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Estandart Reyau d'a Cheneralísma, prencipal bandera carlista d'a primera guerra bordada por María Francisca de Braganza em 1833 Royal Standard of the General in Chief, main Carlist flag of the First War embroidered by Maria Francisca de Braganza in 1833). Wikimedia Commons

Strategy, Operational Strategy and Operations

Comments from the Portuguese Strategic School

BY ANTÓNIO HORTA FERNANDES

ABSTRACT: After briefly characterizing the perspective of the Portuguese strategic school, this article strives to define what strategy is and what it is not. Based on this concept of strategy - as practical wisdom developed by political actors with collective expression to prepare for and lead hostile conflict towards each other - we go on to distinguish operational strategy from operations. However, the concept of operational art is not addressed as it is not considered important. Finally, we take a brief look at the fog of war given that it conditions the entire exercise of strategy and ways of warfare.

It is important to note that this is a conceptual text, not a historiographical one, and no attempt is made to describe or outline the history of the Portuguese strategic school. As for the form, it assumes a continental matrix, and it may have analogies with the proposals of contemporary Italian critical philosophy. Our aim is to present a middle ground that does justice to the Portuguese school, to define strategy and why this concept is defended; the article culminates by looking at the concept of operational strategy, which should not be confused with the concept of operational art. Even though there is almost no reason for the concept of operational art to exist in the Portuguese strategic school, we do not discuss the literature on operational art *per se*. There are three advantages to the in-depth conceptualization of the Portuguese school's concept of strategy and of avoiding anachronisms. Firstly, it allows us to delimit the concept more rigorously, without falling into nomothetic and behavioristic definitions, typical of every disciplinary field. Secondly, it avoids reductionism, including at the level of political decision-making; this is particularly common in Anglo-Saxon strategic culture where emphasis is placed on military strategy as if it were the conceptual basis of strategy - it was the historical basis, but that is another issue. Finally, it avoids the risk of marginalizing strategy in International Relations or making it

merely an aspect of security studies.

To use an analogy from the song “*deseos de cosas imposibles*” by the Spanish pop band, Oreja de van Gogh the strategist today feels like the poet who decides to work in a bank because he/she is confronted with a completely bizarre vision of strategy, in which everything, from football to war involves strategy; *Vogue* magazine even set out an “anti-wrinkle strategy” in a famous issue in 1990. On the other hand, strategy continues to be seen as military strategy and grand strategy is confused with defense policy; this is particularly so in Anglo-Saxon strategic culture, though important figures like Beatrice Heuser (Heuser, 2013), Colin Gray (Gray, 2010), Edward Luttwak (Luttwak, 2002) and perhaps Lawrence Freedman (if we exclude his book titled *Strategy*),¹ are exceptions. Nevertheless, along the lines of Liddell Hart, the above-mentioned authors seem to use the expression grand strategy to cover the spectrum of integral strategy; the military dimension is included and continues to be tacitly prevalent. The distinction between strategy and grand strategy seeks to signal that pure strategy refers to the military. The North American strategist Colin Gray defines grand strategy as follows: “the direction and use made of many or all among the total assets of a security community in support of its policy goals as decided by politics. The theory and practice of grand strategy is the theory and practice of statecraft itself” (Gray, 2010, 18). Politics and strategy virtually overlap in this definition, probably because it considers the more traditional sense of strategy.

In a recent case, the editor of *New Makers of Modern Strategy*, Hal Brands, defines strategy in the book’s introductory text as follows: “it is the craft of summoning and using power to achieve our central purposes, amid the friction of global affairs and the resistance of rivals and enemies. [...] In this sense, strategy

1 (Freedman, 2013) When everything is strategy, nothing is strategy. Since language is not neutral, and since strategic language comes from the field of hostility, by exporting it to the fields of competition, accommodation and cooperation, there is a risk of unnecessarily setting fire to otherwise generally peaceful social dynamics. Strategy not only configures an autonomous disciplinary field, with a specific object and a unique ontological substrate, giving rise to an individualized epistemological space, but it is also and above all an onto-praxist field, shaped in a social rationality that generates its own ends in the face of hostile conflict. Therefore, the concept of strategy should not be used in other areas for which it has no vocation and to which no object corresponds. One can only regret the lack of epistemological, ontological and ethical care taken by Freedman, a strategist and polemologist of recognized merit.

is closely related to the use of force, because the spectator of violence hangs over any contested relationship” (Brands, 2023, 1). In principle, this is a good definition of strategy because, although the mention of rivals and enemies may suggest it includes both competition and hostility when, in fact, it involves only hostility, its intimate relationship with the use of force dispels any doubt. However, while the use of force can be understood as economic, ideological, communicational, or some other form of violence in English it is generally assumed that the use of force refers to armed struggle or military force. This reinstates the ambiguity.

It can also be said that the definition of strategy and strategic level of warfare provided by the DOD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms is at the very least ambiguous. On one hand, these entries refer to a wider view of strategy, not limited to military vision and thus justifying the notion of grand strategy; but, on the other, all remaining related entries, strategic direction, strategic estimate, strategic guidance, strategic intelligence, strategic mobility and strategic sealift, refer directly to the military level.² Strategic reductionism is lurking if not actually present in all the above paradigmatic cases, notably in the case of the DOD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms, and what we do is camouflage it and act as if it is not there.

There still seems to be a predilection for military strategy in the mainstream culture of strategy. Let’s look at some representative examples. The famous historian Geoffrey Parker defines grand strategy as “the decisions of a given state about its overall security – the threats it perceives, the ways it confronts them, and the steps it takes to match ends”. He adds that, in addition to moral resources, “grand strategy should both calculate and develop the economic resources and manpower of nations in order to sustain the fighting services” (Parker, 1998, 1). While this is a somewhat anachronistic definition that may have characterized the period of Philip II, it is very general and is no longer applicable.

Ken Booth, one of the most renowned International Relations scholars, says truly astonishing things about the nature of strategy in his very influential book

2 *Strategy* is defined as “a prudent idea or set of ideas for employing the instruments of national power in a synchronized and integrated fashion to achieve theater, national, and/or multinational objectives” (DOD, 2021, 203). *Strategic level of warfare* is defined as “the level of warfare at which a nation, often as a member of a group of nations, determines national or multinational (alliance or coalition) strategic security objectives and guidance, then develops and uses national resources to achieve those objectives” (Idem, 203).

on the science of International Relations, published in 1994. He defines strategic studies as follows: "Strategic Studies is concerned with understanding and explaining the military dimension of International Relations" (Booth, 1994, 21).

In *The Oxford Handbook of International Relations*, strategist Robert Ayson also traces a landscape of strategic studies that is not only completely centered in the Anglo-Saxon culture but raises outdated epistemological issues that continental schools have long considered meaningless. Strategists like Abel Cabral Couto, Lucien Poirier, Jean-Paul Charnay, or Coutau-Bégarie would undoubtedly have been astonished to read such things. On a positive note, Ayson does not make strategy a field of security studies (Ayson, 2008, 558-575).

In *The Oxford Handbook of War*, Hew Strachan, a fundamental figure of strategic studies and the studies of war and its history, argues that "If strategy occupies the space between war and policy, its formulation requires the combined efforts of generals (who understand the nature of war) and politicians (who are in practice the masters of the context in which it is to be applied)" (Strachan, 2012, 39). Strachan therefore assumes that strategy essentially involves the military instrument and war is armed struggle.

Thomas Kane and David Lonsdale revisit the idea of military centrality in their much-read work written primarily for university students and now in its second edition (2020). According to the authors "strategy is the process that converts military power into policy effect" (Kane and Lonsdale, 2012, 10). Even if strategy were reduced to military servitude, one would not expect any difficulty in defining military strategy because the whole strategy is not limited to the integral strategy. The whole strategy must address its own mode of production, and the relationship between the strategic discipline and other knowledge; on the other hand, it must also recognize who the subjects of the strategy are and how its object field is structured, in other words, what relationships it establishes with the object of policy and with the object of tactics. Sadly, the authors relate military strategy to the levels of tactical and operational conduct, with disastrous results (Kane and Lonsdale, 2012, 14). The impression is given that the entire strategy automatically refers to its application by the actors, and that this application consists of the conversion of military power into the political effects of direction and government. The purpose of military strategy would therefore be none other than to conduct operations, which is said to be the purest military record possible given that the genetic and structural aspects refer to the military in combination with

other triggering factors. This brings us to the most recent vision of the problem of strategy which not only highlights the military and the operational level, but also the tactical level. However, it seems the authors want to recognize other dimensions operating in contemporary strategy, and therefore define military strategy as the use of military power in support of grand strategy (Idem, 13), defining grand strategy as the combination of military activities with other forms of action. Notwithstanding, Kane and Lonsdale continue to see the military as predominating in grand strategy. It is also not entirely clear whether the other forms of action that merge with strategy to produce strategic results are strategic, *stricto sensu*, or are simply supporting undertakings and plans; it gives the idea that they are not really strategic because they are not military action. In Tomasz Pawluszko's 2021 review of Thomas Kane and David Lonsdale's work in Security & Defense Quarterly, he did not directly question the authors' definition of strategy; this would be unthinkable for a reviewer in a Portuguese strategy journal (Pawluszko, 2021).

In an article published in the *Journal of Strategic Studies* in 2017, Isabelle Duyvensteyn and James Worrall present a definition of strategy where the military vector is again attributed a conceptual predominance; the article is entitled Manifesto, suggesting the need for a broader vision within Strategic Studies. In addition to the possible confusion between hostility and regulated competition, also found in the aforementioned work by Freedman, they define strategy as follows: "Strategic Studies is an inter-disciplinary field of studies, which at its core examines the ways in which military power and coercive instruments may be used to achieve political ends in the course of a dynamic interaction of (at least) two competing wills" (Duyvesteyn and Worrall, 2017:347).³

The many examples of relevant studies are all epistemologically disturbing. This is also inferred in Bruno Colson's detailed study of American strategic culture (Colson, 1993).

A similar problem emerges when referring to war in the Anglo-Saxon strategic culture: war is above all seen as armed struggle and conceived from the perspective of conventional warfare, not to mention other denominations that are nothing more than nonsense or, as in the case of hybrid warfare, trivial and redundant.

Just as strategy cannot be reduced to military strategy, war cannot be reduced to armed struggle, even though both positions have been defended for at least

3 For a reply to Duyvesteyn and Worrall, see (Fernandes, 2021).

seventy years. Of course, earlier writings showed glimpses or, strictly speaking, prolegomena, of this expansive view of strategy, but it was in these last seventy years that the theory and doctrine of a strategy of struggle began to be normalized. When Beaufre wrote *La Introduction a la Stratégie*, the new perspective was already becoming common in France and Portugal. In France, General Charles Ailleret had previously defended the idea of strategy in all azimuths (Charnay, 1990a, 27-28). Similarly, in a 1952 article published in Portugal by Pereira da Conceição, an army officer, he argued that strategy had never been a purely military science (Conceição, 1952). In fact, despite not using the concept of integral strategy, he defends a conception of strategy that was very advanced for the time; indeed it was only adopted in the 1960s already under the influence of the Portuguese doctrine for subversive war and Beaufre's reading.

The same could also be applied to war, albeit with some caution. However, expanding the domain of strategy and war does not mean breaking with its matrix. Hostility continues to be the object of strategy, it is understood in a strong ontological sense, confrontation beyond the rules, violence between political actors with collective expression; there is even a certain difference between hostility and war (certain peace support operations, certain maneuvers in subversive war, reverse strategies, or pressure beyond the rules of allies and neutrals), but war is the marginal utility value of all hostility between different political wills. Competition, which is a form of regulated agonism, accommodation and cooperation are not the target of strategy for both epistemological and ethical reasons. Ethics is involved because strategy is also part of the ethics of conflict, an art of prudence beyond all prudence.

The only thing that changes therefore is the extension, not the sense of hostility. It has been accepted for seventy years that strategy can direct violence, establish war plans, and extend those plans to other modalities of action beyond the military. This is also true of war, which is why we can technically speak of the Cold War. There is one difference however: armed struggle always remains a possibility in war, it is permanently lurking.

The problem with all these contradictions lies in the mainstream of what could be called the Anglo-American strategic culture; to use a metaphor, this seems archaically imbued with geocentrism in a world that seeks to integrate quantum physics into cosmology. A brief note therefore goes to the Portuguese strategic school, which is at the forefront of strategy theory along with the French school.

The Portuguese Strategic School – A Portrait

When speaking of a possible strategic culture (I say “possible” because I do not intend to discuss the validity of the conceptual phrase “strategic culture”),⁴ it should be noted that the Anglo-Saxon strategic culture is not unique, has not always predominated and does not hold the monopoly of knowledge on strategy. The French school was decisive for a considerable time after the Second World War. It was punctuated by names such as André Beaufre, Lucien Poirier, Jean-Paul Charnay, and Hervé Coutau-Bégarie, a legacy still reflected in the magazine *eStratégique*. The French school was avant-garde, the mother of today’s strategy, largely because it had detached strategy theory from military strategy without getting lost in the vague and non-agonic field of pseudo-strategic manifestations. However, the French school now seems to falter in relation to its astonishing heritage and can be guilty of Anglo-Saxon reductionism, as seen in the anthology *Guerre et stratégie: Approches, concepts* (Henrotin, Taillat, Schmitt, 2015). Although this book strives to take stock of strategy studies in France and their relationship with war studies, it tends to emphasize the military vector in terms of its definitional base, which is not epistemologically justified.

The Portuguese strategic school is the heir of the French school and of its range of aims. It was established when French strategic thinking was taking off thanks to Beaufre.

In the 1960s, the Portuguese strategic school centered on its founder, Brigadier Kaúlza de Arriaga, headquartered at the Instituto de Altos Estudos Militares (now the Instituto Universitário Militar). Despite these origins, the school did not have a strictly military vision of strategy. As strategy had recently been freed from the narrow limits of the military, it was natural for the military, in one way or another, to cultivate the non-military understanding of strategy, which only then began to be more widely accepted. Here we are referring to the idea and the practice of the concrete impositions of the Cold War and the colonial wars not being alien, of strategy having other valences besides the military; these could all come under the concept of total or integral strategy, corresponding to the general maneuvering of the State or any other political actor. In fact, attention should be

4 The idea of strategic cultures can always be considered good though, strictly speaking, it would be a truism if it were not for its behaviorist basis. For a qualified summary of the notion of strategic culture, see (Wasinski, 2015).

given to the concept of structural strategy when assessing whether the Portuguese strategic school was not merely epigonal and passive in this period in its reception of innovations, all of which came from France with the exception of those from Liddell Hart. One can see that the Portuguese school is not merely a passive recipient of the French school if we consider the concept of structural strategy; in France, and thinking of Lucien Poirier, for example, it is called a strategy of ways and means, a less elegant and less semantically successful translation (Poirier, 1987: 121 et seq.). The concept of structural strategy is a creation of Kaúlza de Arriaga but one must add that the French modality of strategy of ways and means includes the genetic, the operational and what we can call structural tout court; it is therefore less precise and has a different extension than the Portuguese school's concept. Furthermore, unlike in the Portuguese school, the strategy of ways and means is classified as a mode of strategy, just like offensive and defensive strategies, and not as a hinge between integral strategy and general strategies, which was the position of the Portuguese school following Beaufre. However, some clarification is required. Beaufre provided the definitive outline of the notion of "indirect strategies", in addition to military strategy generally, all of which were duly balanced by a total strategy subordinated to politics; but when he uses the expression total strategy, he speaks of it as being "in charge of conceiving the conduct of total war" (Beaufre, 2004, 44-45). In this seminal work by Beaufre, published for the first time in France in 1963, *Total War* is an ambiguous expression. It is true that first and foremost it means that the cold war led to war in all areas, largely due to the military impasses which resulted from the nuclear revolution and the consequent need to deter a hot war. However, the expression in question is still conditioned by the guidelines of the era of total war, the simultaneous and intensive use of all forms of coercion; the French strategist himself states that the cold war essentially has the same characteristics (Idem, 29).⁵ When expressed in this way in the introduction, it even seems to suggest that the period

5 The concept of total war (an epochal concept) is sometimes confused with the concept of absolute war (a structural concept to understand the nature of war). An example of this confusion is found in a work by Jean-Yves Guiomar (Guiomar, 2004, 102-105, 120, 151), which is, nevertheless, pioneering and noteworthy. The same mistake is made in a work by Nil Santiáñez (Santiáñez, 2009, 75-76), one of the most prominent polemologists of our time, and by Beatrice Heuser (Heuser, 2013, 113). Interestingly, this is not the case of Ludendorff (Ludendorff, 1937). For a clarification of the concept of total war, see (Fernandes, 2017, 405-408).

remains unchanged although this is systematically denied throughout the work.⁶

But this mature strategic reflection was not merely a theoretical import from France. Its closest genealogy stems from theories about subversive war, with its concomitant strategies of subversion and countersubversion, also developed in the early 1960s. This extraordinary reflexive vein, expressed in the five volumes of *The Army in the Subversive War*, was developed and gained ground in the conception of total or integral strategy. Nevertheless, Portuguese strategic thinking was on a par with the best in the world throughout the twentieth century. We can see that the Portuguese Strategy School was rooted in good practices and solid foundations from the outset if we think of Botelho de Sousa and, above all, Alfredo Pereira da Conceição, whose conception of strategy in the 1950s anticipated or went hand in hand with that of Beaufre and Liddell Hart.⁷

Despite this remarkable beginning, it should be noted that it was with Abel Cabral Couto in the 1980s that the Portuguese strategic school was renewed and acquired the theoretical importance that it holds today. Abel Cabral Couto argues that strategy is structured around three axes. First of all, the dimension of doing, concerning the action itself, the role of the person who implements the strategy; second, the dimension of know-how, decision support, advice to the prince, in other words, the interaction of more experiential and more theoretical knowledge where the figure of the strategist and the strategic advisor intersect; last but not least, the strategist's field par excellence, that of the theoretical foundation of strategy, be it ontological or epistemological.

On one hand, all of these dimensions of strategy are essential. However,

6 None of this takes away from Beaufre's merit. There is a legitimate tendency in historiography to seek to contextualize all hypothetical innovations, noting that they do not come from nowhere. However, it is no less important to do justice to the idea of radical conceptual innovation, so dear to MacIntyre. I am not saying that Beaufre produces a radical conceptual innovation, but that many aspects can be found in past authors or evolve in a certain context into something else; they give rise to a conceptual innovation, more or less radical. Thereafter, the reading of reality becomes different. I confess I am increasingly convinced that many things in history happen fortuitously and in less sophisticated ways than we think, (without prejudice to structural and conjunctural forces, in Braudel's sense). We then invent reasons to explain what happened, but not only are the actors unaware of them but they are of little importance to what actually happened. And I argue against myself, because I am continually searching for structural forces.

7 On the origins of the Portuguese strategic school in the twentieth century, see (Fernandes, 2004) and (Duarte and Fernandes, 2007).

strictly speaking strategy is a discipline of action and therefore the timing of its application is decisive; this is because it is a praxis discipline that involves social praxis, social rationality in the face of hostile conflict, which simultaneously means action and the meaning of this action. This is what has already been called strategic social rationality: a sociality that generates its own ends in the face of conflict (in the sense of hostility and adversity), especially war; this is because war is an exceptional situation that obliges a response from communities to appease the unusual effects of bellicose violence. In other words, strategy is not only knowledge but also knowing how to apply it; without the latter, the action might not have any upstream strategy. On the other hand, it should be noted that the theoretical premises already involves directing action in a certain way, if only because strategists and strategy advisors are involved in supporting the decision making.

This is why Abel Cabral Couto and the Portuguese school in general do not accept the French solutions of Jean-Paul Charnay and Lucien Poirier. The latter point to a meta-disciplinary facet, somehow external to strategy; Charnay refers to this as “*metastratégie*” (Charnay, 1990a: 188-189; and also, Charnay, 1990b: 213 ff.), while Poirier uses the term “*stratégique*”, which has become widely adopted in France (Poirier, 1987: 195, 199-201). Integral strategy, which is the most important part of strategic action and involves the political actor’s major strategic maneuver, is not strategy par excellence even though strategy is an eminently praxis discipline. Reflection on the nature of strategy and its intrinsic evolution, its particular epistemological framework (its mode of production) and the meaning of strategic action in relation to political and supra-political ends is also part of the concrete nature of strategy. It could be said that they are the fundamental concretions of strategy, without which integral strategy would have no direction as it would not be anchored in the entire reality. This is why there has been no attempt to translate the terms “*metastratégie*” and “*stratégique*” into Portuguese; Jean-Paul Charnay and Lucien Poirier, respectively, each used these terms to accommodate the non-operational dimensions of strategy, whose importance they recognized. According to these authors, *strategies* only concerned strategic action and its direct involvement. However, from the perspective of the Portuguese school, with which I agree, the introduction of another term, such as meta-strategy, would drain the strategy concept of nuclear dimensions, not external, but internal, basic to its praxis core. I do not mean by this that Poirier and

Charnay undermined the impractical dimensions. But strategy is involved in its entirety even in the impractical dimension, and this gives meaning to its practical character, shifting it to its proper place as *phronesis* of hostile conflict, like stoic *oikeiosis*.

Abel Cabral Couto argues that contemporary strategy is a phenomenon in all azimuths, which he rightly qualifies as a symphonic version of strategy. The Great War provided the decisive first steps to overcoming a concept of strategy tied exclusively to military servitude and the shift towards strategy being seen like a soloist recital, to use the words of the Portuguese strategist characteristic of the total war era;⁸ in this strategy, the particular military instrument remains pivotal but already implies a whole set of supporting dimensions that have been mobilized and which will be the embryo of future economic, diplomatic strategies and subsequently ideological, cultural, communicational and other strategies. Strategy can be understood as a concert for a specific instrument. The version adopted is integral strategy in which a joint maneuver is harmoniously promoted by the various general strategies, like an overture with various instruments. This is the watermark that Abel Cabral Couto has transmitted to his disciples, and it has allowed the Portuguese school to do avant-garde and unique work in strategy theory, a fundamental area of research in strategic studies, without neglecting the history of strategy.⁹

Why then is the reflection on the foundations of strategy in the Portuguese strategy school, one that is increasingly expanding also to polemology, so striking? In fact, it is not entirely new but emerged with the foundation of the School following Abel Cabral Couto. The best theoretical advances in strategy were al-

8 It is imperative not to confuse total war with total strategy, which was the first name given to integral strategy and replaced not only because it sounded too static and tight relative to the dynamism contained in the semantic field of the word “integral” in Latin languages, but also because it evoked memories of a time of total war and was therefore dated. It is not by chance that Beaufre ambiguously links total strategy and total war in his first major work in 1963. It is true that Beaufre’s concept of total war meant above all that the Cold War took war to beyond the military dimension, largely due to the military stalemates that resulted from the nuclear revolution and the consequent need to deter hot war between major nuclear powers. Nevertheless, the expression in question is still conditioned by the guidelines of the era of total war, the simultaneous and intensive use of all forms of coercion, since the French strategist himself specifies that Cold War essentially has the same characteristics (Beaufre, 2004:29).

9 On strategy and war in Cabral Couto see (Couto, 1988; and even Couto, 2004: 215-230).

ready known before him, from Pereira da Conceição to the very formulation of the official doctrine for subversive war. Therefore, even though partly true, it cannot be said that practitioners of the strategy just dedicated themselves to theory because it was impossible to develop practical doctrine and test it in Portugal due to the small size of both the country and its armed forces. The long continental heritage and notably the influence of French culture in Portugal played a major positive role here. On the other hand, the accidents of history were also important; for example, the refounder of the Portuguese strategic school, General Abel Cabral Couto, was extremely erudite and known for his tendency to theorize. In fact, his disciples are researchers with this tendency for ontological and epistemological reflection. Antonio Paulo Duarte, a historian, and Francisco Abreu, from management, for example, both with enormous attention to fundamental research in the area.¹⁰

A Proposal for a Concept of Strategy

Faced with all these conceptual aporias, I propose a succinct conceptual framework for strategy based on the Portuguese strategic school. In short, strategy is defined as the practical wisdom developed by political actors with collective expression to prepare for and deal with hostile conflict.

I refer to practical wisdom because strategy is not only art and wisdom, but it also has an ethical dimension (strategy is an ethics of conflict); it is a praxis (*strictu sensu*) that aims to contain from within the deleterious effects of the squandering of human and material resources inherent to hostility and to war in particular, until its abolition and the establishment of definitive peace. Practical wisdom therefore indicates that strategy ultimately seeks to abolish itself, in an eschatological sense. The strategy is first and foremost about political actors with collective expression because the violence in question relates to the issue of power and organization, the objectives and purposes of collectives in which war is the last resort despite the obvious influence of other non-political factors. Second, political actors do not necessarily have to be state-owned, but they must be differentiated. If internal unity is uncontested, the use of force within a unitary

¹⁰ For Francisco Abreu, see (Abreu, 2002), (Abreu, 2006) and (Abreu and Fernandes, 2004). For António Paulo Duarte, see (Duarte, 2013).

actor is not in itself a strategic issue but, in Portuguese terminology, one that concerns internal security. Finally, if these political actors are to have a strategic definition, they must have some collective expression so that individual actors are able to assert themselves politically on the international stage (Georg Soros is a well-known example); but without a minimum useful collective expression, they are not strategic actors.¹¹

Preparing and managing hostile conflict must be a full-time strategy. It prepares the political actor for a possible state of hostile conflict, manages the actual hostile conflict, and sets up a possible peace. Strategy does so under the control of politics, which is why this management is firstly political and then strategic; however, the latter has relative autonomy for reasons we will explain below.

Finally, I speak of hostile conflict, of the strong sense of hostility, of a “game” that starts, feeds and enjoys itself regardless of the rules and the degree of violence used. But it is important to note that hostile conflict is not just war; however, war represents the marginal utility value of hostile conflict. The strategy encompasses manifestations of hostile conflict that are not yet war, such as maneuvering and pressure on allies or neutrals, some peace support operations, inverse strategies, or various strategic acts of psychosocial support and development within subversive war. It should also be noted that whether talking about hostile conflict or war, their manifestations are not limited to the military and armed struggle.

This definition results in the political dependence of strategy. However, strategy is more than an instrumental discipline, a means by which politics deals with hostile conflict without any autonomy or specificity. Strategy is an intermediate discipline that is completed by a superior political synthesis. Thus, the strategic ends and the specific strategic objectives are as strategic qua strategic as they are political. However, the strategic purposes and objectives do not completely overlap or coincide with the political objectives that can trigger hostility; the puncture generated by hostility, which alters the normal social process, produces unique objectives that make it necessary for policy to frame it in a set of collective aims and purposes, that is, to overload the management of violence in order to avoid

11 See (Fernandes 2011 and 2017) for a detailed analysis of the historical nature of strategy as an ethics of conflict, prudence beyond all prudence, a fifth column inside war that contributes to deactivating the mechanisms that feed war itself, in its specific grammar and logic, and retroacting on politics.

its self-centered presence. It is not unusual for strategy to come as a response to politics in order to correct its pro-war blindness. This means that although we are talking about the same community or society that operates politically and the same basic social rationality-particularly because the vertical framework of strategy is dispatched ever closer to politics and further away from tactics – the singularity of the hostile conflict that is fully manifested in war gives strategy a phenomenological and ontological purpose. It requires that a rationality emerges within that community and socio-political rationality that can face this constantly renewing phenomenon; the exceptionality of war allows the political community to segregate its own objectives and purposes, be they intermediate or incomplete. The very survival of the community may be at stake, and political rationality as such does not always shy away from the dazzle of violence and indeed often promotes it.

However, the overriding reason for strategy generating its own ends and for violent punishment being perceived as abnormal is that war is a phenomenon that ultimately spills over from politics, through a politically irreducible chaotic core, generally called absolute war, and politics is unable to absorb it. Strategy is a social rationality that tries to deal with and contain war, often without the backing of politics - namely the kinetics of sovereign-governmental devices, has to let go -, even if it is later also impotent in the face of absolute war. Moreover, the autonomy of strategy is truly understood when it is connected to war. This autonomy becomes meaningless if we extend the object of strategy, which explains why strategy should not be extended to the entire conflictual universe, especially that of a competitive nature.

Strategy is a discipline of action, a praxis in terms of hostility, and war in particular; as such, it is related to a complex, non-linear environment that must be learned *in situ*. As a result, strategy must be a non-systemic discipline, at least in the more or less mechanistic sense of “systemic”. In this context, it is extremely important to understand calculation errors, communication errors and imperfect information, the risk of involvement in a process that may become uncontrollable at any moment due to both pure contingency and the chaotic nature of war as an additional source of extreme unpredictability.

Operational Strategy and Operations – Not Operational Art

The above discussion highlights the need to divide strategy so that action can be taken. At the top, we have what we might call “total strategy”, or, as I prefer, “integral strategy”, or “grand strategy” to use Anglo-Saxon terminology. However, integral strategy is not to be confused with politics; it depends on politics and refers to the general maneuver made by a political actor when there is actual or possible hostility that specific objectives can be achieved in the political space. Of course, strategy and politics interact; moreover, strategy is not only an instrumental discipline but it also defines its own objectives (provisional objectives to be completed in the higher political synthesis) because the specificity of what a hostile conflict or a war is can put the very survival of the political community into question, generating unique and specific ends, namely those that require a strategic rationality.

Integral strategy is followed by general strategies, such as military, economic, communicational, diplomatic, psychological, ideological and cyber strategies.

Next, between strategy and tactics, the general strategies are divided into specific strategies: military strategy is divided into land, maritime and aerospace strategies for example. Then, between integral strategy and general strategies, we find hinge strategies for the deployment of the general will of a political actor; this does not mean that integral strategy is pure conception –all degrees of strategy embody struggle and have a material dimension. The hinge strategies are as follows: the operational strategy, which addresses the use of means; the structural strategy, which involves the composition, articulation and organization of the means; the genetic strategy, which deals with the generation and creation or acquisition of new means; and the declaratory strategy, which involves the semiotic, rhetorical, illocutionary effects in its relationship with the means (strategy of signals). However, this definition of the declaratory strategy should not be confused with the much more limited notion defended by Coutau-Bégarie (Coutau-Bégarie, 1999:403). Although the French strategist also sees it as a strategy of signals, the sole aim seems to be to act as a credible nuclear deterrent, to guide the adversary’s behavior and prevent miscalculations. Hence, it also tends to alienate to some extent the more “mystifying” effects of the logic of appearance, which are prominent characteristics of declaratory strategies. This second aspect is what makes Coutau-Bégarie’s conception of declaratory strategy so

restrictive. Although Coutau-Bégarie's position highlights ethical prudence, my proposal is more assertive as what is at stake is the containment and disarming the violence of the war as a whole.

The levels of strategy (operational, genetic, structural and declaratory) are not conceived or germinated within the general strategies as sequences and behaviors that derive from them. They are rather like Mary's pregnancy by the work and grace of the Holy Spirit, in a simplistic interpretation: coming from outside and from above.

In other words, there is no strictly operational military strategy *per se* for example. There is one operational strategy for military strategy and another for economic strategy, each of which has its own guidelines and specifications that include specific strategies (land, air and sea) in the case of military strategy.

These levels of strategy interact as hinge strategies between the integral strategy and the general strategies to deploy the strategic actor's general will and overall maneuver. The operational strategy establishes the operational conduct for the military strategy, defines the meaning and rules for the use of the means, as well as how they should be used; the latter is also influential because strategy should always entail feedback at all levels.

For example, when we speak of operational conduct at the level of military strategy itself, we are speaking of *operations*; more specifically, the set of processes and actions taken by the military apparatus for its use (i.e. the use of military apparatus), taking into account the objectives of the integral strategy and following the established rules of engagement, namely: the objectives, targets, modes and sequences for the use of the means defined by the operational strategy.

The operational strategy is not a merely reflexive process; to determine which forces can be mobilized and how, but this is also done to ensure the planned device is in place and is acted upon. To take an example, the operational strategy of a strategic actor is for the entire ground military force, including reserves, to be concentrated on the border to take the initiative simultaneously across almost the entire area in a massive and rapid operation; the comprehensive maneuver would act as an economic, informational, ideological, etc. attack to isolate the adversary before he or the allies can respond, with the political objective of almost imperial affirmation in a given geographical area and based on certain ideological assumptions. In this case, the operations within military strategy are responsible

for the processes and actions necessary for the device to be activated, to pocket the enemy and to achieve success.

Offensive and defensive operations come under this section of operations, as do psychological operations in the field of subversive warfare. Operations also encompass the set of activities and movements that extend directly through tactics, or can be tactical but with a direct strategic result, such as retrograde operations (including combat, disengagement, delay and withdrawal, junction operations, supply operations, consolidation operations, again the latter in the subversive sphere, etc.). In other words, all major joint and combined operations involving large units, tightly intertwined maneuvers, confrontations (battles in the past and sequences of battles from the 20th century onwards) and pursuit.

However, operations can be conceived in three ways: as fully strategic, with subsequent tactical ramifications; shared between strategy and tactics, transposing strategic mechanisms to the tactics or as operational art, which groups operations; however, this involves the risk of intellectualizing strategy itself, which would be reduced to planning and conception, like a doctrinal essay, applying a mental exercise to a concrete situation. But even at the highest level, strategy is always the direction of struggle, and also embodies the will to take action. The conception of operational art creates another aporia: if certain tactical operations can have tremendous direct consequences, which is why they are called strategic even though they are done tactically, how much more so in operational art. This is the case when Robert Citino, champion of operational art, relates the 1914 operations to what had already been done by the Bulgarians in the Balkans and before in the Russo-Japanese war, but now on a larger scale and with a greater absolute number of casualties. Although it is not clear whether or not the relative number of casualties was much higher, it was the absolute number that was important because such a high number of casualties inevitably has immediate and direct strategic and political consequences (Citino, 2002: chaps.3-5).¹²

In fact, strategy and tactics are no longer divided by a horizontal topological criterion based on the social division of actions and protagonists: at one level

12 See (Bihan et Lopez, 2023) for a discussion of operational art, influenced by Alexander Svechin's thinking, though it is somewhat weak on the theoretical foundations of strategy. Although we have some reservations, see (Valdés Guía), 2021) for a conceptual framework of the operational art of warfare and high value-added strategy.

(traditionally, the army corps), we were in the field of strategy but, below that, we were in the field of tactics. Whereas the general of a division was a tactician, the general that commands an army corps was a strategist. Nowadays, it is the vertical topological criterion that is most important; it is the consequence of the actions and the relationship with the directing political power that matters. Thus, a tactical action, in its *modus operandi*, may well be strategic due to either the magnitude of the consequences or effects caused, or its direct relationship with the political power in charge. By way of example, the tactical bombing of a sanctuary of a counter-subversive guerrilla force in third countries can have strategic consequences; the use of tactical nuclear weapons always depends on a direct relationship between the highest political entities and the battlefield itself; the use of a small special operations team to neutralize a very relevant target is generally supervised directly by the political power and has strategic consequences (e.g. the neutralization of Bin Laden) even if it is only technical in its conception and execution on the ground. Thus, the decisive genetic link that separates strategy from tactics is the combination of the consequences of actions, the relationship with the directing political power and the substantive change in the correlation of forces.

In summary, an action is strategic regardless of the size of forces, the technical procedures used or the hierarchy of command and control on the ground as long as it is relevant in its genesis, diachrony and large-scale consequences, that is, if the action is relevant to the long-lasting and intensive exploration of a set of invisibles of a *process*, in Whitehead's sense. But an action is tactical if it proves to be significant only in its specific, syncopated, reified aspects. It becomes even more difficult, if not impossible, to find a space for operational art from this perspective, given that actions by very different social segments, hierarchy and volume of forces intertwine.

Mention must be made of a final, though unjustified, historical objection: that operational strategy began as military strategy. At what level was the operational strategy defined before integral strategy existed or when military strategy was gradually becoming an integral strategy, because one began to think of a general mobilization but channeled towards the military? The concept seems to have been forged within military strategy in line with the political landscape as a set of rules that involves military strategy as a whole as well as emerging mobilizations (and convergent to the military) from other areas (economic, ideological,

cultural, diplomatic, etc.); it was not a sequence of military strategy and behavior derived from and subordinated to it. It is no accident that strategy was basically said to be the conduct of war before full-time strategy existed. In other words, we are at the level of conducting war as a whole, depending on politics, but knowing that the strategy was basically a military strategy, taking that same military strategy as a whole.

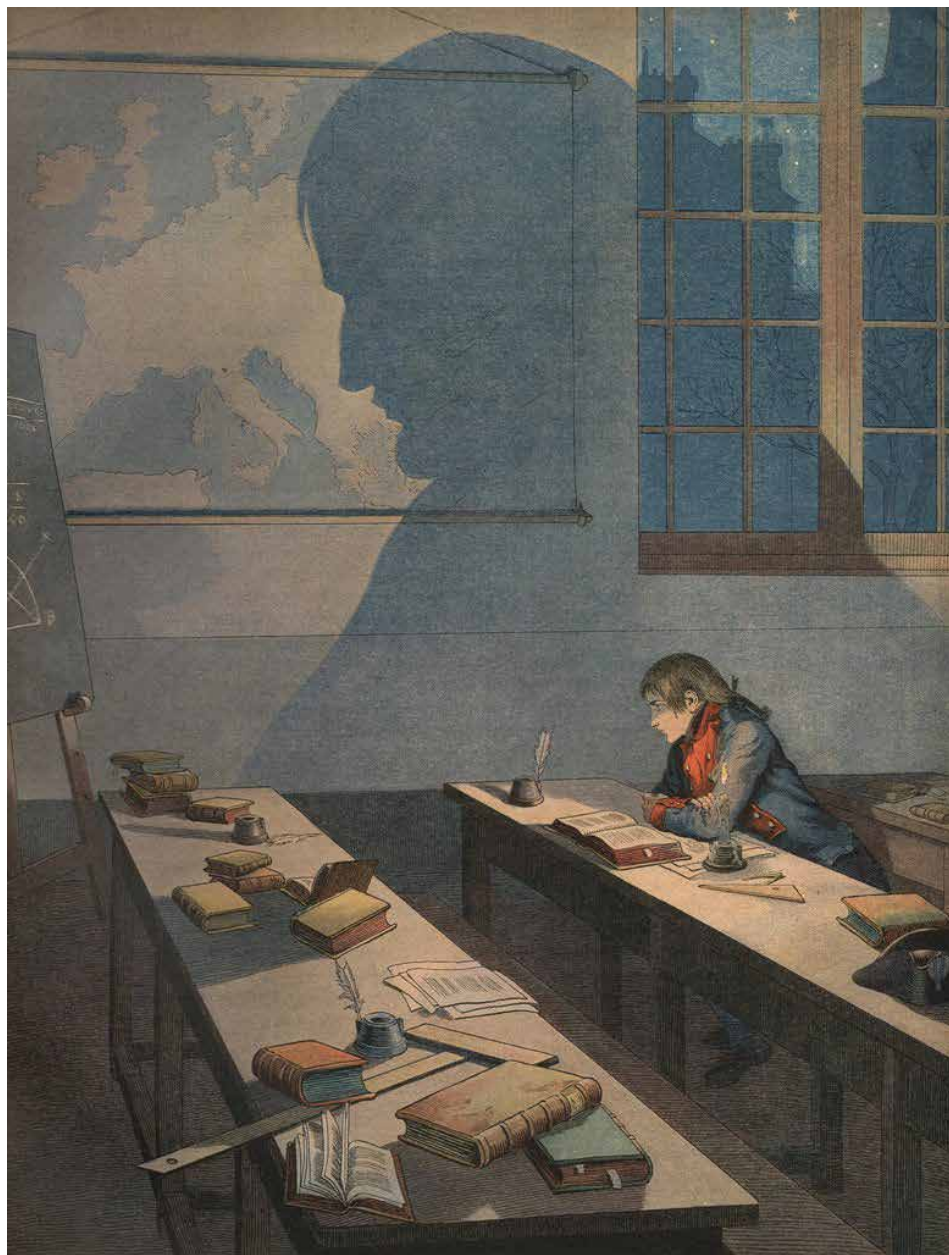
A note on the Fog of War

An additional note on this architecture. However reasonable it may seem, it is no more than a negentropic effort to trap what cannot possibly be caught, be it politically, strategically, epistemologically; we are in the sphere of the unpredictable, the mutable, the complex, the ambiguous (the fog of war), and above all the unreasonable, the absurd and the successive disaggregation of the plexuses of sense. War is unsystematic; moreover, given that it is always asymmetrical, strategy must also be asymmetrical, non-linear, and flexible. In war, the successful realization of a plan almost always supposes the non-realization of the previous plan. In the words of Moltke the Elder: “no plan survives contact with the enemy” (Citino, 51). Therefore, measuring success also involves the many mistakes and almost inevitable blunders that are the fruit of the indeterminate environment of war. In war, whoever makes the fewest mistakes wins, not whoever would be the best in a normal situation. To take the analogy of a handball goalkeeper: 40 percent of saves is a great performance and 50 percent is even better. But in war, which has far greater contingency than handball, there have been performances of around 110 percent, as in the case of Napoleon, even though they seemed impossible under normal circumstances. These situations only show that war is an upside-down world that has its own entropic grammar. On rare occasions, however, war can also proceed almost strictly as planned; take for example the first Gulf War, and to some extent Manstein’s yellow plan in the 1940 invasion of France. But these situations are even bigger surprises given the chameleon-like nature of war, to use Clausewitz’s words.

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The young Napoleon Bonaparte studying at the military academy at Brienne-le-Chateau, France, circa 1780. Litho by Job (pseudonym of Jacques Marie Gaston Onfroy de Breville, 1858-1931), published in Bonaparte, Georges Montorgueil (Paris: Boivin & Cie, 1910, p. 7)



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