The Nature of Strategy versus the Character of War

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The Setup

• Since end of Cold War:
  – Those who see novelty
  – Strategy classicists

• Why both sides miss the point by discussing war
Novelty in War

• Since end of Cold War, many have identified novelty in the character or even nature of war
• Martin van Creveld & non-trinitarian war
• Mary Kaldor & new wars
• Fourth-generation war
Strategy classicists

• In the new wars literature:
  – Clausewitz is being misunderstood
  – History is being forgotten

• War is war, despite changes in character
  – War remains most similar to itself despite change
Missing the Point

• Strategy classicists are more right than those seeking novelty
  – But both are off the mark because war is not autonomous, cannot independently change

• The source of the character of any war is strategy
Defining Strategy

• Strategy is all about relationships
  – Geography, technology, etc

• Centerpiece comprises two main relationships
  – Strategy as relationship between tactics and political ends
  – Strategy as relationship between adversaries
Tactics-Politics Relationship (1)

• Begins with Clausewitz’s supreme, most far-reaching act of judgment
  – Judgment not only about force, but about the ends sought

• From outset, force is unique and what it can achieve is unique
Tactics-Politics Relationship (2)

- Force is not generic
  - Landpower, seapower, airpower, cyberpower, all different
- Deploying force is not enough
- Force must be employed in the field through tactics
Adversarial Relationship

• Enemy is independent, intelligent, adaptive both tactically and strategically
• The strategies of opposing belligerents never inert
  – Therefore the character of any war is never inert
Forecasting Future Character (1)

• Given the primacy of strategy, how can the future character of war be forecast?
  – Prediction is very hard, especially about the future

• Strategy must be at the center of any forecasting attempt
  – Strategy’s two pivotal relationships
Forecasting Future Character (2)

- Politics necessary influence
  - frequently derived from reigning political ideology
  - Politics also identifies enemies to be fought, involving a judgment of their potential threat
    - Choice of enemies may change swiftly
    - Choice of enemies influences the utility of various tactics
Conclusion

• The character of any war stems from strategy-making of belligerents, and the strategies they ultimately employ
  – Practicing strategists must therefore look to strategies employed, rather than to preset categories for understanding any current war

• Character of war has relevance primarily for defense planners
  – They must anticipate the future but lack the necessary details