

# NEGENTROPY<sup>1</sup>

The author provides with some elements for the analysis that open a space for reflection regarding the evolution of the division of war into different levels and the concepts that identify them. The article explains recent changes produced in the military doctrine in line with the requirements of combined and joint action of the armed component of the national power.

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By Jorge Eduardo Lenard Vives

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## INTRODUCTION

The methodological division of war or conflict<sup>2</sup> used until the year 2012 in the Argentine Armed Forces had four basic levels: national strategic, military strategic, operational strategic and tactical.

This classification was not in line with the one that existed in other countries in the world<sup>3</sup> or the one that existed in different areas of the very national public sector; which could have made it difficult to carry out combined and inter- agency operations.

What is more, there was not a uniform concept at tactical level as some forces made another division into “superior tactics” and “inferior tactics”, which made joint action more complex.

On the other hand, it is possible to consider, although it is not listed in a formal division, that there are two additional levels at the ends of the scale: political and technical. Even though it is not necessary to be taken into consideration when actions are planned or conducted by the different instances, they should be considered when making a methodological analysis of the war phenomenon.

With relation to this, this academic essay aims at answering the following question: What would the most proper division of war levels be according to the needs of the Argentine Armed Forces?

As the pre- existing situation is perceived as disorganized, the idea is to “put order to what is not in order” regarding this

classification of levels. As order relates to the harmonic arrangement of things according to certain categories, there is nothing better than putting ideas in order as a common order category: the relation ends- means. Once adopted, it will be necessary to start from the beginning: political level.

## POLITICS, THE ART OF WHAT IS POSSIBLE

Politics is at the top of the process that allows to take ideas into action for conflict resolution<sup>4</sup>. This is the area of pure ideas. It has maximum freedom of action as, in order to make initial decisions, that is, to determine national interests and materialize them into political objectives, they can even disregard other actors that are part of the setting.

This standard (freedom of action that allows to disregard some situation factors when making decisions) is the one that distinguishes the different levels of war.

Politics, or rather “Politics” in capital letters, also sets modes of action to obtain them. These modes are called “policies”, in lower case letters. This lack of imagination to propose names for things, which is repeated in the case of “Strategy” and “strategies”, poses permanent problems when analyzing the topic<sup>5</sup>.

Once the political objective and policies (modes of action) to achieve it have been selected, a powerful assistant of politics comes into play: strategic intelligence. We could ask why we do not call it “political intelligence” because of the level in which it is placed. However, as its



primary responsibility is to determine eventual threats for the objectives set by politics, that is, to determine possible conflicts, it goes up straight from the inferior level.

If strategic intelligence does not have opponents, politics starts to move towards objectives established managing its means and following policies set. If so, everything will occur in a peaceful and harmonic environment. But, unfortunately, this rarely happens. Generally, there will be other actors with the same end.

This competition may lead to a conflict. Then, there is the moment for the second political decision: to accept or avoid conflict<sup>6</sup>. If accepted, strategy will come into play.

### STRATEGY, THE KINGDOM OF UNCERTAINTY <sup>7</sup>

As previously stated, accepting the conflict leads to strategy which can even prevent direct confrontation. By accepting to restrict their aspirations, it may give rise to “convergence” that is one of the ways to solve the conflict. If the greatest aspirations are not left aside, strategies start to be planned in order to solve it in their favour in several ways: by confronting the conflict, leaving objectives or delaying it until there is a better opportunity.

How is politics different from strategy and tactics? At this level, freedom of action implies disregarding means. That is, strategy guides means available to the ends and, if necessary,

1. A concept of information theory that implies the trend to reduce the amount of uncertainty prevailing in a system. It is the opposite to entropy.

2. In our doctrine, these are called “levels of conduction”. But as stated by General Evergisto de Vergara, “each of these three levels manages resources and purposes that are different and lead to causes and effects that are also different. Strictly speaking, these are the levels that allow to understand war and they are conceived and used exclusively to conduct a war. Levels of war or conflict are not necessarily related to command levels of organizations that take part in the operations of each level”. De Vergara, Evergisto: “Los niveles de la Guerra o del Conflicto”; Instituto de Estudios Estratégicos de Buenos Aires; Buenos Aires, 2003.

3. de Vergara, Evergisto; op. cit. “With respect to the topic we are dealing with, this essay shows that levels of war or conflict can be named in any way and refers only to three of them: strategic, operational and tactical”.

4. Different authors; Bases para el pensamiento estratégico; volúmenes I “Estrategia General” y II “Estrategia Militar”; Escuela Superior de Guerra “Tte Gr1 Luis María Campos”; 1994; p. 35. “Politics, thus, appears

as something related to setting goals and to great action lines to be followed to achieve that and strategy as the activity applied... to the use of means”. In this essay, the concepts of that text are followed.

5. Translator’s Note: In Spanish, there is only one word for politics and policies. This word is “política”, that is why when we refer to politics, in Spanish we usually write “Política” in capital letters while when we refer to policies, we write “políticas” in lower case letters.

6. It is worth mentioning that moving from one level to another will have to do with the “second decision”, this is the decision increase conflict violence.

7. Strategy is defined as the discipline that deals with how to use means in order to get to the ends within a conflict; that is, when there is smart opposition. As correctly stated by Admiral Guillermo Delamer during his conference at the War College in 2007, it is not all about strategy. Making a dock does not involve strategy; there is no conflict, there is no smart opposition. In general, in this essay, we use a restricted concept of strategy as opposed to the broad sense that several authors give to it nowadays.

it may develop those means. When implementing strategy (as steps to be followed) in order to reach the objective, it is possible to design modes of action for which there are no means and to develop them by means of “genetic strategy”. But why is it like this?

Because it is the kingdom of uncertainty and a way to dominate it is to add some information to it. Therefore, developing means implies adding information to the system.

This level must be initially divided into a general or national strategy, which is close to politics and into a particular or sectorial strategy.

In the first one, everything has to do with national power. In the second one, it is possible to work over the power component that the previous level decided to use for the solution of the conflict. However, the true strategic level is the general level.

The sectorial strategy is not actually a level in itself but it comes from the implementation of the general strategy to divide the problems into parts and to solve it more easily. This is so in such a way that in some countries, it is not considered a strategic level but a mere component of the national strategy. This is why some of them have three levels of war (strategic, operational and tactical) while others have four (general strategic, military strategic, operational and tactical)<sup>8</sup>.

The idea is to study the problem that exists in the field of the Armed Forces, the specific strategy that is of interest is the military strategy. Some authors wrongly divide it into joint military strategy and specific military strategy. In order to prepare the military strategy, the three Armed Forces are taken into consideration. It has been shown that in modern war, there are no independent strategies in the different geographical areas, but “specific” strategies are interdependent.

Even for the case that Beaufre calls “Genetic Strategy”, this strategy refers only to the development of means and the development of said means must be harmonic for the three Armed Forces according to a Joint Equipment Plan. There is a level that develops the global vision of the military instrument of the Nation and this is the Military Strategy level.

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When the military strategy needs specific means to allot them to operational commanders, it must have prepared them beforehand by developing joint doctrine, carrying out joint training, equipping forces based on the nature of the conflict that is to be faced, taking into account possible use contingencies and assuring their logistic support during the conflict. Since then, the responsibility is to take and bring troops to the Theater of Operations and sustain it during operations.

This is an important difference between these strategic levels and the following levels: Although strategy comes in light of a conflict, the following level will not be reached until the dialectics of wills does not make violence escalate. But, if it escalates, other levels will be reached. These levels have to do with the implementation of that direction: the one implementing direction with maneuver and logistics to take troops to their best conditions, the operational level, and the level in which the way to produce confrontation is implemented, the tactical level.

### OPERATIONAL STRATEGY OR OPERATIONAL ART

The operational level was called operational “strategic” level. If we understand strategy as the availability of ends and means, distinguishing it from tactics because strategy uses the results of tactics, whether victory or defeat, we can infer that all levels make strategy.

From this, we can also infer that there is a methodological classification of strategy but this does not mean that names of levels may be changed. What is more, other names are universally accepted.

Direction levels make strategy; planning and execution levels also make strategy. Strategy at the operational level

8. Until 1995, the United Kingdom had four levels of war. As from that year, they have three.

9. Translator’s Note: The verb “to operationalize” is a barbarism in Spanish because it is not correct to use it as a verb. It is probably a wrong translation from the English language and it has not been approved by the Real Academia Española.



is called operational strategy. As this disposal of means and ends requires a special skill and a unique creativity of the Commander, the strategy of the operational level can also be called operational art.

Strategy of means present is universally called tactics, although for the United Kingdom, operational art may be considered to be carried out at tactical level.

In conclusion, this operational level was not “strategic” as it did not direct, but it planned and executed the strategic direction. Therefore, it is not correct to call it “operational strategic level”, but simply operational level.

The original meaning is so connatural that the barbarism “to operationalize” has become usual (this is a verb derived from the operational level)<sup>9</sup>. But the verb that has the same meaning is “to implement”: to take theory to practice.

This change of name will end discussions and will allow to get, from a conceptual point of view, to the next level: the tactical level.

#### TACTICS, WHERE VICTORY OR DEFEAT TAKE PLACE

Tactics appears when “shooting starts”. The operational level prepared the board: it put chess pieces into the square and now, as a referee in fencing strips, it says: “to you”. And means start to move until they finally crash (or not because this may be the intention of one of the contenders).

Of course they do not do this blindly: previously, tactical plans that set, among others, the objectives and lines of

action have been prepared. Although this is done before action, they keep their feature of “tactical” as they are addressed to action.

This level does not seem to need a subdivision: why do we talk about “superior tactics” and “inferior tactics”? When these concepts are developed, the concept of “superior tactics” includes the conduction of the specific components of the Theater of Operations, the direction of the Great Battle Units and the logistic support of greater level and that is direct and specific to operations. On the other hand, “inferior tactics” included the development of combats of minor groups.

This subdivision was taken into consideration because the category of initial order had been suddenly changed:

*The idea of dividing a task into as many parts as it may be possible with the purpose of solving it in a better way... (is) probably the result of the participation of Descartes in the military tactics as the army has always divided and sectioned space and time and has always taught to assign duties.*

**Jean Guilton**



## *Strategy of means present is universally called tactics*

from the ends- means category to the category of the magnitude of the fractions that were confronted.

It is true that in military operations, greater factions are conducted differently from smaller factions. However, the magnitudes of the forces that are confronted are not a valid category for the methodological division of war, the different geographical environments in which they are trained or the different types of equipment of the troops or specializations to which they belong would not be valid either.

Freedom of action lies in the possibility to change the operation under development beyond plans and predictions when the situation changes. At this level, humans act with all their spiritual and intellectual potential which is used by the tactical driver in order to carry out actions that, for the fulfillment of the mission, are imposed by circumstances.

This division into levels based on the category of ends- means allows to quickly find related events. It is clear that battle is about confrontation and, therefore, it is a tactical fact.

### **IS TECHNIQUE A LEVEL OF WAR?**

Although this is a level that is not generally taken into consideration for studies regarding this topic, it may, at least, be necessary to consider whether to include it or not. This is where words actually die: there are not even orders because -unless the operator is in front of a device that is voice- activated- there is no talking but action.

This is the moment when the shooter shoots his gun, the submariner shoots his torpedo, the aviator sets the control of his cannons or machine guns. This is the direct interaction between the person and the machine.

As opposed to the previous level, there is no human will to be directed; there is only cold metal. There are no chances to correct the mistake either; in most cases, it is no longer possible to change the path of the projectile that is already in the air as this has to do with laws that cannot be controlled by men. (This is also the opportunity for hand- to- hand combat, man- to- man fight, something that may lead to interesting conclusions).

It is true that considering a technological level exceeds the order category taken to prepare the levels of war. Ideas are no longer ordered based on ends and means, but there is an arbitrary technical order category.

There is something that is unavoidable: the so- called Revolution in Military Affairs deals with the influence of technology in nature, purpose and way to conduct to war. It has changed since the age of Romans until nowadays.

The difference in our times is that it does so at greater speed and it sometimes exceeds our understanding.

Freedom of action is minimum: the decision is binary and, actually, the combatant is subject to taking the correct action, either because he is in a coercive or persuasive discipline environment or because of a mere question of survival.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

Having the conceptual development of this essay been made, we cannot deny the fact that it was convenient to change the name of the “operational strategic” level to “operational” and to name the activity of disposal of ends and means “operational art” or “operational strategy”. This allows us to make a proper integration of planning when combined and inter- agency operations must be carried out. Also, and more importantly, it will allow us to improve our understanding of the conflict phenomenon.

It is worth mentioning that, beyond the classification adopted by our Armed Forces, it is convenient to set four levels when analyzing the war phenomenon or the conflict: political, strategic, operational and tactical. Technique and its evolution will lead to changes in the way war is conducted and this will affect all levels. The difference among these levels is the freedom of action that exists at the moment of making a decision; that is, at the moment of going from ideas to action, that is the core aspect of this classification.

We must understand that this division into levels is not real, but an abstraction to clarify the conflict and to have a mental scheme that relates events. The only way the human being knows to understand a problem is to analyze it, to divide it into parts. The subsequent synthesis is creativity which joins the parts that seem not to be related.

An inflexible meaning of this division may give rise to the rigid attitude of trying to force plans and actions to fit into a scheme that is a methodological tool to understand this chaotic and complex and, therefore, entropic, phenomenon of war. Actually, the limits among those levels are vague, they sometimes overlap and many times, they disappear, especially in the so- called fourth generation wars.

The only intention of this classification into levels is to add, as stated in the title of this essay, some “negentropy”; that is, to reduce the amount of uncertainty that may exist in these concepts.

> REFEREED ARTICLE