

OPERATIONAL ART

A NEW APPROACH TO OLD AND SUCCESSFUL CONCEPTS ON HOW TO DO WAR

By **Omar Alberto Locatelli**

By means of questions, the author presents us with an operational commander in light of the need to respond at strategic level regarding the core issues of the operational art: the operational design. In order to do this, he takes into consideration the ideas of the analysts of military art who have proposed a dynamic thought throughout history that allows to get victory.

ORIGIN

How is a war won today? This is a question every operational commander asks himself when taking responsibilities ordered at Strategic level. This makes him put into practice what policy imposes as a need to finish military actions in a language that can be understood by the lowest levels of the Tactic.

This commander will arrive to the conclusion that he will have to win more combats than those posed by the opposite will. That is, planning and foreseeing a higher number of imponderable situations to unbalance in a better way the ones foreseen by the adversary as a way of being more severe both in thoughts and actions.

In the words of Clausewitz, we can find two activities: *to prepare and lead, in a separate way, the encounters and combine ones and the others to reach the Purpose of war*¹. In simple words, the first part is called Tactic and the second one is called Strategy.

The Operational level builds up its strategy by combining the results of tactical combats to achieve the operational end state. The Operational Strategy links the Strategic level with the modes of the Tactical level by means of the resources of the Operational level.

This new way of combining Ends, Modes and Resources is called Operational Art, which is understood as a creative activity which relates the Operational Commander, their Joint Board and their Subordinate Commanders to design Campaigns that combine the Elements of the Operational Design (EDO, in its Spanish acronym)².

1. Clausewitz, Karl Von- De La Guerra- Book 2, Chapter 1, page 72. Editorial Distal. Buenos Aires. May, 2011.

2. Estado Mayor Conjunto de las Fuerzas Armadas; *Manual de Estrategia y Planeamiento para la Acción Militar Conjunta; Nivel Operacional; La Campaña*; MC 20-01; Buenos Aires; en revisión 2013; Cap. III; p. 39.

It simply implies preparing and combining the encounters in a better way than the will opposed, according to the current needs imposed and the uses at that moment. It still is the continuation of Politics *for* and *with other means*.

EASTERN WAR ART

This operational commander already knows that he has the Operational Art to win the war. But he goes beyond this and asks himself how they select the war target by adapting this to what is required at strategic level.

What is the most adequate operational form to fulfill the strategic purposes with the usual scarce tactical means they have?

If we take into consideration the first military philosopher Sun Tzu (544-496 BC), we will see that his War purpose was victory³, an obvious conclusion easy to be expressed but difficult to be implemented. This philosopher considered that in order to get victory, it was necessary to make a proper use of the Art of War (current operational art?).

He lied on five constant factors that prevail on the battlefield: moral influence, time, land, commander and doctrine.

Beyond the first considerations, which are usual for any situation analysis, he also reached doctrine understanding it as the organization of their troops in their correct divisions, the classification of ranks among officers, the maintenance of roads through which supplies could be taken to the army and military expenses.

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If we make an analogy, we can interpret the organization of divisions such as the determination of the main and secondary Operational Efforts, which are understood as the application and/or concentration of means, force or effects in a certain place and time in order to get a favorable result⁴.

The classification of the ranks of officials may be understood as the determination of the different commands and subordinate commands that are necessary to carry out their duties in the campaign.

The maintenance of roads for supplies and military expenses may be understood as the setting of the Operations Lines, which refer to the set of actions that are related to each other and dependent from one another, the execution of which will allow to reach the Decisive Points that will lead to the Center of Gravity⁵.

The Operational Art stems from its eastern origins.



THE FIRST ROMAN CAMPAIGNS

This operational commander already has an idea of how to select their War Target materialized in a Center of Gravity (CDG, in its Spanish acronym), which is understood as a group of characteristics, skills and sources of power from which a system (nation, alliance, military force or any other group) gets their freedom to act, moral or physical strength and will to act⁶.

He still needs to decide how to structure their campaign. He keeps researching in history and gets to the Romans who show the necessary union of war and politics⁷, when subordinating military actions to the needs of the Empire: to keep borders far from Rome to expand their territories and secure the center of power.

This is perhaps the first occasion in which, without being unaware of it, they tried to affect the Center of Gravity of the enemy by protecting their own.

To do so, Hadrian established in his first orders⁸ that the initial problem was to know the troops as well as possible, not only as to their number, but also as to *their value*. The second thing to consider was to get information about the type and activity of the forces gathered by the enemy, information obtained through *explorers* and *speculators*; and centralized by the *consilium* of the emperor and the *officium* of each commander.

In third place, it established how to be sure of logistics in order to decide later where the meeting would take place.

Finally, it gave priority to the battle order of their troops to reach a better performance in the operation pursued. The main factors to be balanced were speed and security.

To summarize, the question to be solved was in what order to arrange infantry and cavalry, legionnaires and assistants and, above all, where to put baggage⁹.

The Campaign implied displacing an army and then making them go into combat. This is, in general, what today is understood as campaign: a series of operations attributed to magnitude forces that carry out strategic, operational and tactical actions to get strategic and operational targets in a given time and space¹⁰.

THE NEW PACE TO MAKE WAR

Having made some more research to comply with the

requirements of the conflict, this operational commander found that, according to Marcus Tullius Cicero, as commander should have the four attributes of a general: military knowledge, courage, authority and good luck (*scientiam rei militaris, virtutem, auctoritatem y felicitatem*)¹¹. So, in order to continue increasing his *scientiam rei militaris*, he found that the evolution of the military thought of that time (described by Procopius during the 5th century in the book Wars) could lead to defeat the enemy with care through maneuvers that do not contribute to a direct encounter¹².

This Commander concluded that the fact that the approach within the **Operational Maneuver** may be Direct or Indirect understanding it as such when it is directed to the Center of Gravity of the enemy or when it focuses on the **Critical Vulnerabilities** to turn them into **Decisive Points**¹³, is not a finding of the current Operational Art.

Belisarius, oryphoroi¹⁴ of Justinian, showed that with scarce resources and movements that did not attack, it was possible to make conquests, such as the ones that gave Rome the territories of Northern Africa, Italy and Southern Spain back¹⁵.

His determination to find the sensitive point of the enemy (**Critical Vulnerability**, maybe?) shown in the improper equipment of the infantry at that moment, led him to exploit the weakness discovered (**Decisive Point?**) when increasing the strength of a new weapon that made the form of war evolve in the coming times: cavalry. The

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3. Sun Tzu - The Art of War - Chapter II - Page 28. Estaciones Editorial - Buenos Aires - July, 1992.

4. Manual de Estrategia- Op.cit. - Chapter III - Page 69.

5. Manual de Estrategia- Op. Cit. - Chapter III - Page 58.

6. "Manual de Estrategia"- Op. Cit. - Chapter III - Page 47.

7. Goldsworthy, Adrian - "Grandes Generales del Ejército Romano" - Chapter 16 - Page 441 - Editorial Ariel - Barcelona - 2006.

8. Le Bohec, Yann - "El Ejército Romano" - Chapter IV - Page 147 - Editorial Ariel - Barcelona - 2006.

9. Le Bohec, Yann - Op. cit. - Chapter V - Page 175.

10. "Manual de Estrategia"- Op. cit. - Chapter III - Page 37.

11. Goldsworthy, Adrian - Op. cit. - Chapter 7 - Page 196

12. Goldsworthy, Adrian - Op. cit. - Chapter 15 - Page 419

13. "Manual de Estrategia"- Op. cit. - Chapter III - Page 68.

14. *Doryphoroi: member of a section of the military house who lived at the expense of the emperor in order to receive physical training to be an officer.*

15. Liddell Hart, Basil - "Estrategia, la aproximación indirecta" - Chapter IV-Page 88 - Editorial Circulo Militar -Buenos Aires -1984.

speed in the way of combating introduced the concept of pace to be given to operations.

According to the type of enemy to face in the battlefield, different types of troops were used (from light infantry to heavy infantry, armed with arch and spear and protected with a *bucellar*¹⁶ armor of Belisarius).

Our operational commander concluded in the need to know how to allot tempo to the different stages of his campaign, which is understood as keeping a constant pressure over the opponent and, thus, creating new problems before they can solve the previous ones¹⁷. More than a simple indication of movement or speed of movements, it is an indicator of the necessary speed to keep the initiative and get a significant advantage that can give freedom of action.

The operational commander started to combine more ideas to turn their operational form into a self-sustaining campaign.

THE IRREVERENCE OF TACTICS IN THE MEDIEVAL STRATEGY

The operational commander saw that his organization problems were not new. Trying to get means has persisted in time, as it was the turning of feudal armies from the Middle Ages to the royal from the early Modern period.

The lack of means of feudal armies led to the search of new techniques (tactics) and new arts (strategies) to face the challenges of that time.

The evolution of the different types of cavalry from light cavalry to the heavy *catafracta*¹⁸, which were indestructible

until that moment, sought for a new type of combatant to face it: the archer.

Combat procedures were shaken by the irreverence that small, mobile and well- disciplined forces successfully faced huge and heavy cavalry and infantry formations with different pace of movement and combat. The Agincourt battle (October 25, 1415) was one of the first examples of the successful and creative confrontation between English archers and French cavalries¹⁹.

The way new designs are used allowed to combine mobility with the occupation of important strategic points both to assure lands conquered and to prevent the reconquest of them.

Edward from England was one of the first who built castles in key places and connected them through safe roads²⁰ to break the enemy that was in continuous movement through combined attacks of cavalry with archers while he protected their own center of gravity.

The new thinkers and commanders will have to use their wisdom to implement the campaign modes with the usual scarcity of means and the permanent uncertainty as regards ends.



He may not have known it, but he was able to find the skill to act within a distance that is compatible with the magnitude and support in order to get a decisive point, which is nowadays known as operational approach.

Moreover, he took into consideration the operational approach, understood as the arrangement and synchronization in time and space of movement, actions and effects of subordinate commands to carry out the campaign.

This operational commander arrives to the conclusion that simultaneous or sequential operations do not necessarily derive from the current Operational Art but they were the need that the great strategists from the past had and, also, from the current logics of each moment.

THE APPEARANCE OF THE FIREARM

The Strategy of strong points became relevant during the battles of the Middle Age making the *strategos*²¹ of the moment comfortably defend the places for the stockpile of ammunition as a certain success factor without worrying about the wars to come.

This operational commander, considering that defense is only a status to get to the offensive, seeks for the reasons of the influence of gunpowder in the attacks of the Modern Age.

The appearance of gunpowder in the combat and its consequent evolution to firearms and the replacement of the pike with the bayonet led to the end of medieval wars and the beginning of modern wars²².

The infantry of the 17th century, which was diversified among pikemen, musketeers, fusiliers and grenadiers, joined in one infant armed rifles and bayonets. The combat technique of the moment started when the companies, formed in three lines, shot the enemy from a distance of 30 to 40 steps until the smoke of the shots could cover the load of the bayonets. The infantry “softened” the enemy so that the cavalry could load, with a saber in hand, and could end the encounter.

John Churchill, the next duke of Marlborough, was the one who taught that the strategy of passive defense must be replaced with a direct offensive showed in his campaign to go through the Netherlands and get to the Danube river in order to help Vienna relieve from the Frank- Barbarian threat. He added Turenne’s maneuvers and Cromwell’s tactics to the strategic examples of Gustavo Adolfo simplifying the organization in platoons and sections,

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taking the formation in columns of six lines to fire lines of three lines in which the first one shot, the second one could get ready aiming at the target while the third one could load their weapon.

Moreover, he made cavalry lighter with only three pistol loads so that they could have a saber in hand.

The campaign that ended with the Blenheim battle (August 13, 1704) was an example of an operational link that combined sequential operations in which even places for resting were planned with the enemy having no chance to affect their march. The operational pause, which was understood as the temporary stop of certain activities before the end of an operational phase or before reaching all targets²³, was decided beforehand.

The Operational Art of an operational commander was present once again.

THE ILLUSTRATION OF THE NAPOLEONIC MILITARY THOUGHT

Our operational commander, overwhelmed by so many definitions and analogy finally gets to the analysis of a period during which operational art blossoms and becomes similar to its thought.

16. *Bucellari*: cavalry soldier with scarce resources that looked for the protection of a boss to whom he rendered military services.

17. Manual de Estrategia- Quoted - Chapter III - Page 65.

18. *Catafracta*: a combined Word that means totally covered, closed or protected. It is a unit of heavy cavalry in which both the rider and horse carried armor.

19. Liddell Hart, Basil - Quoted - Chapter V-Page 119.

20. Joint Board of the Armed Forces; op. cit; Chap. III; pp. 72 y 73.

21. *Stratego*: term used in Ancient Greece to refer to the General, Chief Commander of a land military body.

22. Laffin, John; Grandes Batallas de la Historia; Editorial El Ateneo; Buenos Aires; 2004; Chap. 11; pp. 152 y 153.

23. Joint Board of the Armed Forces; op. cit.; Chap. III; p. 72.

24. Peltzer, Juan Felipe; "Jomini & Clausewitz en la Doctrina Operacional Argentina"; Editorial Universitaria del Ejército Argentino; Buenos Aires, 2009; Chapter 1; p. 11.



1. Sun Tzu | 2. Marco Tullio Cicerón | 3. Belisario | 4. Karl Von Clausewitz | 5. Oliver Cromwell | 6. John Churchill | 7. Liddell Hart | 8. Martin Van Creveld

Clausewitz considers three elements that allow to fulfill the military target of imposing their own will: military forces to be destroyed, territory to be conquered and the will to subdue

This period is characterized by the turning of royal armies into national armies which leads to think about how to think and make war.

When reading Jomini and Clausewitz, the concepts mentioned before become clear and can be put in order²⁴.

He starts by simply understanding that, according to Clausewitz, war is an act of force to *impose our will upon the enemy*²⁵. He also understands that imposing our will upon the enemy necessarily implies destroying or disarming them taking this as a specific purpose of military action.

Moreover, he defines for the first time that war is *not only a political act, but a real political instrument, an*

*extension of his activity carried out through other means*²⁶.

For the surprise of this thoughtful commander, Clausewitz considers three elements that allow to fulfill the military target of imposing their own will: military forces to be destroyed, territory to be conquered and the will to subdue (almost identical to Sun Tzu's ideas). This statement is also the logical order to carry out actions for that purpose.

He starts to understand why strategy is the use of encounters to reach the purpose of war (end state²⁷). Later, he understands why war is an endless number of encounters which are subsequent or simultaneous and of different intensity²⁸.

The campaign appears to be defined as *the group of events which took place in the same and only war setting, adding that it also includes events related to it*²⁹. He, thus, understands the concepts of center of gravity, operational targets, critical vulnerabilities, culminating point efforts and operational lines both at the Strategic and Operational levels³⁰.

Notwithstanding the main evaluation, this operational commander takes, as Jomini and Clausewitz do, the highest reflection and leadership level of war is the political one³¹.

Martin Van Creveld identifies six main elements to be considered during war: tempo, main effort, surprise, combined arms, flexibility and decentralized command.

Once again, the elements of the operational design are present, understood in the same concept, with a different name but the same meaning.

THE CONTEMPORARY CONCEPT OF THINKING HOW TO MAKE WAR

Once the method of how to think about making war has been detected, this operational commander seeks for the most modern thinkers to contrast them with their *scientiam rei militaris*.

In this way, he reads Liddell Hart and finds in Bases para la Estrategia that Alternative Targets³² must be planned to replace the original in case it is not reached with the subsequent political relation to said success (contingency plans, maybe³³). When studying the last conflicts, he adds the last change of armies to the method: from national to multinational³⁴ and, thus, the process of turning political decisions into tactical orders becomes more complex.

When getting closer to this century, he discovers William Lind who, in spite of being a Technical Commander, in his *Manual de la Guerra de Maniobras*, he uses three mind filters or reference points to think and act in military actions.

These filters are: mission- type orders, the main effort and the search for strengths and weaknesses which he calls "surfaces and gaps"³⁵.

Beyond the tactical aspects with which the two first filters are focused; the third one (strengths and weaknesses) is another way of expressing critical skills, requirements and vulnerabilities that will create the decisive points to materialize the operations of the tactical level.

One of the last military theorists, Martin Van Creveld,

in his book *The Transformation of War* identifies six main elements to be considered during war: tempo, main effort, surprise, combined arms, flexibility and decentralized command.

Once again, the elements of the operational design are present, understood in the same concept, with a different name but the same meaning.

It is even more affirmed when expressing that the art of strategy is to use strengths against the weaknesses of the enemy³⁶.

CONCLUSIONS

Victory is the art of continuing from where others have decided to stop.

In this historical review of different actors and actors of war, the purpose of war has always been present. The elements of the operational design, under different names and in different times, have continued showing their need to be used.

The goal was consistent with what the strategic level understands from politics and for this operational commander to be able to distinguish how to make Clausewitz *encounters* have the effect desired by the State. But it has not been easy to make ends materialize a due use of means through the most adequate modes.

It has always been crucial to make the person conducting the battle to clearly understand how it must be finished³⁷ according to what the society supporting it expects from their forces.

It has never been easy and Liddell Hart has written: *The time has come to update the review of the doctrine of the final or military goal in light of the recent experience and current conditions. It would be desirable to start said review based on a joint level, because there is today a dangerous disagreement about doctrine in each Force*³⁸. Any similarity is a mere coincidence. This task is very well marked.

New theorists and operational commanders must take advantage of their creativity to reach the campaign modes with the usual scarce means and the permanent uncertainty without forgetting Einstein's words: *perfection of means and confusion of ends seem to characterize our age.*

25. Clausewitz, Karl Von, op. cit.; Libro 1; Chap. 1; p. 19

26. Clausewitz, Karl Von, op. cit.; Libro 1; Cap. 1; p. 30.27. Clausewitz, Karl Von, op. cit.; Book 1; Chap. 2, p. 35.

27. Joint Board of the Armed Forces; op. cit.; Chap. III; pp. 43, 44 y 45.

28. Clausewitz, Karl Von, op. cit.; Book 4; Chap. 2; p. 153.

29. Clausewitz, Karl Von, op. cit.; Book 5; Chap. 1; p. 162.

30. Peltzer, Juan Felipe; op. cit.; Chap. III; pp. 120 y 130

31. Peltzer, Juan Felipe; op. cit.; Cap. IV; p. 153.

32. Liddell Hart, Basil; op. cit.; Chap. XIX p. 541.

33. Joint Board of the Armed Forces; op. cit.; Chap. III; p. 63.

34. Keegan, John; "El rostro de la Batalla"; Ediciones del Ejército - Servicio de Publicaciones del EME; Madrid 1990; Foreword; p. 22.

35. Lind, William; "Manual de la Guerra de Maniobras"; Editorial Círculo Militar; Buenos Aires; 1991; Chap. 2.

36. Van Creveld, Martin; "The Transformation of War"; José Luis Uceda Editor, Buenos Aires; 2007; Chap. IV; page 167.

37. Locatelli, Omar; "El Arte Operacional de Clausewitz en la Segunda Guerra del Líbano"; Journal *Visión Conjunta*; Escuela Superior de Guerra Conjunta; Year 3; N° 3; p. 11.

38. Liddell Hart, Basil -Op. cit.-Chap. XXI-Page 577.