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STRATEGY IN NATO

PREPARING FOR AN IMPERFECT WORLD

LISELOTTE ODGAARD

Strategy in NATO

Palgrave Studies in Governance, Security, and Development

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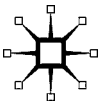

STRATEGY IN NATO

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1

Introduction

Villiam Krüger-Klausen and Liselotte Odgaard

What are the consequences of using a plethora of nonmilitary objectives and instruments in modern conflicts for strategy's role as a link between policy and implementation in operational theaters? Does the military end up leading from the center due to its well-tested and detailed planning procedures while being only one actor out of many in terms of the objectives and instruments devised in the campaign plans for theaters such as Iraq and Afghanistan?[1] Politicians working in a reality of bargaining and policies determined by the lowest common denominator are increasingly micromanaging the tactical battles, in practice often becoming co-leaders at this level. Military leaders working in an environment characterized by methodical evaluation within closed military circles that follow strict military logic tend to influence overall political visions.[2] In modern conflicts, involving both civil and military challenges and solutions, both politicians and military leaders venture far into the sphere of the other party.[3] Strategy must allow the politicians sufficient control of the direction of the conflict and coordinate the efforts while leaving the military and civilian agencies sufficient space for action.[4]

The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan exemplifies this problem. It is engaged in nation-building processes involving numerous actors. The involvement of many stakeholders has resulted in the establishment of numerous overlapping institutions and the emergence of countless divergent interests that have decoupled regional governance processes at theater level from the objectives devised by specialists at the security strategy level.[5] This tendency crowds out the theater-level actors and their insights into on-the-ground sentiments, resources, and constraints.[6] As pointed out by Henry Kissinger, strategy

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should be reinstated as a link between policy and tactics.[7] This link must be based on sound methodical analysis encompassing insights from politicians, civilian agencies, as well as the military leadership.[8]

In the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), commanders are not merely key figures at the theater strategic level, but also end up defining the ways and means used to pursue core national interests at the grand strategy level. A contributing factor to the key role of the commander in NATO operations is the relative ineffectiveness of the comprehensive approach. This approach has introduced an overabundance of actors at the theater level, which has added to the complexity and detracted from the efficiency in the implementation of strategies as per grand strategic guidance. The comparative effectiveness of military commanders in planning processes has allowed successive commanders in NATO operations in Afghanistan to dominate strategy formulation from bottom to top.[9]

Another problem faced by NATO is the difficulty in meeting the objectives derived from the alliance's strategic concept of a comprehensive approach to conflict management. The civilian-led combining of security, governance, and development is treated with something approaching reverence by many, but it has been a severe disappointment on the ground, largely through a combination of incapacity and unwillingness on the part of civilian actors. The fact that military power is necessary but not sufficient remains true, but governments need to look afresh at the comprehensive approach and how they can ensure that the institutions and agencies they largely fund cooperate appropriately.[10]

These problems bespeak of a NATO alliance beset by problems of coordination, adjustment, and efficiency, which pervade strategic planning across functional and geographical issue areas. In particular, it would appear that the complexity of actors and institutions involved in implementing strategies at security and theater strategic levels detracts from the ability of the grand strategy level to translate core national interests into central ends, ways, and means that guide strategic planning at the two other levels.

The Concept of Strategy

Strategy can be defined as a process that translates political visions into attainable objectives, applying the available instruments by feasible methods. This chapter offers a set of definitions and a set of strategic variables that address the disconnection between policy and tactics by devising a concept of strategy that is derived from the essential functions and challenges of the modern security sector.[11] The concept of strategy suggests

how to translate political visions into plans for implementation by civilian and military organizations.[12] These concepts, listed here, are derived from the insights of military personnel informed by military planning processes. They allow us to adopt a systematic and manageable approach to strategy formulation that informs us of the processes at work in complex environments of strategic thinking.

We identify three levels of strategy: grand, security, and theater strategy, each describing different types of tasks, skills, and purpose when contributing to strategic planning:

1. Grand strategy represents the most general level of strategy and lies at the intersection of policy making and bureaucracy, focusing on the core interests, values, and long-term objectives pursued by the state. Grand strategy is defined as a state's vision concerning its future relative position on the basis of national interests and values.
2. Security strategy encompasses sector-specific programs for implementing visions that rely on specialists from the economic, military, and diplomatic sectors. Security strategy can be defined as the development, application, and allocation of methods and instruments to achieve national security objectives. It is functionally specific in the sense that states can have strategies of economic development, foreign policy, defense, energy, and foreign aid.
3. Theater strategy involves the coordinated and synchronized application of methods and instruments within a geographically defined area of implementation, such as Afghanistan and Iraq, where available objectives and instruments are tailored to on-the-ground realities, often by a commander and his staff. It has a geographical focus and is located below the instrumental level.

Within each of the strategic levels, we identify five strategic key variables: time, position, legitimacy, implementation structure, and capabilities, each essential in determining the design of the strategy:

1. Time can be short, medium, or long. It reflects the speed at which a conflict manifests itself and how fast strategic planners address a conflict. The variable time is used to describe the time available to realize objectives.
2. Position concerns the interests and values of a particular state. The variable position is used to describe the interests and values that define the substance of strategic planning seen from the perspective of the state engaged in strategy making.

3. Legitimacy concerns the compatibility between the interests and values of the state and its allies, partners, and enemies. The variable legitimacy is used to describe the acceptability of the objectives from the point of view of the surroundings.
4. Implementation structure refer to the channels used to communicate a strategy. The variable implementation structure is used to describe the domestic and international apparatus available as a channel of implementation.
5. Capabilities refer to a combination of military, economic, financial, and knowledge resources available to realize political visions. The variable capabilities describe the capabilities available to realize objectives, whether these are of a military, economic, political, or diplomatic nature.

Formulating strategies that ensure coherence between political and operational objectives is a challenging undertaking. The challenge stems from the fact that traditionally, strategic planning in the security sector is often carried out by defense agencies as a separate, compartmentalized effort. Instead, it must now be conducted in cooperation with civilian agencies such as foreign ministries, embassies, and ministries of finance. The proliferation of actors and issues involved in conflict management in the security sector is reflected in the definition of strategy, which has been taken beyond its original meaning to become a catchphrase for almost all processes describing means-ends relations in organizations. Concepts such as environmental strategy, educational strategy, and labor market strategy indicate this development.

We do not wish to reclaim strategy as exclusively belonging to the realm of military activities.[13] However, we do propose that strategy as a concept is revisited with a view to combining the simple conceptual models of civilian agencies with the systematic approach to dealing with numerous actors and issues employed in military contexts to carve out a space between policy and tactics. The academic complementary to civilian policy makers is the international relations literature, where strategy is usually described by means of dynamics such as balancing, coercive diplomacy, regimes, et cetera, but without an eye for the different organizational settings involved in strategic planning or the processes involved.[14] The academic complementary to military tactics is the strategic studies debate among defense academies. This debate identifies and systematizes the complexity of actors and issues involved in strategic planning. However, the debate is also marked by detail, describing the agenda of strategic planning without deducing the key elements and variables crucial to address political visions.[15] We revisit the concept of strategy with

the purpose of combining the insights of policy makers and civilian agencies informed by international relations thinking and the insights of tacticians and military staff informed by military planning processes to a strategic concept suitable for modern security conflict management.

This edited volume aims at assessing the qualities and the problematic aspects of contemporary processes of strategy formulation and implementation in NATO. To this end, the individual chapters focus on the interplay between political, civilian, and military agencies in strategic planning processes at grand strategy, security strategy, and theater strategy levels. In addition, this edited volume looks at how developments at the operational level impact on strategic planning at higher levels. The substance in processes of strategy formulation is captured by focusing on the five variables: time, position, legitimacy, implementation structure, and capabilities, which are arguably essential to any planning process.

In this book, these variables are used to characterize NATOs strategic planning process, irrespective of the strategic level at which it takes place. The basis for strategic thinking at all three strategic levels are national and international considerations on, first, the time available to realize objectives, second, the position of the state in terms of interests and values that define the substance of strategic planning, third, the legitimacy of objectives, fourth, implementation structures such as the US alliance system, the UN system, or a party apparatus available as a channel of implementation at the national or international level, and fifth, the capabilities available to realize these objectives.

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The strategy concept is revisited in chapter two "Preparing for the Imperfect World: Strategy in a Conflict Management Environment," which describes the three strategic levels and the five variables in greater detail. The remaining chapters apply the strategy concept to NATO by addressing the following three questions:

1. What defines the nature of the strategic planning process and the instruments and rules of the game at grand, security, and/or theater strategic level?
2. On the basis of an analysis of time, position, legitimacy, implementation structure, and/or capabilities, what are the spaces for action and the types of strategies used?
3. What is achieved by the strategy used? Can discrepancies between objectives and outcomes be identified?

In chapter three, Jamie Shea addresses the link between political decisions and military planning in NATO. He argues that NATO's strong side is its strategic planning process. However, NATO lacks a grand strategy that can define NATO's position vis-à-vis other global and regional actors such as the United States, the European Union (EU), and regional organizations. NATO needs to position itself as a partner of these entities to make a difference with regard to international security management. NATO also needs to determine its geostrategic reach and whether this goes beyond Europe's near abroad and if so, should this role be predominantly political or military. This issue is coupled to the question of legitimacy in the sense that to continue to be a player in international security management, NATO needs to demonstrate its usefulness as a partner for the United States, the EU, and regional organizations. This effort requires more focus on the political aspects of NATO. Rather than trying to go it alone, NATO should be working with others on pooling capabilities. NATO needs to be proactive in defining the rules of the game rather than just be a recipient of the terms of engagement in order to continue to be a relevant player in global security management.

In chapter four, Robert H. Dorff argues that in the United States, agency decisions at security strategy level are more driven by theater-level desires than by grand strategic visions. One main reason for this dynamic is a lack of sufficient capabilities and appropriate implementation structures, resulting in inefficient strategy implementation in US military operations. As a consequence, the United States tends to "lead from the middle." Seen from a NATO perspective, the United States is going to ask its European partners to make up for its deficiencies in terms of capabilities and implementation structures, in effect bearing the brunt of responsibility at theater strategy level in future stability operations. Should Europe fail to deliver, the United States is likely to consider NATO increasingly irrelevant to its strategic interests.

In chapter five, Peter Viggo Jakobsen argues that NATO serves as a force multiplier in high-intensity conflict management operations. The alliance is not the ineffective talking shop fighting war by committee as the conventional wisdom holds. Instead, NATO is an effective implementation structure providing the member states with legitimacy for interventions and capabilities on a scale they would not be able to mobilize on their own. Analyzing the cases of Operation Deliberate Force in Bosnia, Operation Allied Force in Kosovo, the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan, and Operation Unified Protector in Libya, the chapter highlights how NATO enables effective conflict management when a conflict puts its credibility on the line and one or more members capable of formulating and implementing coherent strategies (typically

Britain, France, and the United States) take the lead. When these factors apply, other members with little or no interest in the conflict at hand follow or get out of the way because they value the security guarantee that the alliance provides.

In chapter six, Trine Flockhart demonstrates that the EU and NATO have gradually moved closer to each other in terms of the position understood as the role the two organizations play in providing security for Europe. The two organizations started out by having fundamentally different functions as community building in the case of the EU versus containment of the Warsaw Pact in the case of NATO. Gradually their roles converged in security terms at security and theater strategy level to the effect that pooling and sharing of capabilities have become commonplace. Grand strategic guidance and hence overall political direction and purpose is missing, but the convergence at the other levels of strategy formulation and implementation makes the EU and NATO better prepared for such future definition of a general vision for cooperation between the two main institutions of European security architecture.

In chapter seven, Mark Laity demonstrates that NATOs strategic planning process in theory and in practice are two very different things. However, it is the ability of NATO staff to be flexible under severe time constraints that makes NATO very capable at running complex military campaigns. Laity argues that the politics of grand strategy come to define how military campaigns are planned at the tactical level, which also has a direct impact on grand strategy. Analyzing Operation Unified Protector in Libya, it becomes clear that the legitimacy of NATO's operation was at the heart of concerns and meant that clear objectives and an end state were never defined because the UN mandate did not allow for such clarity of purpose. Laity thereby demonstrates that in modern strategy formulation and implementation, legitimacy is often favored at the expense of coherence between the grand, security, and theater strategy levels.

In chapter eight, Heidi Güntelberg argues that the actual and perceived compliance with international law is imperative to ensure the legitimacy of NATO operations. Analyzing the NATO operations Allied Force in Kosovo and Unified Protector in Libya, the chapter finds that in general, both operations enjoyed widespread legitimacy among the member states of the UN Security Council, in the general public of the intervening states, and in the target states among the political establishments and the local population, because NATO succeeded in protecting the civilian population in both cases. However, in the non-Western part of the world, a different interpretation of the principle of the Responsibility to Protect is emerging, which may jeopardize NATO's efforts to conduct operations on this legal basis in future.

In chapter nine, David Vestenskov and Lars Wille-Jørgensen argue that transformation wars, which have no end state and no clear point of victory, put the variables of time, position, and legitimacy into focus as illustrative of the problems of fighting these wars with traditional military interventions. The chapter analyzes the Soviet and NATO interventions in Afghanistan, demonstrating how deadlines for meeting objectives are constantly shifting because it is not possible to operate with feasible objectives in transformative wars. In addition, the chapter illustrates how the position and legitimacy of the intervening force and key local actors in contributing to the intervening force's objectives are perceived and construed differently by the intervening state and local agents in the theater, distorting the ability of the intervention to meet grand strategic objectives.

In chapter ten, Thomas Galasz Nielsen argues that the variable time is essential to understand tactification in the sense of demonstrating success on the ground without meeting grand strategic objectives. Time has two aspects: short- versus long-term focus and predictability. In the ISAF, short-term focus on success on the ground and focus on predictable short-term objectives that gradually became out of tune with changes in the objectives and end state at the grand strategic level are all factors that contributed to prioritization of short-term tactical objectives rather than grand strategic objectives. Objectives that changed from eradication of the Taliban over nation building to transition of security responsibilities meant that objectives that had already been reached were suddenly irrelevant. In addition, the changes in objectives made it difficult to determine if the military mission in Afghanistan has been successful.

In chapter eleven, Thomas Elkjer Nissen argues that strategic narratives are a means for political actors to construct a shared meaning of international politics and to shape the perceptions, beliefs, and behavior of domestic and international actors. He demonstrates how time, position, legitimacy, implementation structures, and capabilities can be used to inform the construction of strategic narratives in NATO. Using Libya as a case study he explains that the formulation and implementation of strategic narratives in NATO currently is a fragmented process that rarely takes into account the grand strategic objectives formulated in NATO headquarters. The construction of strategic narratives in NATO on the basis of the strategic variables would remedy this problem.

In chapter twelve, Hans Henrik Møller argues that the importance of legitimacy for determining the scope of action within NATO has influenced the way in which the comprehensive approach has been implemented. One unambiguous end state is no longer formulated because NATO is dependent on constant renegotiations of ends, ways, and means

in the member states to maintain legitimacy. Effect-based thinking matches this dynamic political context well since it involves a broad range of nonmilitary and military instruments of power and governmental, nongovernmental, and transnational agencies to achieve effects considered necessary to fulfil strategic objectives.

Notes

1. The plethora of actors in modern warfare and the ambiguities in terms of who is enemy and who is ally is discussed in Rupert Smith, *The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World* (London: Allen Lane/Penguin 2005).
2. On the issue of the use of the military for nonmilitary purposes, see for example Kimberely A. Hudson, *Justice, Intervention and Force in International Relations: Reassessing Just War Theory for the 21st Century* (London: Routledge 2009). On the characteristics of the military profession, see for example Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University 1957).
3. On the problems for the military in contributing to nonmilitary problem solving, see for example Janine Davidson, "Giving Peacekeeping a Chance: The Modern Military's Struggle over Peace Operations," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 15/2 (2004), 168–84.
4. Our effort is in line with analysts such as Colin M. Fleming, "New or Old Wars? Debating a Clausewitzian Future," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 32/2 (2009), 213–41, who points out that while the complexity of wars has increased, wars require that the primacy of politics, rather than violence, is considered essential. We focus on politics by revisiting the concept of strategy so as to make it suitable for the complexity of the modern state and the numerous actors involved in modern conflicts. As pointed out by James R. Stark, this requires that military programs are justified on the basis of their importance as integrated elements of coherent strategies instead of being evaluated solely on their technical and war fighting capabilities. Cf. James R. Stark, "U.S. National Security Strategy: A Global Outlook in Transition," *Militært Tidsskrift* (Military Journal) 140/4 (December 2011), 312–19.
5. Ole Kværnø, "Governance in Southern Afghanistan—Managerial and Strategic Challenges," *Militært Tidsskrift* (Military Journal) 140/4 (December 2011), 339–43.
6. Liselotte Odgaard and Thomas G. Nielsen, "China's Counterinsurgency Strategy in Tibet and Xinjiang," *Journal of Contemporary China*, 23/87 (May 2014), forthcoming.
7. Henry Kissinger, *Nuclear Weapons and Foreign* Policy (New York: Harper 1957), 422.
8. For the argument that in contemporary conflicts, the tasks of planning and implementation mainly end up with the military, see for example Thomas S. Szayna, Nora Bensahel, Terrence K. Kelly, Keith Crane, David E. Mosher, and Beth E. Lachman, "Shifting Terrain: Stabilization Operations Require a Better

Balance between Civilian and Military Efforts," *Rand Review* 33/3 (Winter 2009–10), 16–23; Lawrence E. Cline, "The New Constabularies: Planning US Military Stabilization Missions," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 14/3 (2003), 158–84.

9. Mark F. Laity, "NATO's Strategy for Afghanistan, 2003–11," *Militært Tidsskrift* (Military Journal) 140/4 (December 2011), 330–38.
10. Ibid.
11. On modern security sector roles and missions, see G. John Ikenberry and Anne-Marie Slaughter, *Forging a World of Liberty Under Law: U.S. National Security In the 21st Century: Final Report of the Princeton Project on National Security* (Princeton: Princeton University, September 27, 2006).
12. Our strategy concept is based on a state-centric conceptualization in which military force is one of several instruments of state power along with others such as diplomacy, police, and intelligence. Cf. Michael G. Roskin, *National Interest: From Abstraction to Strategy* (Carlisle: US Army War College 1994); Colin Gray, *Modern Strategy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1999).
13. On the problems of expanding the tasks of the military into nonmilitary fields in contemporary conflicts, see for example Kobi Michael and Eyal Ben-Ari, "Contemporary Peace Support Operations: The Primacy of the Military and Internal Contradictions," *Armed Forces & Society* 37/4 (2011), 657–79; Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era* (Cambridge, UK: Polity 2006, 2nd ed.); Szayna, et al., "Shifting Terrain"; Robert H. Scales Jr., *Future Warfare: Anthology* (Carlisle: US Army War College 2000, revised ed.).
14. Graham Allison and Philip Zelikow, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (New York: Longman 1999, 2nd ed.), proposed such a framework for foreign policy analysis, but it was never fully integrated with the international relations literature and thus remains a predominantly organizational analysis without an eye for the particular dynamics at play in the security sector and involving military activities. Robert J. Art and Kenneth N. Waltz (eds), *The Use of Force: Military Power and International Politics* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield 2009, 7th ed.) is a good example of the international relations approach to strategy.
15. A good example of the outcome of debates within defense academies is Harry R. Yarger, *Strategy and the National Security Professional: Strategic Thinking and Strategy Formulation in the 21st Century* (Westport, CT: Praeger 2008).

2

Preparing for an Imperfect World: Strategy in Conflict Management Environments

Villiam Krüger-Klausen and Liselotte Odgaard

This chapter develops an original approach to strategy intended to produce fresh insights into strategy formulation and implementation processes regarding conflict management. In this effort, we combine insights from the traditions of international relations and strategic studies. The debate on strategy in the international relations literature does not entail thorough discussions of the concept of strategy since the analysts usually assume that strategy is conflated with theoretical concepts such as balancing, coercive diplomacy, regimes, etc. The advantage is that strategic analysis is based on simple conceptual models with solidly tested theoretical dynamics from international relations. The disadvantage is that the levels and issues dealt with in different settings involved in strategic planning are not taken fully into account and a process is not identified. By contrast, the debate on strategy among defense academies often contains detailed conceptual analyses of strategy. This literature identifies and systematizes the complexity of actors and issues involved in strategic planning. However, because it is situated within a military planning context, these analyses are often marked by detail rather than a broader perspective. They describe the total agenda of strategy formulation and implementation without deducing key elements that are crucial to meet political visions.

The chapter attempts to combine the awareness of key variables and dynamics in the international relations literature with the conceptualization of strategic processes that has been carried out in a strategic studies

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setting. The purpose is to identify key elements of strategic processes that are essential to realize the visions of political leaders. We use the levels of grand, security, and theater strategy to describe the process of strategy formulation and implementation. We use the variables of time, position, legitimacy, implementation structure, and capabilities to describe the substance of strategic analysis. The levels and variables together constitute a concept of strategy useful for identifying problems of strategic processes and how these problems can be mended.

The chapter proceeds in three parts. First, we outline our concept of strategy, describing the grand, security, and theater strategic levels of planning processes. Second, we outline the five strategic key variables. Third, we conclude by discussing the advantages and limitations of our strategic concept.

The Concept of Strategy: The Strategic Levels

We propose to take the three levels of grand strategy, security strategy, and theater strategy as a starting point for identifying key processes of strategy formulation and implementation. In combination, the different tasks, skills, and purpose at these three levels of strategic planning describe the structure of the process. We retain some of the hierarchical thinking of these concepts in the sense that we recognize that decision-making power remains at the upper political-administrative grand strategic levels of the state. However, influence on strategic planning also comes from commanders and their staff at the theater level or from specialists working in the security strategic sector.

Beyond the level of strategic planning in states and in intergovernmental organizations such as the NATO alliance, a political level devises the visions or policies that guide the strategy formulation process. In most states, there is an elected body of parliamentarians, an elected president, or a dictatorship that formulates the vision that will guide the formulation of strategy.[1] In NATO, we have the North Atlantic Council that brings together high-level representatives of each member country to discuss policy or operational questions requiring collective decisions. The process that characterizes decision-making at this very general political level is that of persuasion and bargaining between groups of people whose values or interests are initially usually divergent. Political visions are not the object of analysis. Due to their predominantly ideological character, political visions do not form inherent parts of the strategic planning processes. Instead, political visions define the context of strategic planning.