

REDUCTION BUT INCLUSION

Every dictum matters profoundly. If I could analyse all twenty-one dicta simultaneously, I would do so in order to show the unity of strategy and strategic behaviour. Because such holistic treatment is analytically impractical, the general theory is divided brutally into two categories of importance, albeit with a soft boundary between them. Chapter 1 posited and explained the more defining of strategy's features, while Chapter 2 examines the rest, the remainder, of the subject. The topics of these remaining dicta are in all cases significant. Indeed, they are so significant that belligerent disadvantage in any one of them, no matter why it obtains, has the potential to hazard the prospects for strategic and political success overall.

It may be useful to recall two methodological caveats. First, a laudable quest for economy in theory is always liable to lead the theorist into the error of undue reductionism. The excellent theoretical proposition that small is beautiful may seduce the theorist into believing that, in this case, strategy 'essentially is about . . .', picking your preference—politics, technology, chance, deception, money, and so forth. Alas, for clarity, and especially for the quality of strategic performance, strategy is not essentially about any single feature. The strategic hedgehog is not to be trusted if he seeks to persuade us that there is but one golden key to strategic excellence. In practice, there are many such keys, and if one or two are severely worn or missing, or perhaps if the locks they should fit are not permissive of turning, the whole project of strategy could well fail. In principle, clarity is a virtue, but it ceases to be virtuous if it is achieved by oversimplification that misleads. Clarity can just be clearly wrong.

Second, endeavours to combat the hazard of unsound reductionism frequently tempt the strategic theorist into an unmanageable comprehensiveness tending towards the malady of encyclopaedism. So rich can be the dish served by the theorist that strategic practitioners would suffer acute indigestion were they ever to be so foolish as to take the theorist and his analytical method as seriously as he does himself. Clausewitz warned admirably against analysis that treats separately and exhaustively what needs to be seen as a gestalt, a whole. But, the fact remains that the strategic theorist somehow must identify an analytical approach able to accommodate a potentially bewildering variety of strategy's features. The twenty dicta proposed in these first two chapters fall perilously close to an injudicious comprehensiveness, even when that is deemed a risk worth running if one is to steer

comfortably clear of the hazard of excessive reductionism. For examples of the latter, although this author is a great admirer of both Basil H. Liddell Hart and Edward N. Luttwak, he is more than a little uncomfortable with their approaches to strategy. The former argued for the central significance of what he termed the 'indirect approach', the latter for the authority of paradox and irony. Both ideas are valuable, but even if entirely persuasive on their own terms they are just too austere wholly to satisfy the needs of the general theory of strategy. In order to effect a tolerable marriage between economy and richness, this book opts for a comprehensive approach hopefully rendered non-encyclopaedic in appearance and consequence by means of the provision of deliberately weak internal boundaries. As a result, these two chapters present the general theory of strategy by clusters of dicta attaching, and comprising the answers, to just the four basic questions cited already in Chapter 1: What is strategy? How is strategy made and by whom? What does strategy do?—what are its consequences? And, how is strategy executed?

It is necessary to bear in mind always that theory is in the business of explanation, and that it cannot be tested in the social sciences as it can in the physical. Unfortunately, this unavoidable, indeed existential, truth is not sufficiently discouraging as to prevent the would-be scientific theorists of strategy from seeking an unobtainable metrical measure of certainty. Social scientific theory, addressing human behaviour under uncertainty in unique historical contexts that cannot be replayed, has to satisfy the examining criteria of such factual evidence as there is, plausibility (dare one say it, commonsense), and explanatory power. Efforts to pursue theoretical rigour through application of methods from the much harder sciences are a waste of time and, worse, they can mislead the unduly credulous. It is difficult to locate the right, or right enough, strategic answer when the enemy is able to perform, not as in a controlled experiment, but in a manner constrained only by his imagination, strength of motivation, skill, and capabilities, while also behaviour is ever liable to be the consequence of friction and chance. Strategy is conducted competitively by two, and usually more, contestants, playing by few rules. In fact, definition of the terms of strategic engagement, the rules, constitutes a vital prize, a potentially huge net asset in the struggle of the day. Should readers with a background in the physical sciences venture into this book, they need to accept a degree of social scientific enculturation such that they are willing to relax their understanding of the requirements of testable theory.

Here in Chapter 2, presentation of the general theory of strategy completes the project begun with dicta one through nine in Chapter 1. It advances through clusters of answers,

developed in dictum form, to the fundamental questions about strategy. The plan for these pages is to explain: the making of strategy (dicta ten to thirteen, treating strategy-making process, values, culture and personalities, and strategists), strategy in execution (dicta fourteen to twenty, on difficulties and friction, types of strategies, geography, technology, time, logistics, and military doctrine), and the consequences of strategy (dictum twenty-one on tactical, operational, and strategic effect).

MAKING STRATEGY

Dictum Ten: Strategy typically is made by a process of dialogue and negotiation

There have been and will be exceptions to this dictum, but it is a safe, most-case generalization to claim that strategies are developed in an ongoing process of negotiation and dialogue among potent stakeholders, civilian and military. There have been examples of strategies being chosen by a solitary leader, a genius, or otherwise who commands and does not negotiate. Alexander the Great, Napoleon Bonaparte, and Adolf Hitler are the charismatic leaders-cum-strategists who spring most obviously to mind.⁵ To focus upon the Second World War, the great-power belligerents offer only one example of the solitary strategist, typically deaf to advice and warnings, and certainly not permitting anything resembling a process of negotiation among stakeholder interests, Adolf Hitler. In Britain, the United States, Imperial Japan, and even Joseph Stalin's USSR, strategy-making was a shared enterprise, though responsibility, glory, and blame usually was not distributed at all evenly.

Also as a general rule, strategy is hammered out and then is near constantly revised in the light of feedback from the several battlespaces. Players in the process of strategy-making seek advantage, as well as the avoidance of disadvantage, for the interests of their particular tribe in the more or less loose coalition of loyalties and cultures that is every government or governing entity. With war frequently waged by rival alliances and coalitions of polities, strategy-making often entails negotiation not only among stakeholders at home, but also among allies.⁶ The inductive general theory of strategy cannot claim that the process of strategy-making necessarily is strategically rational; it is not. Certainly there should be a serious effort to identify ways to match military and other means with desired strategic effects in the service of political goals. However, some of the institutional, even just personal, players in the process of strategy-making are sure to promote their own versions of intelligently designed rational strategies. Those versions may well meet a minimal standard of rationality, yet be wholly unreasonable in the assessment of others. In the Second World War, for example, the 'bomber barons' of the Royal Air Force (RAF) and the United States

Army Air Forces (USAAF) proposed, quite rationally, that Germany could and should be defeated by bombing alone. Their general theory of air power became doctrine, which directed specific plans intended to achieve victory through (strategic) air power. As recently as 1999, US air force and army generals differed over bombing strategy for the coercion of Slobodan Milosevic's Serbia.⁷ Such disagreements, which express contrasting strategic world views and institutional cultures, all held sincerely, are entirely usual. Indeed, they are so usual that it is eminently defensible to argue that strategy is made and revised by negotiation. But this is not to deny the roles both of careful rational planning that tries to match means with ends, and of inspiration, intuition, and—it must be so labelled—occasional genius, as well as the dysfunctional personality.

This dictum specifies dialogue as well as negotiation among strategy-makers in order to ensure that the theory grasps both formal and informal processes. Strategy-makers usually comprise a very small community with a shifting membership. There will be dialogue and negotiation between civilians and soldiers, as well as among civilians and among soldiers. This is what should occur all but continuously on the strategy bridge. In his celebrated controversial book, *Supreme Command*, Eliot A. Cohen asserts with much good reason that 'in fact, the study of the relationship between soldiers and statesmen (rather different from the relationship between the soldier and the state, as a famous book has it [reference to Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: CSG*]) lies at the heart of what strategy is all about'.⁸ Cohen may overreach, but not by much. The two extremes on the strategy dialogue spectrum are well illustrated by the sharply contrasting performances of American President Woodrow Wilson and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill. The former was so uninterested in strategic matters that he met his newly appointed Commander-in-Chief of the American Expeditionary Force (AEF), General John J. 'Blackjack' Pershing, only once during the war, on 24 May 1917, and resolutely said nothing at all of strategic substance. In the apposite words of one historian:

Wilson's aloofness had its positive side, as the general realized. 'In the actual conduct of operations,' he would recall, 'I was given entire freedom and in this respect was to enjoy an experience unique in our history.' Yet it also left the army entirely bereft of guidance from its commander in chief: the president of the United States. The country had never fought a war that way before, and never would again.

The sharpest imaginable contrast is to be found in Churchill's efforts to guide and control his country's military effort in the field. For a case more extreme even than Churchill's typically ill-fated forays into military strategy, one need look no further than to Adolf Hitler. Happily for his service chiefs of staff, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt held himself as aloof from military strategy as he was resolutely engaged in the making of policy and grand strategy.