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LIDDELL HART'S INDIRECT APPROACH AND ITS APPLICATION
TO THE GULF WAR

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LIDDELL HART'S INDIRECT APPROACH AND ITS APPLICATION
TO THE GULF WAR

Introduction

1. The dreadful carnage of the Great War caused many military thinkers to review the conduct of warfare. Basil Liddell Hart had fought in the war, risen to the rank of Captain, and been one of its casualties. Liddell Hart blamed Clausewitz, and his obsession with the Great Battle, for the stalemated war of attrition, and the willingness of Generals on both sides to commit their forces in massed frontal attacks against fortified positions. The invention of the tank and the mobility and protection it afforded assisted him to formulate a new concept for warfare since called the Indirect Approach.

2. His ideas were seized eagerly by some of the military practitioners of the day, names like J.F.C Fuller, Charles De Gaulle, and a young George Patton. However it is ironical that his enemy of the Great War, the German Army, were best able to apply his methodology in the opening months of World War II in the form of the blitzkrieg.

3. I believe that the Indirect Approach is as applicable today as it was in 1939, and that its maxims were applied successfully by

the coalition forces in the Gulf War.

The Indirect Approach

4. In contrast to the unimaginative frontal assaults of World War I, The strategy of the Indirect Approach emphasised mobility, audacity, and skill. It proposed a war of maneuver to "out think and outflank the enemy, psychologically as well as geographically, at minimum risk and minimum cost". (The latter points have become particularly pertinent in the post Vietnam era.) Rather than large massed armies it required smaller professional armies equipped with the latest technology(a perfect description of the forces of the coalition). Concentration for Liddell Hart meant concentration of strength against weakness not the massing of armies. To assist in the application of his strategy he developed eight Maxims. The aim of this paper is to apply these Maxims to the Coalition Strategy in the Gulf War, and discuss the influence of technology as a force multiplier in that war.

Maxim 1:Adjust your Ends to your Means

5. When Iraq invaded Kuwait on 2 Aug 90 the means available to oppose the invasion were very limited, the remnants of the Kuwaiti Army, the Saudi Arabian Armed Forces, and US ready reaction forces that could be quickly airlifted in (after Saudi approval was

given). Arrayed against these forces was Saddam Hussein's powerful army, concentrated on the Kuwait and Southern Iraq border with Saudi Arabia. The allied strategy had to be defensive in posture, and to quickly deploy sufficient forces to deter the Iraqi's from continuing their attack into Saudi Arabia. Air assets which could be speedily deployed were positioned to overcome lack of manpower on the ground and bolster the defensive firepower available.

6. Naval forces, also capable of speedy deployment, enabled the economic instrument of policy, the sea blockade, to be enforced.

7. I believe that the phasing of the offensive operation was a prime example of matching ends with means. When the deadline expired insufficient ground forces were in position for a ground offensive and the Iraqi forces were still strong, so the available assets, airpower and artillery were used to strike at strategic and tactical targets to weaken the enemy. While this also fits Maxims 4 and 7, it was matching means to ends. The Ground War was launched when General Schwartzkopf was happy that the enemy had been sufficiently weakened and the necessary means were available.

Maxim 2:Keep your Object Always in Mind

8. The most important application of this Maxim was at the very highest strategic level, the overall objective of the War. This was the ejection of Iraqi forces from Kuwait. To prosecute the War

a coalition of nations including Arab countries was formed. The Arabs joined the coalition because of Iraq's aggression and were keen to see Kuwait liberated but not the annihilation of the Iraqi people.

9. This objective was foremost in the minds of the major players. Civilian casualties were minimised, and when the Iraqi forces had been driven from Kuwait, admittedly with enough damage inflicted on them to cease their effectiveness as a fighting force, the War was terminated. There has been subsequent criticism that the War was stopped too early, that Baghdad should have been occupied and Hussein killed or captured. I strongly believe that strict adherence to the objective of the War preserved the coalition, helped gain world acceptance of the actions taken, and preserved some form of power balance in a relatively unstable region.

Maxim 3: Choose the Line or Course of Least Expectation

10. After occupying Kuwait, the Iraqis expected any offensive against them would be directed mainly at their forces in Kuwait. They therefore based their defensive posture on the Kuwaiti seaboard and the Kuwaiti/Saudi border. Their reserve, the Revolutionary Guard, was positioned on the Iraq/ Kuwaiti border to respond to attacks from either the sea or from Saudi Arabia. This was their strength. As allied forces arrived in theatre they were initially aligned against this strength, concentrated on the

... once the offensive war began and the
grounded or destroyed large forces were
then struck deep into Iraq against little
Iraqi forces, draw them out of their
beat them in detail.

... in an amphibious attack by Marines was
ation of a strong amphibious force in the
ed rehearsals. The attack was never

of Least Resistance

... the line of least resistance was , as so
line of least expectation, so the planning
above are equally applicable.

... lication of this Maxim was in the air war.
the Iraqi Air Force was no longer a
still an anti-aircraft missile and gun
had clear air superiority. This was
with increases in the number of sorties
coverage of targets. The air offensive
Iraqi's both psychologically (very important
and logistically, and contributed greatly
st by Iraqi forces against the ground

... nstrated by the
lies according to
ainst Israel and
riority targets.
y reduced their

... st your Opponent

... ; this maxim. By
well dug in and
ir offensive was
the Iraqis off
psychologically,

... ity,
, control, and
ilities,

... eavy artillery),

18. The unrelenting bombing and the successful interdiction of their supply lines made the Iraqi soldiers prime targets for the coalition psychological warfare campaign. Many of the soldiers that surrendered had copies of the coalition propaganda pamphlets in their pockets. By the time the ground war started most Iraqi units had lost the will to fight.

Maxim 8: Do not Renew an Attack Along the Same Line After it has once Failed

19. As there were no unsuccessful attacks this maxim thankfully did not have to be applied.

Technology and the Indirect Approach

20. As mentioned previously in paragraph 4 Liddell Hart was a great believer in using technology as a force multiplier to overcome numerical deficiencies. The Gulf War provided a perfect example of this.

21. Stealth technology allowed the F117-A to operate night after night against targets protected by over 3,000 anti aircraft guns and 60 surface to air missiles without losing a single aircraft. Anti-radar bombs , and precision strikes against command and control centres and aircraft shelters reduced the Iraqi Airforce to early impotency. Terminally guided munitions in the form of

Tomahawk cruise missiles or laser guided bombs allowed an intense bombing campaign against important targets in Baghdad. This severely disrupted the Iraqi armed forces without causing heavy civilian casualties which, as outlined earlier, may have disrupted coalition unity. At the tactical level the terminally guided munitions caused heavy losses of tanks and artillery, further decreasing the Iraqi 's morale.

Conclusion

22. I have always thought that Liddell Hart's Indirect Approach was really a fancy way of saying " Fight Smart ". Use all your own strengths against your enemy's weaknesses to overwhelm him with minimum losses to your own men and equipment. His Maxims were successfully applied in the Gulf War and the results speak for themselves. Whilst the next war, if and when it happens, may be against a force with higher technology levels, better leadership, and with a stronger cause to fight for, the Indirect Approach should form the basis of our strategy.
