is used for purposes for which it was not intended and is ultimately ill-suited. The U.S. military is now challenged by a failure in the application of the operational art caused by a misunderstanding of force and of what it can provide.³

This Strategy Research Project (SRP) will not seek to reform operational art to address more effectively the current threats the United States and its allies face. Instead, it offers the reader an understanding of the foundation upon which any fix that aligns operational art with the character of war must rest: an understanding of the utility of force. The utility of force resides in its ability to achieve, to the appropriate degree, regarding the amount of force required and utilized, a military objective aligned with and nested within the greater political goal. A nuanced understanding of the utility of force begins with a consideration of the different types of confrontation and conflict, as well as the consequences of employments of force. Such understanding extends beyond the study of the classic Westphalian battle against a near-peer competitor, which, while important, is largely outside the scope of this paper.

“War Amongst the People,” as described by retired British General Rupert Smith, effectively depicts the current and future character of war, which has been scarcely recognized. This kind of war renders traditional applications of force as virtually absurd and leaves many conventional military means irrelevant.⁴ This SRP also addresses civil-military relations and discusses the ramifications of failing to win against an adversary that does not, or will not, share the same beliefs, ethics, and values that are cherished by this nation.

The proper application of force is a moral responsibility of military leaders. They must rehearse and practice operational art to use resources at their disposal effectively and efficiently. Army Doctrine Reference Publication 3-0 states that operational art is a “cognitive approach” that uses “skill, knowledge, experience, and judgment to understand better the problem or problems at hand.”⁵ To successfully address the

current myriad of threats to national interests, our strategists need to develop a new cognitive approach to understand how best to employ military assets. Specifically, to better engage today's adversaries, our strategic leaders and military practitioners need to develop a new paradigm regarding applications of military force as they formulate strategies, plan campaigns, and conduct operations in pursuit of national interests.

It is essential for the nation and its military to understand the utility of force to ensure that resources, especially the blood and treasure of our country, are applied in a meaningful manner to accomplish military objectives that protect and preserve national interests. Clausewitz, Simone Weil, and Smith, as well as contemporary military practitioners such as Lieutenant General H. R. McMaster, have made meaningful contributions to provide a better understanding of the continuities and changes in warfare and the utility of force in the modern strategic environment.

The Strategic Environment

Volatility, uncertainty, instability, and complexity characterize the twenty-first century strategic environment.⁶ The global system is increasingly multipolar and interdependent. No single adversary, as U.S. President B. Obama has stated, "Can acting alone resolve the challenges that confront the people of the world today."⁷ Increasingly, this notion is consistent with, and must be extended to include, the activities of non-state actors who comprise numerous ethnic, religious, cultural, and political groups and who pursue a diverse array of interests. Seeking to attain or maintain their interests, these groups often rely on the use of force to shape their environment and achieve their desired endstate. As these non-state actors vie to set the conditions for their success, the magnitude of chaos and uncertainty in the strategic

environment increases. So, too, does the likelihood that force, in its basest form, will play an increasingly prominent role on the world stage.

The application of force in this strategic environment is exercised within the traditional military domains of land, air, maritime, space, and cyberspace. The complexity and contested nature of each domain requires corresponding increases in cross-domain synergy to achieve the desired effect.⁸ In this complex, uncertain, and multi-domain environment, no singular military solution breaks the cycle of confrontation and conflict. Force, or threat of its use, can only suppress its target for the time being, leaving the cause of conflict unaddressed, and producing only the likelihood of another cycle of confrontation and conflict. In fact, the use of force often delays and complicates the timely resolution of the underlying issue when subsequent decisive actions beyond its use are not implemented. Understanding the effects of the application of force must begin in an intellectual dimension, or domain, that endeavors to understand the symptoms observed, to identify the correct problems and their root causes, and to effectively and efficiently contend with the consequences of any contemplated actions.

To meet current and future challenges, while recognizing the limitations of force, it is necessary to utilize all instruments of national power (diplomatic, information, military, and economic) in a coordinated manner that leverages other state and non-state actors.⁹ Nonetheless, in the current strategic environment, force, in one form or another across the spectrum of conflict, will continue to be used as it has been throughout history by those who seek power, who wish to protect their interests, or seek to settle differences. The enduring nature of force resides in its ability to protect the state or other non-state actors and their interests. McMaster's evaluation of the current

strategic environment exemplifies the new paradigm for applying force. He emphasizes that, first, war is political, and second, that war is human. McMaster's recognition of the human and political dimensions of the nature of war reflects Clausewitz's earlier examination of armed conflict.¹⁰

The Nature of War

Clausewitz's timeless treatise regarding war stipulates that war is both a human and political endeavor, waged as "an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will."¹¹ He begins *On War* with the famous analogy of a pair of wrestlers, each attempting to impose his will on an opponent through sheer physical force.¹² War, therefore, is a fierce contest between those who struggle, through the use of force, to make one do the other's bidding. *The U.S. Army Operating Concept* reflects this analogy, which provides a very discernible human face to the interaction of opposing wills.¹³ The human element of the nature of war as described above, within the context of the situation that gives rise to the confrontation or conflict, also reflects the political element of war.

The political element of the nature of war must not be considered in isolation from the use of force. Clausewitz claims "war is not merely an act of policy but a true political instrument, a continuation of political intercourse, carried on with other means."¹⁴ The use of force is an effective way to achieve a desired political end that subordinates force to the reason for its use. Hew Strachan supports this concept in the modern era by offering that "war's subordination to policy is congruent with democratic norms of civil-military relations."¹⁵ Clausewitz states that the use of force in warfare must be viewed by and through the political element of its nature. He thus connects politics and war by suggesting that while different motives serve as an impetus to use force and wage war, an enduring part of the nature of war is its political element. Clausewitz

clearly shows that wars fought without a political objective are without purpose.¹⁶

Understanding the strategic environment and the nature of war together provide a backdrop for the further examination of the role of force.

Force

Simone Weil provides an insightful examination of force in her analysis “The Iliad, or the Poem of Force.” In this essay, Weil asserts, “The true hero, the true subject, the center of the *Iliad*, is force.”¹⁷ She defines force as “that x [object or incident] that turns anybody who is subjected to it into a thing.”¹⁸ In her view, force has two aims: either killing, thereby rendering the soulless body a thing; or, turning a living being into a thing that lacks even the slightest kind of “galvanic response.”¹⁹ The latter, the living thing, becomes a suppliant who has lost the right to exercise will and is only in a marginally better condition than the former corpse. Additionally, her description of force is analogous to a double-edged sword that “intoxicates” those who think they possess it on one hand, and “crushes” those who believe they do not possess enough of it on the other hand.²⁰ In either case, Weil’s discussion of force evokes strong emotions reminiscent of themes Clausewitz develops concerning the human element of the nature of war.

Consider yet again Clausewitz’s two wrestlers locked in battle: each attempts to force his will on the other; each has an unequal and finite amount of force at his or her disposal. Weil’s discussion of force provides many useful insights. At the end of the wrestling match, one wrestler becomes a thing--either a corpse or a living thing, but a thing nonetheless. The suppliant, one who has lost the ability to exercise free will, can be reduced to a corpse in an instant. Yet, the supplicant hopes that his or her pleas for mercy will be answered. If these pleas are answered, then the possibility emerges that

he or she will become a human being again who can exercise will freely. Routinely, this is not the case. Most afforded the opportunity to rise after suffering defeat will spend the rest of their days constrained by the will of others who had fewer limitations on the force at their disposal. Surely, the suppliant hopes to be a true living being again but will never achieve that status and instead endures “death strung out over a whole lifetime.”²¹ It is important to note that everyone, at some point, experiences defeat--even Clausewitz’s wrestler who wins the match.²²

Turning our attention to the victor in Clausewitz’s wrestling match, we see through Weil’s eyes, as revealed in the *Iliad*, that those who exercise power through force often fail to recognize the consequences of their actions and become reliant on the use of force to bend others to their will. In becoming “intoxicated” by force, any sense of proportionality or limits to its use are forgotten.²³ This results in the victor’s unexpected demise and eventual destruction, perhaps by entering into a state of being as a thing, no different from the suppliant previously vanquished. There is no hesitation in the application of force by those who possess it--no consideration for those who are about to become a thing; few engaged in a struggle of this kind with the greater amount of perceived force think before they act. Chance comes to the forefront when the unrecognized limits to force are exceeded, then he or she who had the greater advantage may no longer have enough. This reveals the provocative nature of force and the danger it brings when the utility of force is misunderstood and misapplied through a poor understanding of operational art. Herein lies the realization that force may not achieve the desired results proportional to its perceived capability.

The Utility of Force

Failure to achieve the desired end then is not due to a determined adversary but rather due to a misapplication of force and a failure to understand its limitations. Through reflection on the utility of force, possibly during that moment of hesitation, one can bring to bear the full potential of operational art by understanding the limitations of force to achieve the desired effect. As this SRP has shown, Clausewitz and Weil concur that war and the use of force involves a violent clash of opposing wills; further, there are limits to what force can achieve. Smith further elaborates on these themes in *The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World*, when he addresses the concept of confrontation and conflict in the modern era.

Smith suggests that in the past, peace was punctuated by periods of crisis, war, and resolution, and then peace returned. Today, he observes, the world is in a perpetual state of confrontation that frequently leads to conflict.²⁴ The distinction between confrontation and conflict resides in the purpose that each serves.²⁵ In a confrontation, “The aim is to influence the opponent...and, above all, to win the clash of wills.”²⁶ A confrontation incorporates the use of all the instruments of national power in which the military usually plays the supporting role, as was the case during the Cuban missile crisis.²⁷ All confrontations are political at their core, but they and do not necessarily morph into conflict. However, all conflicts begin as confrontation.²⁸ In conflict, the purpose or end, through the use of force, is to “destroy, take, [and/or] hold” the adversary.²⁹ Conflict is a feat of strength--the military provides the main effort and overshadows, for some period, the other instruments of national power. Smith’s definition of conflict broadly reflects the human element of war described by Clausewitz: “the collision of two living forces.”³⁰

The use of force dwells within a larger diplomatic context. Once hostilities commence (Clausewitz's grappling match between wrestlers) the other levers of national power play a diminished role. In conflict, the military, as those who apply physical force, becomes the lead agency and main effort. This is not to say that diplomats do not work diligently to bring about resolution in a conflict--they must. However, diplomatic efforts in a conflict are the lesser of efforts compared to those who are using force to attain or maintain desired military objectives within the confines of a larger political setting.³¹

The use of force in a conflict provides value only if the objective it seeks to overcome remains within the political framework that led to its use. Smith makes an important distinction between what he terms military/strategic objectives (often used interchangeably) and political objectives: one achieves military/strategic objectives by the use of force; political objectives, concerning the application of force, are "achieved as a result of military success."³² So, winning a conflict sets the conditions to return to the confrontation stage where diplomacy and/or other instruments of national power are leveraged to address the underlying issue. Nesting the military objective within the scope of the desired policy outcome is essential; it reflects the political element of the nature of war previously described by Clausewitz.³³ The utility of force, as previously noted, is its ability to achieve a military objective aligned to and within the greater political objective by using only the amount of force required. In this manner, force is always a means to an end and never an end in itself.

Understanding the strategic environment, the nature of war, and the utility of force in both its conceptual and practical form affirms the role of armed forces in efforts

to achieve specific objectives. Smith's treatment of confrontation and conflict sets the foundation for examining the current character of war as "war amongst the people." In this context, the applications of force seldom decisively achieve the political objective.

War amongst the People

The present understanding of the utility of force, as manifested in its implementation, is based largely on an antiquated theory of warfare that Smith refers to as "interstate industrial war."³⁴ In Smith's view, industrial war began with Napoleon and continued through the Second World War. Industrial wars are conflicts between states in which forces are maneuvered and massed against each other on a battlefield. Belligerents leverage all manpower and industrial might on hand, at the expense of other interests, to achieve victory in a battle that ultimately provides a decisive outcome.³⁵ This view of warfare conforms to the peace/crisis/war/resolution/peace paradigm of the past. The application of force in industrial war served a singular purpose: in achieving military victory, it attains the desired political outcome. This kind of war, Smith contends, "no longer exists."³⁶ The armed forces of different nations and their previously held monopoly on the use of force that served the state well have limited equity in the current and future character of warfare that is manifested not as an interstate industrial war but rather as a "war amongst the people."³⁷

The evolution of the character of war is supported by the facts that 1) today's conflicts are largely intra-state; and that 2) the armed forces, the purveyors of force, are less relevant in contending with conflicts in their current form because these military forces are organized, manned, trained, and equipped for the industrial wars of the past.³⁸ War amongst the people, Smith observes, supports the confrontation--conflict paradigm. It is comprised of six themes or trends that became dominant and sentenced

industrial war obsolete as the world transitioned from the Second World War to the end of the Cold War.³⁹ Today, as in the foreseeable future, the tenets of war amongst the people must be understood to appreciate better the utility of force in the twenty-first century.

The first theme that Smith addresses is that the ends that one applies force to attain or maintain have changed.⁴⁰ In the past, achieving a military objective supported the accomplishment of the desired political objective or endstate. Now, military force is applied to create decision-space. In this decision-space, other forms of national power are used to achieve the desired endstate. Force is used not to achieve strategic objectives or endstates, but to achieve “sub-strategic objectives”⁴¹ that set the conditions to resolve the underlying reasons for the conflict and then realize the desired endstate. To truly win the clash of wills on the modern battlefield, the military--and those who call for its use – must recognize that feats of strength must be demonstrated in ways that complement the political endstate (i.e., influence the intent of the desired audience) and not become an endstate.

Smith’s second theme is that the terrain where wars are fought and won is not on a battlefield that is geographically isolated but rather, both figuratively and literally, a battlefield that is amongst the people in an all-inclusive manner.⁴² Here the struggle to win the will of the people is the ultimate aim--the goal for which the belligerents struggle. The media plays a significant role in shaping the message about the use of force; its message is broadcast to a global audience, who in turn influence policymakers, who then determine if military force is to be applied, for how long, and to what end.⁴³ This closed circuit between the belligerents, their target, and the global audience further

supports Smith's case that wars are fought amongst the people and not on the traditional battlefields of a bygone era.

Smith's third theme is that conflicts are often unending and "timeless."⁴⁴ Smith's first and second themes provide support for this assertion. First, because the ends for which the military fights have changed, there is no decisive battle. Therefore, force is used to set the conditions for resolution of a confrontation or conflict, but force does not resolve the underlying issues. Second, as wars are fought amongst the people, each belligerent seeks to gain the will of the people. Moreover, every move to gain the advantage by one belligerent triggers a counter-move by the other. Therefore, the use of force, by design, is an instrument of national power that by its nature takes time. Its use continues until it no longer serves the interests of those who control it.⁴⁵ Further, the conditions sought through the application of force are regularly not achieved (and the conflict becomes unending or timeless) as the system acted on changes before the effects can be adequately assessed. This begs the question of whether the application of force has achieved the desired effect.

The fourth theme is that in the current era we fight to preserve the force.⁴⁶ In part, this is due to the people's adverse feelings toward casualties, as well as the costs associated with filling the ranks and materially equipping the force, in terms of both morale and capital. This theme explains that the way that force is now employed is in ways that minimize risk and do not seek decisive victory as was previously sought during interstate industrial wars in a time when a decisive victory through force could be attained. Further, Smith states that the current military force structure reflects an outdated concept of employment, unsuited for what force is used to accomplish. The

need to re-organize standing military formations during each deployment, not to address a specific threat as many would claim, but to operate effectively in a war amongst the people if the force is to have utility, supports this observation.⁴⁷

The fifth theme Smith addresses is that “on each new occasion new uses are found for old weapons and organizations.”⁴⁸ The legacies of the industrial and Cold War era largely determine how force is applied in the current era. Historically, belligerents avoided directly confronting the strengths of their adversary preferring to strike at a time and place of their choosing and thereby avoiding a counter-strike. Often, the contemporary adversary chooses not to engage on a traditional battlefield in a manner reminiscent of past wars. So, military formations must be reorganized, and weapons must be adapted to achieve the desired effect on the adversary. The shift from industrial/Cold War to war amongst the people requires new ways of thinking about the current character of war in order to capitalize on the utility of force.⁴⁹

Smith’s sixth and final theme reveals his thinking regarding the character of war in the twenty-first century in which the adversary is often a non-state actor.⁵⁰ This adversary, confronted by an alliance or coalition of states who share a common interest or enemy, takes various shapes. Adversaries include religious extremists in the Levant, warlords in the trans-Sahel, and terrorist groups in Mindanao. They all seek to freely pursue their interests. These adversaries lack many of the characteristics that have been engrained into a state’s characterization of an enemy. Therefore, a coherent strategy to contend with the non-state actor in all but the most general terms is elusive. States erroneously continue to use force against non-state actors in the same manner as they have historically against other states. This diminishes the utility of force by

states who employ their militaries in wars amongst the people against mostly non-state actors in an attempt to attain or maintain, by use of force, national interests.⁵¹

Each of Smith's six themes regarding war amongst the people can be challenged. For example, in Smith's first theme, "The Ends for Which We Fight are Changing," the idea that force is employed to establish a condition has been called too vague and that the distinction in ends (military versus political) does not matter. If the condition that the use of force establishes, in turn, achieves the political objective, then there is no difference between the military sub-strategic objective and the ultimate political or policy objective.⁵² Another criticism of Smith's theme, we fight amongst the people, is that the nature of irregular warfare is the same today as it was during the period of interstate industrial war, and even earlier during the times of the ancient Greeks, Romans, and Persians. Therefore, critics claim that Smith has found nothing new.⁵³ In total, these and other criticisms attempt to argue that war amongst the people is not a new paradigm but rather an adaptation of the nature of conflict that does not present a challenge to the use of force in a modern context. This assertion may be correct. However, recognizing the continuities and changes in conflict, and appreciating that the character of conflict is different today than in the past necessitates a fundamental change in how one approaches confrontation and conflict--and the utility of force. Advocating an intellectual paradigm shift driven by a refined understanding of the utility of force and its role in operational art is a noteworthy endeavor. This understanding, achieved through discourse and reflection, will lead to changes in the way a military organizes, mans, trains, and equips itself. These changes must be replicated in doctrine to enable strategic leaders to counter current and future threats.

Smith's six themes address the character of confrontation and conflict in the twenty-first century. The application of force and the value it provides are vastly different from their previous uses and value. Today, war is waged amongst the people to garner their will rather than to control the geographic battlespace that they occupy or to destroy their armed forces and equipment. The cycle of confrontation and conflict is a new paradigm. The luxury of industrial war has left militaries wielding a hammer to meet every challenge confronted by a state--none of which today resembles a nail. This demonstrates the fact that there are limits to the use of force, what it accomplishes, and how it is employed in the current risk-adverse environment. When force is used to destroy, to take territory, or to hold territory, it will not deliver the endstate that those who decided to employ it seek to achieve. At best it is indecisive, and at worst, counterproductive. The Clausewitz Trinity enables us to better understand the relevance of war amongst the people and the proper utility of force in the twenty-first century.⁵⁴

The Utility of Force in the Modern Era

The trinity that Clausewitz presents in *On War* provides a theoretical framework for examining the characteristics of a conflict. Three constituent parts comprise Clausewitz's trinity: the people, the state, and the military.⁵⁵ The trinity's elemental parts vary in their relation to each other; they cannot be considered in isolation because they are inextricably linked; they are three-in-one in the classical sense.⁵⁶ For analyzing a conflict (the past, present, or future), an appreciation of the character of that particular situation is enhanced by using the trinity. The trinity is a valuable tool in analyzing conflicts between states as well as between states and non-state actors. In every case, 1) the aim is the will of the people, 2) an entity assumes a quasi-state-like status

charged with the decision to employ force, and 3) there is a force of some sort, traditional military or otherwise, charged with applying physical power.⁵⁷

Today, non-state actors operate in a gray zone; they “seek to secure their objectives [or endstates] while minimizing the scope and scale of actual fighting.”⁵⁸ This, by definition, denies the conduct of industrial war and supports Smith’s fourth theme: we fight in such a way to preserve the force. Understanding that the United States is now engaged in a war amongst the people, we observe non-state actors resorting to violence in a calculated manner. In the case of Muslim Extremism, as exercised by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), the uses of “primordial violence, hatred, and enmity”⁵⁹ eclipse reason and chance. This strategy provides insights into the type of confrontation and conflict one must be prepared to enter with an enemy that does not subscribe to the same beliefs, ethics, and values of the United States and its allies. In the case of ISIL, the Caliph holds absolute power over all affairs, including governance and the employment of force in a state-like manner. The ideological subscribers, the people, support the organizational structure of the Islamic State or Caliphate to varying degrees. They fulfill a myriad of roles from collecting taxes and delivering the spoils of the conflict to the Department of Finance, to circulating ideological statements from the Media Council, to serving as fighters under the direction of the Military Council and its sector commanders.⁶⁰ Trinitarian analysis enables us to contrast the roles of ISIL’s people with the roles of the opposing coalition’s people. Through this understanding of ISIL, as revealed through the Trinity, the utility of force is discovered in a war amongst the people where the brass ring to be won is the will of the people and the utility of force is limited.

Smith's six themes regarding war amongst the people show the limits of force in resolving confrontations and conflicts in the modern era using ISIL as an example of a non-state actor. The use of overwhelming force to counter the actions of ISIL offers little probability of resolving the underlying issues of the conflict; it only supports sub-strategic objectives that set the conditions for the outcome. Considerable risk is entailed when force is applied to set the conditions for other instruments of power, and those instruments prove ineffective or cannot bring about a resolution of the underlying issues. The temptation to reassert force is then compelling, but nonetheless fraught with disaster. The struggle with ISIL is one in which each belligerent seeks to win the will of the people (both locally and globally) in a battle amongst the people. Here the value of force diminishes: it cannot simultaneously win the will of the people without making, at least, a segment of the people into a thing. One rarely wins the will of the people by attacking the people.

In the current struggle between ISIL and the coalition, there is no intent or need at this time for either belligerent to risk the entirety of the force to achieve victory in a decisive battle. The tangible and intangible resources at the disposal of the coalition (and to at least some extent at the disposal of ISIL), their equipment, their formations, their organization were developed and procured to defeat an enemy in an industrial war and to deter enemies during the Cold War. The military currently uses these same tools to apply force on an enemy that is less responsive to its application. Only through understanding the utilization of force within the framework of war amongst people can the United States achieve operational and strategic objectives in the cycle of confrontation and conflict with ISIL or similarly violent extremist groups.

Force should be employed by understanding the character of confrontation and conflict today, by analyzing conflict in accord with Clausewitz's trinity, and by applying Smith's six themes of war amongst the people. As with the case of ISIL, so too is the case with other non-state actors such as Boko Haram in the trans-Sahel, the Houthis in Yemen, or the Abu Sayyaf Group in the Philippines. The trinity dissects the conflict in its three elemental parts: the people, the "state," and the military. Understanding their inner-related roles reveals the current character of confrontation and conflict in a war amongst the people. Here, the utility of force is limited; it can be effective only when it is applied in a thoughtful and measured way. In this manner, it can set the conditions to resolve the underlying problems that it was brought to bear.

The paradigm of analyzing according to the trinity, of understanding war amongst the people, and thus considering the utility of force also applies to military operations other than war, such as foreign humanitarian assistance (FHA). In this type of operation, the military conducts actions in support of other U.S. departments or agencies to "directly relieve or reduce human suffering, disease, hunger, or privation."⁶¹ On 25 April 2015, a series of severe earthquakes in Nepal killed over 3,300 people and left nearly 7,000 injured--affecting more than eight million people in the region.⁶² At the request of the Nepalese government, a U.S. military Joint Task Force supported the efforts of the U.S. Agency for International Development and other national and international aid organizations. To reduce suffering the U.S. Government executed Operation SAHAYOGI HAAT using more than a thousand assigned U.S. forces from around the theater of operation.⁶³

All efforts focused on the people. The United States provided assistance under the authority of the host country after their request. This assistance was delivered by the military, which used the Joint Task Force (JTF) construct to execute the mission. Likewise, the character of this operation and its military component conformed with Smith's themes of war amongst the people. Employment of the military in and of itself did not reduce suffering. Instead, military forces set the conditions to reduce suffering and achieved sub-strategic goals that included delivering relief supplies, conducting damage assessments, transporting casualties from remote areas to treatment facilities, and providing the communications architecture to command and control the operation. The JTF conducted relief efforts among the people and gained a global audience while employing the force in such a manner that mitigated risk to an acceptable level. Most poignantly, new uses for weapons, not specifically designed for FHA, were adapted and leveraged so that they were able to provide value and contribute to mission accomplishment. An example of this was the use of the MV-22 Osprey tiltrotor aircraft to move relief workers throughout Nepal rather than the doctrinal mission of transporting troops, equipment, and supplies from ships and land bases for medium lift combat assault support. As in this FHA example, both an understanding of Clausewitz's trinity and Smith's concept of war amongst the people is relevant. This example illustrates the utility of force in the modern era.

Confrontations and conflicts with near-peer competitors remain strategic realities. The paradigm shift from industrial war to war amongst the people does not mean that large concentrations of military forces pitted against each other will not occur. They will and warrant further research regarding the utility of force and war amongst the people.

What must be understood is that the application of force, and what it is expected to achieve (the very heart of operational art), is of the greatest importance. These issues must be painstakingly studied to reduce current tensions between the state and the military. The will of the people must be gained, whether the confrontation or conflict is between states or between states and non-state actors.

Civil – Military Relations and the Ends, Ways, and Means

To apply force in the manner this SRP describes, it is necessary to have three things: a state, a military, and an adversary. The military is responsible and accountable to the state from which it recruits or conscripts its members. The relationship between the military and the state is of central importance. Only by understanding the reciprocal relationship between these two entities, where the actions of one demand and complement the actions of the other, can a coherent understanding of the utility of force emerge--the essence of the civil-military relationship. The military must understand the ends they pursue. Likewise, the state must clearly understand the strengths, limitations, and potential costs of the employment of military force. The relationship between the ends (political) and the ways and means of force (military) drives the logic of, and, is in fact the core of, operational art. In this understanding of force and the current strategic environment, the disparity between what the military is tasked to accomplish and the degree that it accomplishes the assigned task becomes apparent.

The military historically serves the singular purpose to protect and defend the state and its interests. This is not to say that military forces cannot adapt to new uses or that the tools at the military's disposal cannot be used for operations other than combatting adversaries. As previously shown in the example using ISIL and FHA this is, in fact, the case. Military forces deployed and employed in the current strategic

environment are less effective than desired; they have failed to meet the expectations of those who direct their use.⁶⁴ This failure is affirmed by retired Army Lieutenant General D. Bolger and other military professionals who recognize that the United States has built a military that is unsurpassed in every domain, that can integrate capabilities “to achieve efficiencies and synergies not previously feasible.”⁶⁵ Nonetheless, this same military is failing to achieve its assigned mission.⁶⁶ This failure is a failure in the operational art: “the pursuit of strategic objectives, in whole or in part, through the arrangement of tactical actions in time, space, and purpose,” which is accomplished by integrating ends, ways, and means.⁶⁷

First, the state must determine whether it is in a confrontation or conflict. Deciding to move from confrontation to conflict is a very critical decision. When a state’s leaders decide to move from confrontation to conflict, they leverage the capabilities of the military to apply force to achieve desired outcomes or ends. These must be determined before the conflict begins in order to prevent one instrument of national power from negating the utility of the others. Leaders must consider the way to achieve the desired outcome as well as the kinds and amounts of resources required. To manage risk, the leaders must maintain a balance among the end, the ways, and the means to prevail in the conflict. If the desired end is not worth the risk to the means, then either the end or the ways must be changed. Leaders must assure that military objectives achieved through use of force are consistent with objectives pursued by other instruments of national power, such as diplomacy or economic measures. These decisions define the strategy that the military executes. Finally, the military objectives must align with the state’s policies.

The Way Ahead

Today, confrontations and conflicts for objectives that are not achieved by use of force alone challenge the United States and its allies. We continue to engage in a struggle for the will of the people and their leaders. The paradigm of war amongst the people represents a recent evolution in our understanding of confrontation and conflict. The current use of force across the range of military options is of limited value. Confrontation persists long after the conflict is over; resolution can be achieved only by other elements of national power. Nonetheless, when the military employs force, there is an expectation that tactical successes will cascade to operational and strategic successes.

This approach to operational art, the connecting tissue between tactical actions and strategic or political objectives, is flawed. Comprehending effective uses of force and mastering its application must begin with an understanding that force can achieve only limited objectives, some of which are counter-productive and undesirable. Practitioners of operational art must fully consider these limitations to assure that strategic leaders use resources efficiently and effectively to achieve the desired ends. Tactical, operational, and strategic actions must be nested so that a synergistic application of force leverages all instruments of national power. Only through an understanding of the utility of force that anticipates the consequences of its application and that acknowledges the unintended consequences of its use will operational art serve as a practical framework for the pursuit of national interests.

The decision to move from confrontation to conflict cannot be entered into lightly. Decision-makers, within the bounds of what are reasonable expectations in the current strategic environment, are morally obliged to correctly apply force in cases where

warranted while fully grasping what force can and cannot accomplish. Further, strategic leaders, both military and civilian, have a moral responsibility to know when and how to use force. The decision to do so ultimately puts lives at risk--not only the lives of the belligerents, but also the lives of the people trapped in the conflict. This is a shared responsibility, borne by both leaders who wear camouflage-uniforms in battle as well as leaders who wear suits-and-ties on Capital Hill or at the White House. The relationship between the military and its civilian leaders is of the utmost importance. They share a moral obligation to sustain and refine their bond to reduce the inevitable tensions in this civil-military relationship. A dysfunctional relationship between civilian and military leaders--due to mistrust caused by perceived shortcomings, or by failures to prevail in current conflicts – ultimately reduces the likelihood of successfully achieving national interests. And it costs lives.⁶⁸

“In the spirit of learning lessons and not throwing stones,” a study by the military was commissioned in June 2012: *Decade of War, Volume I, Enduring Lessons from the Past Decade of Operations*.⁶⁹ This report developed eleven strategic themes in an attempt to identify enduring lessons that can inform both civilian and military leaders who are deliberating entering into a conflict to more efficiently and effectively utilize resources. Significantly, several of Smith’s themes presented throughout this SRP support three lessons cited in the *Decade of War* report: Understanding the Environment, Conventional Warfare Paradigm, and Adaptation.⁷⁰

The first lesson, “Understanding the Environment” is critical to ensure that leaders have used all appropriate resources to avoid moving from confrontation to conflict. Inherent in understanding the environment is the recognition that the problem

must be accurately described and further that any approach to achieve strategic ends must include only a judicious use of force. This is consistent with Smith's first theme that the approach taken reflects the current environment and achieves the desired ends. Further, the selected approach must complement that of other components of the government so that the application of force creates decision-space and ultimately supports the desired end. In short, leaders must acknowledge the importance of fully understanding the operational environment by conducting assessments that leverage a broad range of sources. These thorough assessments will assist in identifying the appropriate ends. Strategic leaders, both military and civilian, can accomplish this in a multitude of ways, such as building relationships in the area of operations and drawing on the experiences of subject-matter experts and regional specialists, by strengthening cultural proficiency, and by comprehensively planning and exercising operational art to assure that military actions do not become ends in themselves.⁷¹

The second lesson presented in *Decade of War* is that "conventional warfare approaches were ineffective when applied to operations other than major combat, forcing leaders to realign the ways and means of achieving effects."⁷² Understanding the environment enables leaders to recognize when the ends for which they are fighting have changed. Accordingly, the second lesson from *Decade of War* supports Smith's theme that we currently engage in wars amongst the people. To contribute meaningfully in a war amongst the people, leaders must consider adopting different approaches for generating desired effects. In many cases, the utility of force is limited. Therefore, leaders must acquire understanding of what force can or cannot provide. To address the reality that the character of modern warfare has significantly changed, we must

consider institutionalizing non-conventional warfare, or war among the people, in our professional education systems. Smith's concept must be engrained in the moral fiber of those who make the decisions to employ force as well as those who are charged with its application. This, in turn, will influence how the military organizes, mans, trains, and equips to meet the current tactical and operational requirements in pursuit of strategic objectives.⁷³

A third lesson, directly related to the second, focuses on adaptation: "policies, doctrine, training, and equipment were often poorly suited to operations other than major combat, forcing widespread and costly adaptation."⁷⁴ Smith aptly supports this observation in his assertion that old tools are being used in ways in which they were neither designed nor intended. Adaptation has become a hallmark of military success and is recognized as such in *Decade of War*. Although Smith focuses on equipment and formations, his discussions of adaptation or the lack thereof, can be extended into the intellectual domain – how we think about war and the application of force in the modern era. Accordingly, our doctrine should encourage adaptive leadership approaches. We need the organizational flexibility to assure that military formations do not need to reorganize to operate in various operational environments. We need to seek innovative material solutions coupled with tactics, techniques, and procedures that recognize the utility of force.⁷⁵

Operational art is not explicitly referenced in the *Decade of War*. Notwithstanding, many of the recommendations cited above support the assertion that our failure to achieve national objectives is brought about by a failure in the operational art (i.e., coherently aligning the tactical to the strategic). This is caused by a poor

appreciation of the current character of war and a misunderstanding of the utility of force.

Many senior leaders in government are quite aware of the paradigm shift in the character of war; they know that force alone cannot resolve today's conflicts. This awareness comes to the forefront in discussions among military professionals as they deliberate restructuring our armed forces for the current and future fights in a time of uncertainty and fiscal austerity. Only by acknowledging this paradigm shift, which requires changes in how and when to employ the military, can the armed forces make a meaningful contribution to the protection and advancement of national interests. Recently, General J. Dunford addressed this matter. While serving as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, he expressed his belief that the joint forces of the United States are optimized neither for a large-scale conflict with a near-peer competitor nor to fight violent extremism. To be effective now and in the future, Dunford contends, our military must make fundamental changes in the organizational construct of the joint force. This includes how it plans, how it develops strategy, and how it exercises command and control.⁷⁶ The Chairman's call for change implicitly calls for an understanding of the utility of force.

By embracing the paradigm shift in the character of armed conflict and by assessing the underlying assumptions regarding the utility of force, our strategic leaders can properly meet the challenges presented by current cycles of confrontation and conflict. Changes in the way we think about force and conflict are useful only if they are manifested in the way our force is organized, manned, trained, and equipped. Therefore, acting effectively in our clearer thinking is the next challenge. Ultimately,

other instruments of national power must be relied upon--and bolstered where necessary. The use of force can create at best a stalemate. Other levers of national power must be applied to achieve the desired endstate or policy objective.

Endnotes

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¹² *Ibid.*, 75-77.

¹³ U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, *The U.S. Army Operating Concept, Win in a Complex World 2020-2040*, 9.

¹⁴ Clausewitz, *On War*, 87-88.

¹⁵ Hew Strachan, *The Direction of War* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 54.

¹⁶ Clausewitz, *On War*, 88-89.

¹⁷ Weil, *The Iliad, or the Poem of Force*, 6.

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¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 7-8.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 11.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

²² *Ibid.*, 6-14.

²³ *Ibid.*

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³⁰ Clausewitz, *On War*, 77.

³¹ Smith, *The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World*, 184-185, 203.

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³⁶ Ibid., 3.

³⁷ Ibid., 5-6.

³⁸ Ibid., 269-71.

³⁹ Ibid., 19-20, 269.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 272-280.

⁴¹ Ibid., 272-4.

⁴² Ibid., 280.

⁴³ Ibid., 280-291.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 291.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 291-4.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 294.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 294-9.

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⁴⁹ Ibid., 299-303.

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