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Strategic goals are developed and approved by the President of the United States with the input from his close advisors, staff and administration officials. These strategic goals form the foundation that subordinate agencies, departments and military planners use to develop strategic objectives that will support the overarching desired national goals. A clear understanding of desired goals and endstate is imperative at the strategic level to ensure that all elements of national power are applied effectively. For the military, clear delineation of strategic goals are essential to ensure that military force can be effectively and efficiently applied when necessary to support strategic success. The importance of national strategic goals and their significance to military campaign planners will be examined. Critical factors required for the development of strategic goals and the importance of the need for continual assessment and revision of strategic goals over time will also be examined. Proper development and continual assessment will directly impact the military campaign planner and can ultimately determine the success or failure of the military mission. The success or failure of the military mission will ultimately impact the success or failure of the overarching national strategy.					
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JOINT FORCES STAFF COLLEGE
JOINT ADVANCED WARFIGHTING SCHOOL

**Pursuing Strategic Goals: Resources, Technology, Political
Will, and the Global War On Terrorism**

By

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Joint Advanced Warfighting School in partial satisfaction of the requirements of a Master of Science Degree in Joint Campaign Planning and Strategy.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Joint Forces Staff College or the Department of Defense.

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05 April 2007

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Abstract

Strategic goals are developed and approved by the President of the United States with the input from his close advisors, staff and administration officials. These strategic goals form the foundation that subordinate agencies, departments and military planners use to develop strategic objectives that will support the overarching desired national goals. A clear understanding of desired goals and endstate is imperative at the strategic level to ensure that all elements of national power are applied effectively. For the military, clear delineation of strategic goals are essential to ensure that military force can be effectively and efficiently applied when necessary to support strategic success.

Current United States Armed Forces military doctrine recognizes three levels of war; tactical, operational and strategic. These three levels overlap. Planning and execution at each level is reliant on planning and execution in other levels. Clearly delineated strategic goals form the nucleus from which military plans at all levels evolve. Proper or improper identification of strategic goals affects how military leaders plan and utilize military power to support the attainment of strategic objectives. An incorrect interpretation of a strategic goal can lead to the failure to accomplish the desired strategic goal.

Some have argued that the Global War On Terror (GWOT) lacks a sound strategy that is in part reflected in the lack of strategic objectives for the military. Specifically, issues have been raised regarding Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and what appear to be lack of clearly defined national strategic goals which are impacting military success.

The importance of national strategic goals and their significance to military campaign planners will be examined. Critical factors required for the development of strategic goals and the importance of the need for continual assessment and revision of strategic goals over time will also be examined. Proper development and continual assessment will directly impact the military campaign planner and can ultimately determine the success or failure of the military mission. The success or failure of the military mission will ultimately impact the success or failure of the overarching national strategy.

Dedication

Dedicated to all service members and their families who have made sacrifices during Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom.

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Laura, thanks for your steadfast support and encouragement throughout this project. I could not have done it without you. To Conor, Aoife and Niall, thanks to each of you as well. I appreciate your patience with me during the past months and love you each very much.

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Introduction

We live in a time of unconventional challenges and strategic uncertainty. We are confronting fundamentally different challenges from those faced by the American defense establishment in the Cold War and previous eras. The strategy we adopt today will help influence the world's strategic environment, for the United States is an unusually powerful player in world affairs.¹

The United States is entering its sixth year in the Global War On Terrorism (GWOT). The horrific events of September 11, 2001 shocked the American public and much of the world. The shock and grief rapidly forged a resolve among Americans that served to unite the population against terrorism. President Bush quickly rallied the nation and announced that the United States was at war. The first war for Americans in the twenty-first century would be a Global War On Terrorism. Within a month after the events of September 11, the United States Armed Forces were conducting military operations in Afghanistan to topple the Taliban government and disrupt and destroy the al Qaeda terrorist network. The operation, termed Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), was a spectacular tactical military success. The American public and citizens of the world were amazed at the effectiveness and efficiency of the United States military.

The thesis of this paper is that the United States Armed Forces can achieve tactical and operational success on the battlefield without clearly articulated national strategic goals. Achieving strategic success, however, requires an understanding of clearly stated strategic goals that are continually refined, defined and coordinated with the military campaign plan.

¹ The Secretary of Defense, *The National Defense Strategy of the United States of America*, (Washington D.C.: March 2005). iii. (Hereinafter referred to as NDS).

While the search for key terrorist leaders continued in Afghanistan, the military was tasked to plan and prepare for military operations against Saddam Hussein in Iraq. Deeply concerned that terrorists might exploit Saddam Hussein's assumed cache of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD), President Bush ordered Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) in March of 2003. Once again the American public and the world were awed by the speed, effectiveness and accuracy of the United States military machine. Major combat operations were concluded approximately six weeks after the start of the operation. The Bush administration sought to rapidly exploit the Iraqi people's new found excitement for freedom by quickly establishing a new democratic government in Iraq. Three years later, the tactical military victories are a shining but fading memory in the minds of many Americans while a significant United States military capability remains deployed world-wide in pursuit of national strategic objectives.

Despite the initial military successes, some have argued that the GWOT lacks a clear strategy or that the strategy has been incomplete.² Specifically, issues have been raised regarding OEF and OIF and what some consider lack of clearly defined or unattainable military strategic objectives.³ This arguably impacts the military's ability to contribute to national strategic success and can also impact the overall achievement of national strategic goals. The scope of this paper will be limited to an assessment of strategic guidance to the military element of national power.

The foundation that guides the employment of all the elements of national power is grounded in our national strategy. Upon entering office, political administrations generate

² Tony Zinni and Tony Koltz, *The Battle for Peace* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 178.

³ Harry S. Yarger "Strategic Theory for the 21st Century: The Little Book on Big Strategy" (February 2006): 54.

their view of national strategy. Relying on the fundamental principals established in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States, our leaders formulate current and future national strategic vision. This vision translates into goals, some of which are enduring and others which are administration- specific. This process is a science as well as an art. Development of strategy is science with regard to management of national resources and it is art with regard to the imperfect predictive aspect of anticipating future events. In a recent article on strategy, Harry Yarger describes the strategic environment as, “Characterized by four earmarks –volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity (VUCA) –the strategic environment is always in a greater or lesser state of dynamic instability or ‘chaos.’”⁴ Developing strategy is inherently difficult and complex for any administration.

The Bush administration released its initial National Security Strategy (NSS) in September 2001, and subsequently released a revised NSS in September 2002, one year after the terror attack on the World Trade Center Towers. This was nine months after the rout of the Taliban from Afghanistan, and only six months prior to commencement of military operations in Iraq. In the ensuing years through March 2006, the administration would release no less than two dozen documents outlining national strategic goals and objectives. This rich source of information requires interpretation and understanding by all involved in implementing the described policy and strategy outlined in the documents. It is imperative that military professionals understand national strategic goals described in the NSS and other national strategy documents because these goals translate directly into strategic objectives for military strategists and planners.

⁴ Ibid., 18.

These strategic goals are essential to other organizations as well; the military is merely one aspect of national power that can be employed to support attainment of national goals. Other aspects of national power include diplomacy, information, economics, finance, intelligence and law enforcement.⁵ It is through the integrated application of these elements that the United States seeks to achieve its national strategic goals. All of these elements are essential to the successful attainment of national strategic goals. Most of the elements, however, do not have the media appeal and interest that the United States military generates. As such, if the public perceives that the military isn't succeeding, the public becomes concerned that the nation isn't doing well in pursuit of its national goals.

To support the analysis of strategic guidance to the military, this paper will define strategy and identify some of the issues that make the development of strategy difficult. Once baseline definitions and concepts are established, the importance of strategic goals and their significance to military campaign planning will be examined. This analysis will in part be based in historical examples. Critical factors required for the development of strategic goals and the importance of the need for continual assessment and revision of strategic goals over time will also be examined. Proper development and continual assessment of strategic goals and objectives directly impacts the military campaign plan and can ultimately determine the success or failure of the military mission. The success or failure of the military mission can ultimately impact the success or failure of the overarching national strategy. After examining several historical precedents, an analysis of the strategic goals and objectives of OEF and OIF will be undertaken. Finally,

⁵ Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff *Joint Publication 1, Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States* (Revision Final Coordination XX Month 2006) (Washington D.C.: 2006), 1-6. (Hereinafter referred to as JP-1).

conclusions findings and recommendations will be made. Definitions of strategic concepts and terms provide common understanding and are an essential point of departure for the thoughts and analysis espoused in the remainder of this paper.

Background

“We need education in the obvious as much as we need investigation in to the obscure.”⁶

Origins

What is strategy and why is it important? Answering these questions requires an understanding of the word strategy. The word comes from the ancient Greek word *strategia*. For the Greeks *strategia* was associated with generalship, leadership of the people or “leading out the people in arms.”⁷ The Greeks made little distinction between military generals and political leadership, and quite often the general performed many of the diplomatic and political functions we associate with politicians today.⁸ Over time the word strategy has evolved and although it still embraces the leadership aspect of the ancient Greek word, it is commonly associated with political leadership and the strategic direction of the nation.

The concept of strategy has evolved over the years and continues to evolve today. Some have argued that during the War of Independence General Washington and other leaders at the time may not have used the word strategy but understood the concept of leadership behind the word. During those formative years General Washington and the Congress developed strategy. As Commander in Chief of the military (although not President until 1789), General Washington was in large part responsible for the national strategy that would ultimately lead to victory.⁹ Strategy changed over the course of the war. Initially most colonists did not want independence from England. They merely

⁶ Dave Palmer, *The Way of the Fox, American Strategy in the War for America 1775-1783* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1975), xx.

⁷ Carnes Lord, “Leadership and Strategy” *Naval War College Review* (Winter 2001): 141.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 141.

⁹ Palmer, 76.

wanted the same rights and protections that English citizens had. Over time, our founding fathers' strategic goals changed and evolved and became grounded in the desire for independence and the drive for territorial aggrandizement.¹⁰ Just as the Greeks understood the importance of leadership (generalship) during time of war, so too did our founding fathers. "Central to democratic leadership, particularly in time of war, is the task of persuasion, motivation, and inspiration."¹¹ During the birth of our nation President Washington would maintain a critical central role in the development and execution of national strategy.

Critical documents drafted before, during and after the War of Independence provide the foundation for our own policy and strategy today. The Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States define the United States and our principal national goals. Individual leadership undeniably has a central role in the concept of strategy, however, the Congress also participates in strategic development. Over time, policy would increasingly be guided by few and endorsed by the population. This is in large part true today, although our definition of strategy is different than that used by the Greeks. As defined in the Department of Defense Dictionary of Military Terms, strategy is defined as, "The art and science of developing and using political, economic, informational and military forces as necessary during peace and war, to afford the maximum support to policies, in order to increase the probabilities and favorable consequences of victory and to lessen the chances of defeat."¹² This is a far different definition of the word strategy than that used by the Greeks. Even the dictionary

¹⁰ Ibid., 77-78.

¹¹ Lord, 142.

¹² Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Pub 1-02. Department of Defense Dictionary of Military Terms* (Washington D.C.: 2001), 408. (Hereinafter referred to as JP 1-02)

definition is very similar to the Department of Defense definition in that it defines strategy in terms of the employment of the elements of national power to support adopted policies in peace and war.¹³ Perhaps the reason for the expanded definition and the inclusion of the elements of national power is due to our democratic nature as well as an increasingly complex, global, interdependent world environment. Some have argued that strategy currently suffers from an excess of definition. “The very term has expanded so in meaning that it has become impressively imprecise.”¹⁴ Regardless, it is clear that the development of strategy is an effort that requires individual, group and organizational support in development and execution. Some individuals, groups and organizations play a larger role than others in development and execution, however, all have a role in the success or failure of the established strategy.

Levels of Strategy

Harry Yarger outlines fifteen separate premises for strategy. His tenth premise is that strategy is hierarchical in nature. This is based on how government is organized and how leadership maintains power, control and influence over the instruments of national power. As a result of this structure, strategy is generated at the highest levels of leadership and government. “Strategy cascades from the national level down to the lower levels.”¹⁵ The hierarchical nature of strategy today is evident in our current system and is usually discussed with the following terms which will be briefly defined to assure common understanding. These terms are: national interests, grand strategy, national security strategy, national military strategy and theater strategy.

¹³ Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, Eleventh edition, (2003) s.v. “Strategy.”

¹⁴ Palmer, 3.

¹⁵ Yarger, 10.

Our national interests are shaped by our history, the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, present activities and future anticipated events. Interests often represent a nation's wants, needs and concerns.¹⁶ National interests are also shaped by and seek to shape the environment external to our nation. Concepts that are important to our national interests usually fall into one of four main categories: survival and security, political and territorial integrity, economic stability and well-being, and stability.¹⁷

Grand Strategy is often described as that overarching vision for the nation that is achieved by coordinating all the elements of power that a nation can bring to bear. A discussion of the elements of power will be conducted later in this section. Grand Strategy is that higher level vision for national success. Concepts such as the preservation of national security, bolstering national economic prosperity and promoting national values have often been associated with Grand Strategy.¹⁸ It is commonly understood that Grand Strategy is usually not documented or published, and is most often implied. For the United States one can see that our Grand Strategy has deep roots in how we developed and have grown as a nation. Important themes that have developed and have been validated since our inception still provide the basis for our national Grand Strategy. Today when a President and his administration take office, they will usually discuss Grand Strategy which in part will be reflected in their published National Security Strategy.

The National Security Strategy (NSS) is a published document that the President and his administration write to coordinate all of the elements of national power. This is the

¹⁶ United States Marine Corps, *MCDP 1-1, Strategy* (Washington D.C.: 1997), 38. (Hereinafter referred to as MCDP 1-1)

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 38.

¹⁸ Yarger, 11.

first visible document that reflects the strategy and strategic goals of the nation. The NSS is defined as, “The art and science of developing, applying, and coordinating the instruments of national power (diplomatic, economic, military and informational) to achieve objectives that contribute to national security.”¹⁹ Some of the goals are enduring, that is they are passed from administration to administration regardless of political affiliation. Other goals are administration specific and unique to that particular administration and political party. The NSS is an important document that should be published annually. Most administrations do publish a NSS upon entering office, however, they do not always achieve the goal of publishing the NSS yearly.

The NSS serves to establish national priorities founded in our national interests (the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution), and our Grand Strategy. This published version has several target audiences. It serves an international audience as well as a national audience. The NSS provides direction to different organizations in the government, for example the Department of State, the Department of Defense etc., on how differing elements of national power should be utilized to support the achievement of desired national goals. Until recently the elements of national power were divided into four categories; diplomatic, informational, military and economic. Recently three additional elements of national power have been added which are financial, intelligence and law enforcement. All told, the seven elements of national power are most often represented in the acronym DIMEFIL (diplomatic, information, military, economic, financial, intelligence and law enforcement).

The National Military Strategy (NMS) is developed by the senior military representative to the government, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS).

¹⁹ JP 1-02, 287.

Using the NSS as its source of direction, the NMS ensures that the military element of national power is focused to accomplish the military objectives as outlined in the NSS. The NMS is defined as, “The art and science of distributing and applying military power to attain national objectives in peace and war.”²⁰ The NMS seeks to support the attainment of national strategic goals through the accomplishment of military strategic objectives.

Theater Strategy is hierarchically subordinate to the NMS and applies to theaters of operation. The United States assigns military general officers to differing regions in the world and to several important function capabilities required by our nation. The military officers, called Combatant Commanders (CCDRS), are in turn responsible for effecting policy and strategy in their assigned regions. Although the generals are predominately responsible for the military element of national power, they often coordinate other elements of national power in their assigned region. As such, Theater Strategy is defined as, “The art and science of developing integrated strategic concepts and courses of action directed toward securing the objectives of national and alliance or coalition security policy and strategy by the use of force, threatened use of force, or operations not involving the use of force within a theater.”²¹ Under the NMS, CCDRS develop Theater Strategy and subsequent campaign plans.

There are other strategic documents that are developed by the administration and disseminated throughout the government. One that requires mention here is the National Defense Strategy (NDS). The NDS is developed by the Secretary of Defense, and is not a document that is required by law to be developed and published. This document can be

²⁰ Ibid., 286.

²¹ Ibid., 430.

developed based on perceived need by the Secretary of Defense. If the Secretary believes that there is a need, then the Secretary can release additional documents as required. The focus of this paper is on the military element of national power, the NDS and NMS. It is important to keep in mind that there are numerous other documents that support the NSS, and each element of national power may publish documents that support the accomplishment of national strategic goals outlined in the NSS.

Goals and Objectives

With such a wide variety of strategy related documents and guidance, terminology and understanding of strategic goals and objectives can unfortunately become clouded. Military planners are very aware that words are important and that using precise terms precisely can pay big dividends in ensuring common understanding and clarity. It is essential that future strategy documents utilize the same precision so that strategic clarity can be achieved. In the previous definition of strategy, part of the purpose of strategy is, "...to afford the maximum support to policies...." The word "policies" by definition refers to a "definite course or method of action selected from alternatives and in light of given conditions to guide and determine present and future decisions."²² Strategy at the national level establishes national goals and provides guidance and resources whereby the goals or endstates can be achieved. Policy is hierarchically above strategy and provides guidance for strategy.²³ Strategy needs to be communicated to and to be understood by its intended audience. A failure in interpretation of national strategy by allies, friends and adversaries can lead to unintended strategic consequences. Saddam Hussein

²² Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, Eleventh edition, (2003) s.v. "Policies."

²³ Yarger, 50-51.

misinterpreted the United States response to his invasion of Kuwait in 1990 and as a result was militarily removed by U.S. and Coalition forces.

The distinction between goals and objectives is important. Goal is defined as, “the end toward which energy is directed.”²⁴ An objective is defined as, “a strategic position to be attained or a purpose to be achieved by a military operation.”²⁵ Between these two definitions the term goal has better applicability to overarching strategic goals while objective definitively applies to strategic military objectives. The distinction is important although subtle. Achieving an objective is winning a campaign, while achieving a goal is winning the war. A strategic goal is by definition an “end” on which energy (elements of national power and resources) is focused. Strategy documents often use vague terms for goals and objective such as aims or pillars, and this ambiguity causes confusion as to what is meant with these terms. The definitions of goals and objectives should be standardized throughout strategy documents to ensure clarity and common understanding. In this paper, the term goal will refer to strategy outlined in the NSS and higher and the term objective will refer to strategy defined at the NMS level and below (figure 1).

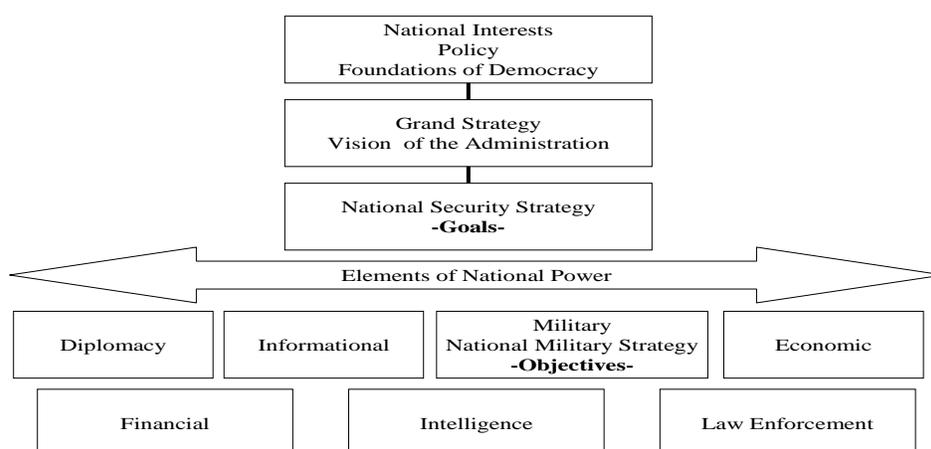


Figure 1

²⁴ Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, Eleventh edition, (2003) s.v. “Goal.”

²⁵ Ibid., s.v. “Objective.”

Ends, Ways, Means

Strategy is often described using the ends, ways and means concept. This concept has value because it assists conceptually in the development and achievement of successful strategy. The ends are essentially the goal or desired endstate that is sought by the given national strategy. The ends reflect what is desired by the nation. Ways describe the methodology that will achieve the ends. Often the ways are referred to as the “how” to accomplish the strategic ends. In national strategy, the ways will incorporate all elements of national power. Each element of national power will have a different “way” to seek achievement of the desired end or endstate. The means are the resources that are allocated to the ways in support of achieving strategic goals. For the military, the means would include the size of the armed forces and the equipment that is procured or allowed to be utilized to support the achievement of a strategic goal. A military example of resources could be significant such as those national resources utilized to support the war effort during World War II, or limited such as those resources utilized to support our initial operations in Afghanistan during OEF in 2001. Means can also incorporate intangible aspects such as will, courage, spirit and intellect.²⁶

A clear understanding of desired goals and endstate is imperative at the strategic level. Strategic goals are developed and approved by the President of the United States with input from his staff and close council. These strategic goals form the foundation that military planners use to develop military campaign plans. Strategic goals are essential to ensure that military force can be effectively and efficiently applied for strategic success. How the goal (end) is to be accomplished will involve all the aspects of national power. Some aspects of national power may be more important than the others depending on the

²⁶ Yarger, 70.

circumstances. This is normal and should be expected. It is imperative, however, that all elements are applied to achieve the desired strategic goal. Failure to leverage all elements may delay, prevent or prohibit the attainment of the strategic goal. Resources (means) are not unlimited in nature. They are limited and must be applied with foresight and forethought. An analysis of ends, ways and means requires analysis of the impact of politics, resources and technology and their role of the development and execution of strategy.

Resources, Technology and Political Will

Strategy and strategic goals are influenced by the resources, available technology and political will of a nation. Over time, all of these variables will change, impacting the development and execution of strategy. It is important to understand these factors and the role that they may play in the pursuit of strategic goals and strategic objectives. These three factors play a large role in how the military develops its strategy to support the NMS and Theater Strategy. A brief discussion of each is relevant as background and provides greater depth of understanding about the complex nature of strategic development.

Resources can be either tangible or intangible.²⁷ Tangible resources include all of the items that have some form of physical dimension. For the military they include the most obvious: combat equipment, ammunition, fuel, food, personnel and countless other supplies. It is overwhelming to think about all of the physical items and support systems that are required to recruit, train, educate, equip, house, deploy, sustain and retain (to mention only a few) members of the armed forces today. The United States has a complex system that includes those service members serving in the Pentagon and other

²⁷ Yarger, 69.

support agencies overseeing the allocation of resources to the Armed Services. Ultimately this support is tied to money, and although the armed forces receive budgets they do not control the amount of money they receive on an annual basis. This budget is controlled by the Congress of the United States. If the Congress chooses not to fund the armed services, then the amount of services that the military can provide will decrease or diminish. On a global level it is clear that military service capabilities are directly related to the amount of funding they receive from their respective governments.

Intangible resources are just as important as tangible resources. These resources include will, courage, spirit and intellect.²⁸ By their very definition, these items are difficult to measure and assess. This can cause developers of strategy difficulty when developing strategy. An army equipped with the finest equipment cannot perform to expectations if it doesn't have the spirit, courage and will to support the force. Resources are generally limited and consideration must be given to intangibles when establishing strategic goals and objectives.

Technology is another important factor that is associated with strategy. Throughout history military forces have sought to leverage an advantage over their opponents and adversaries through the use and development of new technologies. Humans are eager to believe that a new technology can reduce or eliminate the brutality and horror of warfare. Technology or the belief that technology provides a panacea for future warfare feeds a defense industry that is continually pursuing and shaping the next generation of warfare. Where warriors used to clash within arms length with edged weapons and blunt instruments, today we have the ability to deal weapons from a greater standoff and often from a great distance. This does not mean the results on the target or on the individual are

²⁸ Ibid., 70.

any less destructive and devastating than they used to be in ancient times, it just means that we have the ability to employ modern weapons from a “sterile” non-threatened environment, such as the cockpit of an airplane or a Combat Operations Center (COC). One example of technology influencing strategy can be found in the development and use or potential use of nuclear devices. These weapons undoubtedly contributed to the defeat of the Japanese during World War II and fostered a strategy after the war that sought to limit the need for conventional ground forces. Once the Soviet Union and the Chinese developed their own nuclear weapons this myth was shattered. With devastating consequences resulting from the employment of nuclear weapons, nations were forced to realize that some form of conventional military would also be required for years to come. Technology is an important factor and consideration in the development and implementation of strategy, however it must be understood that strategic fog and friction may not be reduced by technology.²⁹

Political will is an important consideration in the discussion of strategy. Some have argued that because our government is democratic, strategy will always be difficult for the United States to define and establish. This is based in part due to the fact that we have separate levels of government that provide oversight to the other branches of government. For example, if the President of the United States and his advisors determine that a certain strategy is in the best interest of the nation, he must garner support from all branches of the government and all political parties and ultimately the American public if the strategy is to be effectively pursued and achieved. Political will can have a dramatic effect on the employment of the armed forces of the United States in the pursuit of national strategic goals. Numerous historical examples can be found where a very

²⁹ Colin S. Gray “Why Strategy is Difficult” *Joint Forces Quarterly* (Summer 1999), 83.

capable United States military pursuing a national strategic goal is redeployed to the United States when the military effort is terminated by a change of or lack of political will to continue the effort. Vietnam, Beirut and Somalia all provide examples of loss of political will. Resources, technology and political will are key elements to be considered in the development and pursuit of strategic goals and objectives. Having established this background on strategy, it is essential to examine the reasons why strategy is difficult to create and sustain.

Difficulties in Creation

The great military theorist Carl von Clausewitz understood the importance of strategy and the complexity and difficulty in developing strategy. In his time strategy was defined and developed differently, however the conceptual factors making strategy complex render his work relevant and pertinent to discussions today. Clausewitz understood that prior to declaring war, statesmen and military commanders must articulate and understand the reasons for undertaking the war, as a first priority in formulating the most comprehensive strategic goals and objectives.³⁰ He also highlighted that leadership, judgment and experience are critical to the development of strategic goals and objectives.³¹

Another one of Yarger's 15 strategic premises' is that "efficiency is subordinate to effectiveness in strategy."³² This is an interesting comment. Normally our society expects a balance of efficiency and effectiveness in our attempts to find solutions to various perceived threats or problems. In business, the greater the efficiency of the organization

³⁰ Carl von Clausewitz *On War* Edited and translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 88-89.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 177.

³² Yarger, 14.

usually equates to an increase in the potential for profits and profitability. Business profitability, however, is not the best allegory for national strategy. Clausewitz notes that a business cannot focus on one transaction but must instead “work on the basis of [its] total assets, and in war advantages and disadvantages of a single action could only be determined by the final balance.”³³ A business that subordinates its strategic goals to cost control can find itself bankrupt. Like business strategy, national strategic goals cannot be myopic; the stakes are too high. This is not to say that efficiency is not desired, it is. Ultimately efficiency must always be subordinate to effectiveness or the strategic goal or objective may be lost.

The modern strategic environment makes the formulation as well as the pursuit of strategic goals and objectives more difficult. This complexity is not a new phenomenon, but there are aspects of modern society today that were not present in previous eras and have made the world a more complex operating environment. Key among these drivers is our ability to communicate and disseminate information. Often termed the information age, the modern world is like no other in history. The ability to send and receive information anytime and literally anywhere in the world has tremendous impact and effect on the environment that we live and operate in. Additional factors include; globalization, porous borders, changing identities, mass migrations, failed states, and non-state actors all of which serve to cloud the strategic landscape.³⁴ Yarger identifies the VUCA principle as a descriptor for the strategic environment.³⁵ VUCA, developed by the U.S. Army War College, stands for volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity.

³³ Clausewitz, 182.

³⁴ Zinni, Koltz, 52-66.

³⁵ Yarger, 17.

Strategic goals are routinely pursued in an environment that is complex, chaotic, ambiguous and uncertain.

A similar model to explain why strategy is difficult to develop recognizes the themes outlined in the VUCA model, but describes them slightly differently. Three factors are identified in this approach. These are that 1) by its very nature strategy is difficult as it endures through time and different contexts, that 2) the multiplicity and sheer variety of sources of friction make strategy difficult to develop, and finally 3) the contexts that are planned for have literally not occurred and might not occur: the future has not happened.³⁶ This leads to the issue of whether strategy is predictive in nature; the development of strategy, are we trying to predict an expected behavior or outcome? Yarger discounts the predictable nature of strategy and argues that strategy is not predictive.³⁷ National strategy does try to influence and must predict the outcome or accomplishment of a strategic goal or objective. This is evident in the ends, ways, means model which does try to predict a strategic outcome which serves to provide the ways and means with which the anticipated goal is to be accomplished. The word predict is defined as, “to declare or indicate in advance: foretell on the basis of observation, experience or scientific reason.”³⁸ The predictive nature of strategy does not imply that assessment will be always and completely accurate. Strategy must be continually defined and refined over time to ensure predictive results can be achieved because of the changing nature of the global environment. If strategy is static instead of recursive it can become obsolete or irrelevant in our dynamic modern environment. “Strategy can fail because it may apply the wrong solutions to incorrectly framed questions because guesses about the future

³⁶ Gray, 82.

³⁷ Yarger, 6.

³⁸ Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, Eleventh edition, (2003) s.v. “Predict.”

were not correct.”³⁹ Clausewitz also acknowledges the recursive (a procedure that can repeat itself indefinitely)⁴⁰ nature of planning noting, “...the strategist must go on campaign himself...allowing the general plan to be adjusted to the modifications that are continuously required.”⁴¹ This reinforces the difficulty, and complexity inherent in drafting and publishing the United States’ strategy documents. This is the environment that the United States operates in when developing national strategy to influence and effect the desired national strategic outcome. Disseminating national strategy is formally done with the documents described previously. A brief examination of challenges in developing this documentation requires some attention.

Documentation, or Not...

It is important to recognize that although clear documentation of strategy is desired, the goal is often elusive. There are numerous examples that support and substantiate this statement. The nature of our democratic government and the sheer size of the institutions required to support the three branches are enormous. Across all of the different organizations, agencies, departments, and military services, (to name a few), the strategic themes, goals and objectives must be articulated. This begins with the various strategy related documents, the NSS, NDS, NMS and many others.

These documents are not the only source of policy and strategy. For example, every time the President of the United States makes a speech, the speech may convey new elements of national strategy. These elements may not be found in current documents, but must be included and understood by those responsible for implementing policy. The President is not the only source of strategic direction. National strategy is also conveyed

³⁹ Gray, 82.

⁴⁰ Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, Eleventh edition, (2003) s.v. “Recursive.”

⁴¹ Clausewitz, 177.

to various audiences domestically and internationally through his advisors, department heads and senior civilian and military leaders. The means of conveyance can take many forms. With all of these sources disseminating information, friction and contradiction is bound to happen. This friction impacts how strategy is to be accomplished as well as the expected result.

Staying “on theme” across the vast bureaucracy of government is difficult. Too little strategic vision can be just as problematic as an overabundance of strategic vision. What is the right amount and how should it be conveyed to the intended audiences? There certainly is no right answer, however, military planners must be aware of the various sources of national strategy and must be aware of the subtleties and nuances of its conveyance. Without this knowledge, military strategists may not provide the right direction and strategic endstate required by the military aspect of national power.

Between 2001 and 2006 no less than two dozen formal unclassified documents described and interpreted national strategy for the United States. As previously noted, Yarger stressed the importance of the hierarchical nature of strategy. With this in mind, how does the administration release and keep the various strategy related documents current, hierarchically correct and on track with desired goals and objectives? It is clearly in everyone’s best interest to stay current and abreast of strategic goals and objectives, however, it is very challenging to do so.

For the Bush administration the NSS was developed early in 2001 and was revised and released after 9/11 in 2002. The most recent version of the NSS was released in 2006. The NSS is arguably the “hub of all power” on which hierarchically all other strategy documents follow. This initially was the case with various strategies covering topics (post

9/11) from National Strategy for Homeland Security (2002), National Strategy to Combat Weapons of Mass Destruction (2002), National Strategy for Combating Terrorism (2003), and the NMS (2004). During 2004 the timing of the release of Strategy documents seems to come off cycle. The NDS was released in 2005, a year after the NMS. The NDS should be the hierarchical superior to the NMS. As of January 2007, the NMS has not been updated since 2004. After the NDS was released specific National Strategy for Victory in Iraq (2005) was released as well as Presidential directives addressing the reconstruction and stabilization efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq (2005). Apparently the release of all of these strategy documents regarding specific military operations eliminated the need for an NMS. In 2006, a National Military Strategic Plan for the War on Terrorism was released, one month prior to the release of the 2006 NSS.

These are merely the high visibility national strategy documents. Speeches by key leaders (the President, Department of State, Department of Defense etc) have been made publicly which can redirect or modify national strategy. More importantly than the date of release of the documents is the content and nesting of the strategic vision within the documents. Although not in the scope of this paper, it would be a significant undertaking to organize and assess the prescribed strategy by document to analyze whether the documents share common vision hierarchically and how change occurs and is disseminated over time. Some of the strategic goals and objectives identified are enduring and general enough to be maintained over time. Understanding which documents apply to which element of national power and then tracking not only the source document but other written or verbal expressions of strategy are of the highest importance for both civilian and military leaders but could be an arduous and time

consuming goal. A failure to do so can have negative effects in the pursuit of national strategic goals and objectives.

This brief description of the origins of strategy, goals and objectives of strategy, ends way and means, resources, technology and political will, difficulties in the creation of strategy and strategic documentation has established a framework for this analysis. This background has been provided to demonstrate the difficulty in developing, disseminating and understanding national strategy and strategic goals and objectives. With this in mind, this analysis will now turn to an examination of how the military element of power has historically been used in the pursuit of national strategic goals.

Historical Perspective

“Our strategic goals are complex and sometimes contradictory and may change in the middle of a military endeavor. The resources at our disposal are not always obvious, can change during the course of the struggle, and usually need to be adapted to suit our needs. Our adversary often refuses to fit our preconceptions of him or to stand still while we erect the apparatus for his destruction.”⁴²

Assessment of strategic goals and objectives and the success of the United States in achieving those goals and objectives provides a back drop for current events. We can mitigate the strategic complexity of the future by studying historical successes and failures. Although history does not repeat itself precisely, themes of history do tend to reappear in general terms.⁴³ The American public is generally supportive of military operations with clearly defined objectives and with clearly defined conclusions. The American public generally does not support military operations without clearly defined objectives and indefinite time to conclusion. This is evident in military operations that have occurred after World War II that were indecisive, inconclusive and sapped the material and personal resources of the nation.⁴⁴

Prior to the World War II, the United States did not maintain a large standing army. When the nation required military force during the Civil War, the Spanish American War, World War I and World War II, the United States mobilized the force necessary to accomplish the assigned mission. After mission accomplishment (strategic goal or objective attainment) the nation would demobilize the army while maintaining a cadre to support future potential conflict. Reasons for not maintaining a large standing army can

⁴² MCDP 1-1, 9.

⁴³ Major General Robert H. Scales Jr., *Yellow Smoke, The Future of Land Warfare for America's Military* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2003), 121. This is a concise thought provoking book about the future of warfare.

⁴⁴ Zinni, 89.

be found in the ideology and documents that initially formed our nation. The Constitution makes clear that maintaining a standing army is not the norm and is an exception that should only be reconstituted with legislative oversight.⁴⁵

This tradition changed in the years following World War II. Because of nuclear proliferation and a perceived threat from the Soviet Union, the United States as the global power required the maintenance of a standing army of significant size. Beginning with President Truman and the Korean Police action, the United States has continually recognized a need to maintain and use the military to assist in the attainment of strategic goals and objectives. Use of the military to support national strategy for missions other than national survival requires clear national strategic goals and national strategic military objectives. World War II, Vietnam and the Persian Gulf War provide useful historical examples that will now be considered.

War Plan Orange

War Plan Orange provides a good example of national and military strategic planning in the years leading up to World War II. War Plan Orange was one of the Rainbow Plans developed in the years prior to World War II. To avoid references to specific countries directly, the War Department instead labeled countries throughout the world by color, vice correct name. “Blue” referred to the United States, and “Orange” referred to Japan. The United States Navy would be the driving force behind the development and refinement of War Plan Orange. Beginning at the turn of the century, naval forces would be involved in the pursuit of U.S. national policies throughout the world. This projection of power required the establishment of fueling stations throughout the globe that could be used to provide the critical fuel to ships. Initially these sources of fuel were called coaling

⁴⁵ U.S. Constitution, Article 1, Section 8, Clause 12.

stations, locations where coal could be positioned or obtained to support the fleet. As technology changed, the fuel source became oil, however, the requirements remained the same.

Regardless of the type of fuel required, naval planners recognized and understood the logistic requirements that would be needed to support fleet operations around the world. These logistic requirements would play a significant role in the development war plans in over the next several decades. Japan was increasingly recognized as a potential threat to the United States interests in the Pacific region. Planners worked for decades to define, create, revise, and redefine the threat and potential courses of action that could be used to defeat the enemy. With the outbreak of World War II, War Plan Orange was executed as designed, and proved to be a valid, valuable interpretation of events that were to unfold in the Pacific Theater.

In the years prior to the outbreak of World War II, the United States did not maintain a large standing Army. Instead we relied upon our isolation and naval forces to influence and obtain our strategic desires. As a nation we recognized the importance of maintaining sea lines of communication through which we could conduct commerce throughout the world. At that time, involvement in a European conflict was neither desired nor planned for. The Department of State was not interested in the idea of war planning.⁴⁶ Congress influenced strategy through the allocation of resources to the military, and focusing on trade, arms treaties, international organizations, colonies and overseas bases.⁴⁷ The development of strategy was left to the military planners. These planners received little if

⁴⁶ Edward S. Miller, *War Plan Orange, The U.S. Strategy to Defeat Japan 1897-1945* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1991), 11.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

any strategic guidance or direction from their civilian leaders.⁴⁸ These naval officers were not only military professionals, but they also understood world affairs and the importance of national strategy. This was in part due to their education, but also can be attributed to their extensive experience at sea, pursuing and achieving national policy with minimal guidance and direction. At one point, Commander Schofield, later the navy's chief strategist, proposed elaborate flows of information between government agencies and the military. Senior admirals spurned these ideas as too complex and academic.⁴⁹

With little tangible verbal or written guidance the naval planners responsible for War Plan Orange realized the importance of their efforts and worked diligently to create a realistic plan. Absent political direction, the planners assessed the geopolitical characteristics of the region (over time), the perceived nature of the struggle, the potential goals of the belligerents and the time and costs (resources) in achieving them.⁵⁰ Working with the assets at hand, the planners developed approaches that would require assessment over time. Logistics involved were recognized to be critical to the plan and to the success of the overall operation.⁵¹

As the planning continued technology changed as well. Initially the planners had the difficult challenge of dealing with the logistics of coal and availability of coaling stations. This concern would be mitigated by the efficiencies gained by the technology of oil fuel that would power ships. Although initially not a factor, the use of airplanes would eventually play a key role in the war in the Pacific. Terrain that was previously not considered useful acquired potential value for forward basing airplanes. Insignificant

⁴⁸ Ibid., 11.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 11.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 19.

⁵¹ Ibid., 90.

islands became significant.⁵² In addition to technology, the political will of the nation impacted planning. The treaties of Versailles and the treaty of Washington undid 15 years of war planning.⁵³ Service politics also influenced the plan. Senior Army leaders would argue that the Marine Corps had no business or experience conducting operations over the beach. In 1928 they would argue that the job was better suited for the Army and would push for and receive a cap on Marine forces of 40, 000.⁵⁴ With tensions in the world increasing as global war approached the focus on planning shifted to providing security at home in the United States.⁵⁵

Education, experience and sound judgment mattered and the Navy recognized these qualities. When the Navy selected planners with high class standings, the quality of output and planning effort was also high. When planners of lower class standing were involved in the planning effort, "...the less work and more lackadaisical approach to planning occurred."⁵⁶ Thus the quality of officers assigned to the planning effort directly impacted the quality of the plan. Experience, intelligence, good judgment, aptitude for work and a sense of imagination were qualities inherent in many of the lead naval strategists of the time.⁵⁷ In his article on leadership and strategy Carnes Lord also acknowledges the importance of leadership (both civilian and military). Leaders need "...four qualities: an understanding of their country and its history; an understanding of the strategic environment they face, and of their actual and potential adversaries; a vision of the future; and an ability to communicate."⁵⁸

⁵² Ibid., 102.

⁵³ Ibid., 104.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 147.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 214.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 216-218.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 329.

⁵⁸ Lord, 142.

From 1897 to 1945, with little national strategic guidance, the Navy continued to develop a plan for the defeat of Japan that would ultimately prove to be highly effective and valid. A key element in the success of the Orange Plan was a fundamental understanding of the recursive nature of the planning process and the plan itself. This understanding and the fact that quality leaders and innovators were selected to continue the effort no doubt contributed to the success of the planning effort, the plan itself and the execution of the plan. Planners had the foresight to think through all aspects of the plan, and although not anticipated or desired, they even considered an invasion of the Japanese mainland as early as 1920.⁵⁹ This military objective would drive many aspect of the plan, including the “how” to get to the desired conditions for a successful invasion of the mainland. As late as the summer of 1945, planners were still considering and planning for an amphibious assault on the Japanese homeland. The adaptability of the planning effort and the plan (despite lack of official guidance) provides positive lessons that can be applied today. “The American way of planning on the eve of war embodied many long-term continuities. Strategy, as always, was the province of uniformed officers who received virtually no guidance from Congress, the State Department, civil agencies, or even the service secretaries.”⁶⁰

Vietnam

The conflict in Vietnam involved not only the strategy of the United States but other countries’ national strategies as well. Soviet, Chinese, and French national strategies involved operations in Vietnam. After World War II, the United States and Truman administration acknowledged the fact that Indochina possessed strategic significance for

⁵⁹ Miller, 165.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 275.

the United States. Two National Security Council (NSC) papers, NSC 48/1 and NSC 48/2 were drawn up after concerns about the course of events in China. Both of these documents were drawn up before the Korean War. The papers recognized that China was the chief exporter of communism in the region, and that over time China might become a significant regional threat.⁶¹ These documents provided the foundation for the now famous “Domino principal,” (countries would fall like dominos under the pressure of communist expansion, either Soviet, or Chinese) which delineated the strategic objectives in Vietnam.⁶² President Truman conceptualized this and his strategy became an enduring national strategy that all Presidents adopted until the fall of Saigon in 1975. It is interesting to note that although NSC 48/1 and 48/2 outlined our national interests in the region, these interests were subservient to the interests of the French who had traditional colonial interests in Indochina and Vietnam. Our initial national strategy was to leverage the French national strategy so that we might accomplish our strategic goals through their actions. “Action should be taken to bring home to the French the urgency of removing the barriers to obtaining by Bao Dai or other non-communist nationalist leaders of the support of a substantial proportion of the Vietnamese.”⁶³

NSC 64 was adopted as policy on February 27, 1950 and is considered the source of the Domino Principal. If Indochina fell to communist domination, Thailand and Burma would be expected to fall under communist domination as well. “Accordingly, the Department of State and Defense should prepare as a matter of priority a program of all

⁶¹ U.S. Department of Defense. *The Pentagon Papers*. Gravel Edition, Volumes I (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971),81-82. (Hereinafter Pentagon Papers Vol 1)

⁶² *Ibid.*, 82.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 82.

practicable measures designed to protect United States security interests in Indochina.”⁶⁴

This policy directive would provide the foundation for strategy in Indochina and Vietnam for the next twenty-five years.

Arguably the strategy of containment with regard to the perceived communist threat was not a strategy at all, it was a tactic.⁶⁵ “Our failure as military professionals to judge the true nature of the Vietnam War had a profound effect. It resulted in confusion throughout the national security establishment over tactics, grand tactics and strategy, a confusion that continues to this day.”⁶⁶ Containing the communist threat would require that the national strategy leverage the different elements of national power to support the government of South Vietnam. Initially the U.S. commitment to Vietnam was through the French. The French had colonial interests in the region that dated back decades, prior to the turn of the century. Support for combat operations in Vietnam and other French colonies post World War II required prioritization and were increasingly unpopular given the scope of reconstruction required on the continent of Europe.

The U.S. primarily supported the French in Indochina with financial resources. The defeat of the French garrison at Dien Bien Phu in 1954 marked a turning point in French commitment to Vietnam. As French forces departed the area, the United States continued financial support to the government, eventually committing military advisors to the country early in 1960. U.S. commitment to South Vietnam should be considered from 1955 to 1975, a twenty year involvement. This time period can be broken into three

⁶⁴ Ibid., 362.

⁶⁵ Harry G. Summers “On Strategy: The Vietnam War in Context” (Carlisle Barracks, Strategic Studies Institute, 1981), 56.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 57.

phases corresponding to overlapping, evolving operational conditions that should have precipitated U.S. national strategy review.

These three time frames can be delineated as the period 1955-1965, when communist insurgents sought to continue to establish and increase an insurgent base of support, 1965-1968 a period of insurgent and conventional attacks by the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese regular forces, and a final period 1968-1975 during which the conflict transitioned to a predominately conventional conflict between South Vietnam and North Vietnam.⁶⁷ These general time frames can be estimated with the benefit of hindsight, however, clear indicators of change were evident at the time as well.

Our initial emphases on security concerns in the region were motivated first by the perceived Soviet threat and then subsequently the Chinese threat with regard to the proliferation of communism. Our faith in the government of South Vietnam and their capabilities to determine their destiny provided another opportunity for reassessment of national strategy. Throughout this time frame and in the years leading up to 1975, the democracy that the United States was supporting in Vietnam was less than perfect. Many of the South Vietnamese did not realize the benefits of a democratic system over a communist system. With the continued corrupt leadership in the South Vietnamese government, and without support for a democracy, U.S. national goals would be difficult to achieve.⁶⁸

Employment of military force allowed us to refocus efforts to something seemingly more tangible. Democracy was being threatened in South Vietnam by military force. We

⁶⁷ David W. Gardner "Vietnam and the Importance of End State Development" *Campaigning* (Winter 2007), 37.

⁶⁸ Zinni, Koltz, 21.

could either confront the challenge militarily or surrender our national ideals.⁶⁹ We chose to fight. Regardless of the reason, the military was constrained in many ways in the pursuit of military policy and objectives. Both politicians and military leadership share the burden of responsibility of those failures. General Westmorland had a difficult time identifying military objectives that would match up with the (less than clear) political objectives.⁷⁰ General Westmoreland did have a three phase strategy that was pursued. The strategy sought to, “protect logistic bases, gain the initiative by penetrating and whenever possible eliminating enemy base camps and sanctuaries, and finally to conduct sustained ground combat to mop up remaining NVA and guerilla forces or to push them ‘across frontiers where we could contain them.’” Two concurrent goals throughout the phasing were to pacification and the strengthening the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN).⁷¹ In 1965, with an increasing North Vietnamese Army presence in and around the country of Vietnam, the military needed more direction than to “...find and kill the enemy.”⁷² Although this methodology provided an assessable goal, it was not a military strategy that resulted in the successful attainment of national military objectives.

It is clear that General Westmoreland was attempting to conduct and fight a war within the constraints of the national strategic guidance and national strategic goals. It is also clear that the military strategy was largely based on a strategy of attrition of enemy forces.⁷³ After all, the United States had great depth of resources in material and personnel from which to draw. A small country like North Vietnam could not match or

⁶⁹ General Fred Weyand and Lieutenant Colonel Harry Summers Jr. “Vietnam, Myths and Realities” *Armor* (September-October 1976), 32.

⁷⁰ Gray, 82.

⁷¹ William C. Westmorland *A Soldier Reports* (Garden City, Doubleday, 1976), 145.

⁷² LtGen Harold G. Moore and Joe Galloway *We Were Soldiers Once and Young* (New York: Random House, 1992), 30.

⁷³ Westmorland, 153.

sustain the resources required for such a war. Assessing the military strategy outlined by Westmorland in his three phases, it is clear that operations were focused internally to the country of South Vietnam. This internal focus failed to take into account the threat coming directly from North Vietnam. Military strategy should arguably have shifted to direct operations against targets in North Vietnam and possible ground military operations against NVA forces in their own country and countries adjacent to Vietnam. “A ground invasion of North Vietnam was out, for the U.S. national policy was not to conquer North Vietnam but to eliminate the insurgency inside south Vietnam...”⁷⁴ Failure to recognize and effect change to national and military strategy led to effective military operations against the NVA forces, however it would never yield the desired national strategic goal.

In 1968 the enemy signaled another opportunity for modification to national strategic goals and national military objectives. Revised military objectives included, deterring the Chinese from direct intervention in South East Asia, defeating the Viet Cong and NVA forces in South Vietnam, forcing the withdrawal of NVA forces and finally extending the Saigon government’s control over all of South Vietnam.⁷⁵ Interestingly a survey of Army General officers conducted after the war found that only one third of the Generals found the objectives clear while two thirds found them unclear and in need of clarification.⁷⁶ The Tet offensive led to a military disaster for Viet Cong forces operating in South Vietnam. Virtually wiped out during the offensive, they no longer were

⁷⁴ Westmorland, 153.

⁷⁵ Douglas Kinnard *The War Managers* (Wayne: Avery Publishing Group Inc., 1985), 24. I recommend this book for its inclusion of a survey of 173 Army General Officers who had served in Vietnam from 1965-1972. The author obtained a 67% response rate to his questions. The answers provide an interesting perspective regarding goals and objectives during the war. The author does not explore why with such acknowledged “confusion” wasn’t clarification sought?

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 24.

considered a viable threat. This defeat forced the government of North Vietnam to commit more conventional North Vietnamese Army (NVA) forces to support the spread of communism in South Vietnam. Although some in the military realized the military successes of Tet, the offensive was a strategic defeat for U.S. national strategy. In fact, it would be a defeat from which the United States would never recover.

Military leaders realized the strength of the NVA, however, at this point were not allowed to take the fight to the enemy countries providing and supporting the NVA activity. Without an ability to set national military objectives that might support the prevention of the spread of communism, the U.S. military would continue fighting a guerilla campaign internally in South Vietnam when the adversary and the war had developed into a much more conventional operation. The military was hamstrung by numerous politically emplaced restrictions preventing the military from prosecuting the war effectively. With these restrictions in place, however, many still tried to lay blame for failure to aggressively pursue changes to policy squarely on the shoulders of military leaders. In an article in the magazine *Foreign Affairs* Clark Clifford, the Secretary of Defense after Robert McNamara, blamed the military for “failing to provide strategic plans aimed at winning the war.”⁷⁷

This blame game was challenged by those that felt the “civilians” had convinced the President that he could carry out and win a limited war.⁷⁸ Although the deployment of over 500,000 U.S. military personnel to South Vietnam is debatably characterized as limited war, it is clear that even with a sizeable effective force on the ground, unless clearly defined national military strategic objectives are provided, success will not be

⁷⁷ Philip B. Davidson *Vietnam at War: The History 1946-1975* (Navato: the Presidio Press, 1988), 462

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*,462.

realized. Newt Gingrich has asserted that the military leaders should have stated opposition to the conduct of the war and resigned. “We designed a war we were going to lose, and we managed to lose it the way we designed it, and nothing unusual happened.”⁷⁹ General Westmorland responded with the comment, “Over-all control of the military is one thing; shackling professional military men with restrictions in professional matters imposed by civilians who lack military understanding is another.”⁸⁰ These comments reinforce the argument that both national strategic goals and national military objectives must be continually defined and refined over the course of time. Failure to do so will most likely lead to failure.

In addition to the civilian and military leadership, the people of the United States must also be considered. Democracy incorporates the views and opinions of the population in the development of policy and pursuit of strategic goals and objectives. Without support for policy, strategic goals and objectives can be modified and changed. Leaders must maintain the support of the population to successfully pursue the attainment of national goals through military means. “The American Army is really the people’s Army in the sense that it belongs to the American people who take jealous and proprietary interest in its involvement. When the Army is committed the American people are committed, when the American people lose their commitment it is futile to try to keep the Army committed.”⁸¹ In Vietnam, the support of the people was not maintained and eventually was lost which lead directly to the curtailment of military operations. “In the final

⁷⁹ Ibid., 463.

⁸⁰ Westmorland, 121.

⁸¹ Summers, Jr., 7.

analysis, the American Army is not so much an arm of the Executive Branch as it is an arm of the American people. The Army therefore, cannot be committed lightly.”⁸²

Following the Tet offensive the United States’ strategy did change. Vietnamization and withdrawal with honor increasingly became the guiding objectives of the time. Vietnamization allowed the military to change their mission from something they couldn’t accomplish (the defeat of the enemy) to something they could accomplish, preparing the South Vietnamese forces to fight.⁸³ The United States did not recognize the North Vietnamese strategy, and did not realize U.S. national strategy was being successfully attacked until it was too late. A strategic vulnerability for the United States resided in the United States’ population. The population was unwilling to support a long protracted indecisive war far from our home shores with ill defined national strategic objectives.⁸⁴ The enemy had detected the weakness of our strategy and exploited our vulnerability. Several thousand years ago the great military theorist Sun Tzu noted, “What is of supreme importance in war is to attack the enemy’s strategy.”⁸⁵ The government in North Vietnam recognized this vulnerability and succeeded in exploiting it to their advantage. If the United States was ever able to be successful in winning the war, a new superior strategy had to be developed to support the defeat of the communist ideology and the pervasive nature of the NVA. Balancing our national strengths in resources, technology and political will with a coherent responsive national strategy over time may have yielded better results against North Vietnamese vulnerabilities.⁸⁶

⁸² Ibid., 7

⁸³ Ibid., 66.

⁸⁴ Davidson, 717.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 718.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 717.

In the same survey of military General officers mentioned previously, the author found that when responding to the question “If we had to do it over—in what areas would you recommend the greatest change? 91 % responded that they would define better the objective better.”⁸⁷ The military respondents understood their responsibilities in determining clear military objectives, but also noted that policy makers had responsibility for framing clear tangible obtainable goals.⁸⁸ Understanding our own national strategic goals and national strategic military objectives is very important. Understanding the enemy’s national strategy and national military objectives is equally important. With these two sources of information refining and defining military strategy can occur continually and will ultimately support the success of national strategy. In conclusion, an old North Vietnamese axiom is provided:

1. *When the tactics are wrong, and the strategy is wrong, the war will be quickly lost.*
2. *When the tactics are right, but the strategy is wrong, battles may be won, but the war will be lost.*
3. *When the tactics are wrong, but the strategy is right, battles may be lost, but the war will be won.*
4. *When the tactics are right, and the strategy is right, the war will be won quickly.*⁸⁹

Persian Gulf War

The balance of power had changed in the world during the decade leading up to the Persian Gulf War. The wall separating east and west Berlin had fallen and the Soviet Union was no longer the direct military threat that it had once been. The United States and its leaders took the opportunity to assess whether or not the nation could realize the benefits of a “peace dividend.” Perhaps with the fall of the Soviet Union, the United States would no longer need the size and force structure associated with a military

⁸⁷ Kinnard, 176.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 25

⁸⁹ Davidson, 716.

designed to conduct major combat operations in Europe. The Weinberger-Powell doctrine had evolved in the years preceding the Gulf War. The doctrine essentially required clear national interest, overwhelming force and firm congressional support when utilizing the military force.⁹⁰ It is with this backdrop that the administration confronted the problem of the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq.

Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm provide another interesting opportunity to assess national strategy and the national military strategy nested within the overarching strategy. It is often relatively easy to assess when and where conflict will occur. Examples include the first and second World Wars. Although the majority of the world population wanted to avoid conflict, conflict was inevitable. Often conflict cannot always be anticipated, and events and circumstances develop rapidly in areas that conflict was not anticipated or foreseen. This was the case in 1990 with events leading up to the Persian Gulf War.

Saddam Hussein arguably did send signals that an invasion of Kuwait might occur. That the actual invasion in August of 1990 did surprise most of the world and reinforces the point that not all conflict can be anticipated. Reacting quickly and initially unilaterally, President Bush took the position that the invasion was wrong and that Iraq must remove its forces from the country of Kuwait. Over the ensuing months his requests were largely ignored and dismissed by an increasingly stubborn Saddam Hussein. President Bush and his administration sought to rapidly devise a national and (subsequently) international strategy to deal with the Iraqi presence in Kuwait. To his credit, the President did continually refine and define what he thought the national

⁹⁰ James W. Vizzard, "Defining Victory: Three case studies of Strategic Guidance and Decision Making" ((Master of Military Arts and Science Thesis, United States Army Command and General Staff College, 2004), 15. This monograph is an excellent document on strategy and guidance.

strategy should be with regard to Iraq and then sought to support it through the United Nations. He was successful in his endeavors, creating and molding a common, straightforward strategy for operation in Iraq.

What is interesting and important to understand in this example is that even with relatively simple, straight forward national strategic guidance and vision, individuals can misinterpret or weigh in with their own personal desires on what and how the strategy should be developed and executed. President Bush and his administration consisted of a very strong experienced base of civilian and military leadership. The President had participated in combat operations during World War II and understood how the military operated. He also had two very intelligent and experienced combat leaders in key positions at the outset of the operation. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff at the time was General Colin Powell, and the General in charge of CENTCOM was General Norman Schwarzkopf. Both men had served combat tours in Vietnam and both were personally committed to not make the mistakes that were made in Vietnam. Everyone involved understood that clearly defined ends with properly resourced ways would lead to victory in the Gulf. The nation and the military specifically did not want another “Vietnam,” but instead wanted to prove that the military power of the United States could be employed effectively and efficiently to accomplish desired objectives.

It is interesting how each individual interpreted the guidance and endstate to be achieved as strategy developed. Over time the President clarified his desires to defend Saudi Arabia, remove Iraqi forces from Kuwait and restore the government of Kuwait. Through public speeches and discussions with his inner circle his language and actions should have made his desired national strategic endstate clear. This however, was not the

case. The defense of Saudi Arabia became the first most immediate goal of the administration and the military. Forces were rapidly deployed during August to perform this mission, while diplomacy and sanctions were sought and enforced against Iraq. The administration then turned to the discussion of ends or endstate desired. Three options were on the table immediately following the Iraqi invasion. They were the defense of Saudi Arabia, the retaking of Kuwait and the removal of Saddam Hussein.⁹¹ The removal of Saddam was dismissed early on and the discussion of strategic ends centered on defensive and offensive operations. For the next three months President Bush reiterated his desire to restore the borders of Kuwait. His military Generals either failed to recognize his desired endstate or made the case to limit operations to the defense only. General Powell repeatedly sought to influence the defensive option by highlighting the costs associated with offensive operations.⁹² General Schwarzkopf remained focused on the task at hand (the viable defense of Saudi Arabia) to prevent further incursion by the Iraqis. Despite the fact that the President would increasingly reiterate his desire to remove Iraqi forces, neither General would actively pursue planning offensive operations. Both desired clear goals from which they could develop military options. Although they wanted clear goals, they were not reluctant to attempt to shape the goals if these goals were counter to their military (inclinations).⁹³ When a brief regarding military offensive operations to the President did occur in October 1990, the brief was poorly crafted and caused more concern and dismay among civilian leaders instead of reinforcing what the military thought was a clear strategic endstate.⁹⁴

⁹¹ Ibid., 42.

⁹² Ibid., 43.

⁹³ Ibid., 44.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 49.

The dynamic process of developing strategy with regard to the Iraqi invasion provides numerous lessons. The dialog between the politicians and senior military leaders is influenced by the background, education and beliefs of each individual. Each individual listens, visualizes and interprets differently. This does not imply that candor is absent in such forums. The difficulty is knowing how to facilitate communication between individuals with different perspectives and ideas. Often President Bush would be waiting for input that would shape his overall strategy, while others would be waiting for guidance from him that would shape their input. The process of military planning is time consuming based on the depth of resources required and the scope of the potential operation. This is based in the fact that a large number of planners must come together to interface and integrate to prepare a viable working solution to the problem at hand. Vetting the plan through various levels of bureaucracy can affect the speed with which the plan can be developed. This potential delay can effect the civilian leader's interpretation and development of national strategy. If, for example, the President receives a brief regarding a military option, but the President desires a different set of options that might lead to different results, the military planners must reassemble the planning staffs to provide a new assessment. This process takes time, and reinforces the fact that both civilian leaders and military leaders are advancing and shaping their interpretation of desired strategy through a set of linear steps. This linearity can impinge on flexibility. Military planners must present several options early and continually seek advice and input.

At the time of execution, Operation Desert Storm did have clearly defined military objectives that supported clearly defined national strategic goals and United Nations

mandates. Although constructed to provide clear guidance and intent with regard to the expected endstate, this rigidity has had an impact on events that arose as a direct result of combat operations. It is commonly understood that once combat operations are started, it is difficult to control the outcome of the complex, chaotic system that is unleashed.

Although a certain result may be anticipated, there is an equal chance that the result might not occur or that the situation will morph into something else entirely. This happened during the Gulf War to a certain degree. The President's overarching goal was the eviction of Iraqi troops from Kuwait and the reestablishment of Kuwait sovereignty. For the military, this meant defeating the Iraqi Republican Guard force. The defeat of this capability would force the Iraqis to withdrawal from Kuwait. As the operation unfolded, actions by the Marines and Coalition forces in the west served to be the catalyst for the initial Iraqi withdrawal from Iraq. This occurred very early in the operation and was not anticipated. Most thought that the decisive operation would be the sweep out to the west that would ultimately make contact with the Republican Guards, and that during this sweep the Republican Guards would be defeated, causing remaining forces to leave Kuwait. As events unfolded, new strategic opportunities were available to the President. These opportunities, however, would not be attained or even considered to due perceived lack of ability to change or modify strategy over time.

The speed with which the Coalition accomplished their objectives stunned the Iraqis, as well as the entire world. No one had anticipated such quick success, and most anticipated a difficult fight to eject the Iraqis which resulted in the lengthy buildup of combat power in Kuwait prior to commencement of combat operations. United Nations and American objectives were met early in the 100 hour war. Iraqi forces began

withdrawal shortly after the Coalition attacks. The most visible signs of withdrawal were on the infamous “Highway of Death” leading out of Kuwait city. Fleeing Iraqi forces were decimated by Coalition power as they attempted to flee the country. Arguably, termination of the conflict should have begun at that time. The national strategic and United Nations’ goals of withdrawal of Iraqi forces from Kuwait had been satisfied. Additional combat operations were not required. The military objective of defeating the vaunted Republican Guard forces was not required, and any further attack into Iraq should not have occurred.

President Bush had many options in this rapidly changing situation. As the situation began to unfold, the inflexibility built into the military plan and the UN charter became evident. With overwhelming success achieved, the Coalition could have easily continued with a new purpose of taking Saddam Hussein out of power. Many have argued that an opportunity was missed by not doing continuing the mission. At the time, however, strategic goals and objectives had been met. To continue on would have required the President and the administration to review national strategic goals, national military objectives and then they would have had to convince the United Nations and the Coalition that these new goals and objectives deserved support. All of these actions would have taken time, and the President was satisfied with the outcome at the time. His advisors recommended cessation of combat operations as well. In this environment, combat operations were terminated.

Interestingly, what was considered strategic success by the president and key members of his staff was seen as operational and strategic failure by many. Criticism of the failure of the military flanking maneuver to effectively destroy the Republican Guards and the

perception that the ground war was halted prematurely was then and is today subject of discussion and conjecture.⁹⁵ Was victory achieved? Clearly arguments can be made to support either side. A better question would be how to make the strategic decision making process more responsive to the evolving situation. This does not imply that at the time the President or the administration and key advisors had no discussions about how to proceed in light of the rapid accomplishment of the stated objectives. The administration was constrained by its definition of success and lack of flexibility with which to continue to refine and define strategy. What if the President had sought U.N. approval to continue the attack and topple the Hussein government? Saddam himself could not understand why the U.S. military did not go to Baghdad to capture him. If authorized, would the U.S. military be prepared for the follow on nation building effort required? Who would take power with Saddam removed? These questions may have been discussed, and if not they certainly should have been. The fluidity of the strategic situation requires continual evaluation and preparation to consider anticipated and unanticipated events.

Closing Thoughts

Certain themes are repeated in these three examples. In each situation, endstates were delineated with regard to both national strategic goals and national military objectives to achieve those goals. Although stated and documented, these goals and objectives were often unclear and ambiguous. The lack of clarity, instead of being addressed, often went unchallenged and unchecked until the situation in the operating environment forced reassessment. This is not how strategy should be developed or executed. Goals must be defined in tangible terms that can be supported by all elements of national power. If they are not defined, then organizations responsible for their implementation should

⁹⁵ Lord, 141.

immediately seek clarification and correction. Otherwise the generating authority may not realize that there are problems with interpretation or understanding. It is essential that leaders at all levels seek clarification or make recommendations that clarify and enhance understanding.

Personality considerations must be taken into account when developing and executing national strategy and military strategy. Each individual will have a different interpretation of what is required and how to achieve success. This individuality can add friction to an already difficult process, however, it must be recognized and expected. Understanding that individual human nature can complement as well as confuse strategic development is the first step in mitigating this effect. Military organizations mitigate this factor by conducting rehearsals prior to execution of military operations. Leaders responsible for each piece of the plan are required to demonstrate their understanding of their contribution to the overall plan or operation. During this process, the lead commander gains an appreciation as to whether his plan is understood. This rehearsal also can serve to identify friction points or problems that had not to date been addressed. They can be rectified on the spot or addressed through continued planning. The rehearsal process should be utilized at the highest levels by the key leaders responsible for giving the order to execute the military plan. The rehearsal should allow for candid discussion of specifically how elements of national power are to be focused to support the attainment of strategic goals. Although individuality is recognized as a positive trait in our society, it can also lead to misinterpretation when working to achieve a common goal. This must be factored in to the development and execution of strategic goal and objectives.

Endstates are never permanent. They are conceptual and fleeting. The complex and chaotic global system that we operate in does not allow for a result to ever be final. Over time the system will continue to adapt and change. Even when we think we have achieved our national and military strategic goals and endstates, we have done so only temporarily. We must anticipate that they will immediately begin evolving, adapting and changing. Acknowledging this fact will force leaders to anticipate and shape the next national strategic goal and objective. Adaptation and change occurred in Vietnam and the Persian Gulf War. In each case, strategic goals and objectives needed reevaluation in light of changing conditions. New endstates would have to be developed which would require the anticipation of endstates for the newly created endstates. Can we learn from our past? An analysis of strategic goals and objectives and their application during Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom will be the focus of the final part of this paper.

Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom

“We are reluctant imperialists. We don’t relish imposing our systems, beliefs and values on others. Yet we are convinced that our values are universal and that their adoption or achievement by all mankind will make a more peaceful, prosperous, and secure world. With this goal before us, we have offered our values to others...but with mixed results. We have not been skillful in understanding how to effectively apply our power in ways that do not alienate or threaten other societies. We understand warmaking far better than we understand peacemaking.”⁹⁶

Then and Now

In his 3 February 2000 address before the Senate Committee on Armed Services, George Tenet, the Director of Central Intelligence, made a statement entitled, “The Worldwide Threat in 2000: Global Realities of Our National Security”⁹⁷ In his address he outlined the various security threats that our nation might face in the future. This threat assessment supported the creation of national strategy by defining threats and challenges that are important to the nation. The Director addressed transnational threats (WMD proliferation, terrorism, narcotics, international organized crime, and information warfare) and regional issues (Russia, the Caucasus and Central Asia, the Middle East, Iran, Iraq, the Balkans, Kosovo, China, North Korea, East Asia, Indonesia, India-Pakistan, and Africa).

In his section on terrorism, he recounted recent success in working with foreign governments worldwide to bring over two dozen terrorists to justice since 1998. He then addressed the continuing threat of Usama Bin Laden as foremost among other organizations. He stated that the U.S. was a prime terrorist target and that Iran remains

⁹⁶ Zinni, 178.

⁹⁷ George Tenet, “The Worldwide Threat in 2000: Global Realities of Our National Security” (Statement before the Senate Committee on Armed Services, 2000)

the most active state sponsor of terrorism.⁹⁸ He concluded the section by remarking that the best weapons to combat terrorism are, "...constant vigilance and timely intelligence."⁹⁹ In the section on Iraq, the Director mentioned the potential threat if Saddam renewed his efforts to reconstruct WMD-capable facilities and that Saddams' military options were very limited. He also concluded that, "In a strategic sense, [Saddam] is still on a downward path."¹⁰⁰ This testimony is one of the inputs to the National Security Strategy. Traditionally the United States identifies tangible threats, assesses these against our national interests and then includes them in national strategy documents. These documents are then used at various levels of government as well as in the military to develop and disseminate the strategic vision of the administration in power.

Despite this strategic guidance from the CIA, it is difficult to anticipate future events. Having been in office only 9 months, the administration was confronted with crisis. The attack on September 11 would significantly alter the United States' global strategy. Military force became integral in the fight against terrorism. The military required national military strategic objectives to conduct operations to support national strategic goals. Strategy documents were distributed within a month after the attacks on the World Trade Centers. Although not reflected in the NSS until 2002, strategic goals were provided in October 2001, in a classified National Security Presidential Directive (NSPD) 9. This was the first substantive national security decision directive issued by the Bush administration. Although classified, Defense Secretary Rumsfeld presented his version of

⁹⁸ Ibid., 5.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 6.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 14.

NSPD 9 before the 9/11 commission in March of 2004.¹⁰¹ The objectives of the strategy were to: eliminate the al Qaeda network, use all elements of national power to do so, and to eliminate sanctuaries for al-Qaeda and related terrorist networks.¹⁰² The document also called on the military to plan for military options against Taliban and al-Qaeda network targets in Afghanistan. At this point in time little reference is made to follow-on operations or what to do after the Taliban and al-Qaeda network were defeated. Regardless, strategic guidance was issued prior to OEF, providing strategic objectives that military planners began to use to guide their plans.

Numerous sources confirm that our operations and tactics in OEF initially achieved desired strategic results. The government claimed that in Afghanistan, "...we put together a strategy that made use of the full range of tools of the U.S. Government—financial, intelligence, law enforcement, diplomatic as well as military.¹⁰³ The predominant element of power used from October through the defeat of the Taliban and ousting of al Qaeda from Afghanistan in February-March 2002 timeframe was United States and Coalition military forces. Initial operations relied upon Special Forces and interagency organizations to leverage the Northern Alliance forces and support them in their efforts to defeat Taliban and al Qaeda forces. The strategy for the operation was driven largely by the Secretary of Defense and sought a light footprint for U.S. forces that would work with indigenous Afghan forces to oust Taliban and al Qaeda.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ The President of the United States *National Security Presidential Directive 9: Combating Terrorism*. (Washington D.C.,2001),1.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 1

¹⁰³ Douglas J. Feith, "Operation Enduring Freedom; 1 Year Later" Foreign Press Center briefing, (Washington D.C. 2002), 1.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 1.

In the early stages of OEF many people throughout the world were inspired by the rapid defeat of the Taliban and the disruption of the al Qaeda network. Although bin Laden was not killed or captured, most observers felt strategic success had been achieved. “Operation Enduring Freedom was highly successful, accomplishing most of the stated U.S. strategic objectives.”¹⁰⁵ The President wanted to strike back at those who had contributed to the attacks of 9/11, and the American public was united with the President. The Secretary of Defense implemented a lighter, leaner, efficient and effective military that leveraged technology to its fullest while exploiting the advantages of light, lethal special operations forces and lean regular military forces. U.S. strategy was designed to inflict damage on those supporting terrorism, while the goal was never to occupy and engage in sustained combat operations in Afghanistan.

“Operation Enduring Freedom confirmed that the relationship between policy and strategy remains the most critical factor in conducting a war. Policy always dominates strategy, and clear, militarily achievable political objectives are critical for ultimate success in conflict.”¹⁰⁶ “Our goal as the National Security Strategy makes clear, is to make terrorism—is to delegitimize terrorism, is to make terrorism like genocide, the slave trade or piracy—the kinds of activities that no one who aspires to respectability can condone, let alone support.”¹⁰⁷ Both statements above were written in 2002 when it was clear that initial U.S. and Coalition military efforts had largely accomplished goals outlined by the administration. At the present time (January 2007), however, it is no longer clear that U.S. national strategy in Afghanistan is as effective as it was in those

¹⁰⁵ Dr. Milan Vego, “What Can We Learn From Enduring Freedom?” *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings*, (July 2002), 28.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 28.

¹⁰⁷ Feith, 2.

early days. In 2006 and in the opening month of 2007, strategic success in Afghanistan is arguably not what it was initially. Taliban forces have grown larger and despite the deployment of NATO and U.S. forces, the President is currently considering the addition of additional military forces to support operations in Afghanistan this spring.¹⁰⁸

Strategic success to strategic failure? With operations ongoing in Afghanistan it is too early to tell. What is more relevant at this point is a discussion about whether our initial strategic military objectives were and continue to be clearly defined to support military operations. In 2001 the military strategic objectives were clear enough for military planners to plan for and conduct operations to support national strategic goals. An essential element in the development of strategy (either national strategic goals or national military objectives) is an endstate. At the beginning of combat operations on October 7, 2001, President Bush announced that military action was designed to disrupt the use of Afghanistan as a terrorist base of operations, to attack the military capability of the Taliban regime, to bring bin Laden and other al Qaeda leaders to justice and to prevent al Qaeda from posing a continuous terrorist threat.¹⁰⁹ Regardless of the source and the actual verbiage of the national strategy of the time, the sources and documents previously listed are linked sufficiently to be the stated strategic goals of the nation at the time.

Proper political and military preparation for conflict should lead to a more refined, enduring national strategy. Battlefield success should continually be evaluated for military strategic and national strategic consequences. If strategic revision is required, then political and military leaders should acknowledge and pursue the revision of goals

¹⁰⁸ Robert Kemp "Civil—Military Operations in Khost Province, Eastern Afghanistan: A Civilian Perspective" *Campaigning* (Winter 2007), 35.

¹⁰⁹ Vego, 29.

and objectives. Some might argue that the United States did not “strike back” quickly enough at the terrorists after 9/11, others might argue that we struck back too fast. The military developed strategic military goals that led to stunning initial accomplishment of those goals in Afghanistan. These initial goals were interim goals that should have been connected to an overarching national strategic endstate and military strategic endstate. Additional goals should have been developed by the military to ensure continued strategic success.

Recursively pursuing a national strategic endstate and military strategic endstate in Afghanistan could have ultimately established the political will and resources necessary for the accomplishment of national strategic goals and could have set conditions for military withdrawal. Militarily defeated in Afghanistan, both the Taliban and al Qaeda have taken refuge predominately outside of the country. Despite some efforts from neighboring countries, specifically Pakistan, both the Taliban and al Qaeda have continued to not only survive and operate, but have increased recruitment and stepped up military operations in Afghanistan.

This might have been prevented in 2001 and early 2002 if strategic vision had been broader. “The lack of proper political preparation makes it harder to achieve military success and raises its costs. It also makes it harder to translate battlefield victory into reliable strategic gains.”¹¹⁰ Examples that support this point are apparent when considering the effects of the ousting of the Taliban government. The military removal of the Taliban government created a vacuum that required some level of military

¹¹⁰ Carl Conetta, “Strange Victory: A critical appraisal of Operation Enduring Freedom and the Afghanistan War” (Project of Defense Alternatives Research, 2002), 7. This is an excellent article written as the operation was in its infancy. The ability of the author to make strategic assessments regardless of their correctness demonstrates the ability of organizations to conduct strategic assessment continually before, during and after execution of military operations.

participation in potential stability operations, and support to the establishment of a new government in the country. Military objectives that were initially provided did not allow military planners to begin planning for and resourcing these potential tasks. As a result humanitarian and stability operations would be planned for and resourced much slower than they could have been. “However great his (Winston Churchill) admiration of the Americans, he was exasperated by their insensitivity to the fact that wars create as many problems as they solve and that the art of grand strategy is to foresee the outlines of the future and be prepared to deal with it.”¹¹¹

The strategic importance of defeating both Taliban and al Qaeda within the borders of Afghanistan does not appear to have been considered as a critical strategic objective. In fact it appears that little thought was initially given to attempting to stop the movement of enemy forces as they crossed into Pakistan with impunity.¹¹² The mission to stem the flow of Taliban and al Qaeda was given to the Afghan forces supported by U.S. Special Operations personnel. This methodology was understandable but did not take into account the extreme strategic importance of the mission and the limited capabilities of the Afghan forces to accomplish the mission.¹¹³ The current resurgence of the Taliban is undoubtedly being supported from locations across the border in Pakistan. This problem with the porous border continues today.

Operation Enduring Freedom has entered its sixth year. Many successes have been achieved and many challenges remain ahead. Despite the fact that national and military

¹¹¹ Peter Paret, ed., *Makers of Modern Strategy from Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 503.

¹¹² Task Force 58 Narrative Summary Operations in Afghanistan, 27 October 2001 to 26 February 2002 (MCHC, Quantico, VA), 48. This is a declassified report that differs slightly from the TF 58 Command Chronology. This document contains additional details and provides a conclusion. This document provides insight into early military operations supporting OEF.

¹¹³ Vego, 33.

strategy has not always been correct or correctly applied to OEF does not alleviate the responsibility of civilian and military leaders to continue to try to get strategy “right.” The importance of continually defining endstates, goals and objectives is imperative to support the successful accomplishment of U.S. national strategic goals.

Then and Now, Operation Iraqi Freedom

In March 2002, with operations in Afghanistan considered successful, planning for military operations in Iraq was underway. The Bush administration determined that the next threat confronting the United States was the threat posed by Saddam Hussein in Iraq. The perceived threat concluded that Saddam possessed or would possess Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) and that he would use those weapons against the U.S. and our allies or would provide terrorist organizations with WMD. In the 2002 NSS (and throughout strategic documents), the threat of WMD was and is a continuing strategic concern. At that time, another logical military objective would be the elimination of Saddam Hussein and his ability to procure and distribute WMD throughout the region. There were also alleged ties between Saddam Hussein and terrorist organizations, specifically al Qaeda. Although intelligence reports (of 2002) provided a foundation used by civilian and military leaders to make a strong argument for military operations in Iraq, the WMD and the ties to terrorists were largely unsubstantiated by the time major combat operations were concluded.

In the ensuing months the Bush administration would convince the American public, the congress, the United Nations and some of our allies that military operations were essential in Iraq. The threat of WMD use and proliferation served as the foundation of the strategic argument and became the central strategic goal of the United States at the time.

From the beginning of the military planning to the commencement of military operations in March 2003, the military would recognize this national strategic goal and would develop military plans supporting this national goal. These plans would focus on the defeat the Iraqi Army, which would force the removal of Saddam Hussein, and end the threat of WMD use and proliferation in the region. Another consequence of the military operation would be the requirement to establish a new government in Iraq, and the decision was made that the new Iraqi government would be a democracy.¹¹⁴

By tying Saddam Hussein to WMD use and proliferation and to terrorism, the administration easily rationalized military operations in Iraq. The 2002 NSS is very clear in delineating strategic goals with regard to terrorism, but used unambiguous terms such as “attack their leadership.”¹¹⁵ In December 2002, the administration released the National Strategy to Combat Weapons of Mass Destruction. This document also provides clear strategic goals to civilian and military leaders responsible for implementing the various elements of national power. The document specifically presents interdiction as a means of countering WMD proliferation.¹¹⁶ Although no unclassified documents at the time delineated specific military strategic objectives, military leaders and planners could find documented national strategic goals and guidance with regard to WMD and terrorism.

National strategic goals and military strategic objectives were unambiguous during the planning and lead up to the war. The military objective of defeating the Iraqi Army was tangible to military planners and supported the overarching strategic nation goal.

¹¹⁴ Yarger, 54.

¹¹⁵ The President of the United States. *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*. (Washington, D.C.: 2002),5.

¹¹⁶ The President of the United States. *National Strategy to Combat Weapons of Mass Destruction*. (Washington D.C.: Dec 2002),2.

Unfortunately these military objectives (defeat of the Iraqi army and the removal of Saddam Hussein) would act as a focal point for both civilian and military leadership. This focus would lead to the neglect of other critical military strategic objectives and national strategic goals, specifically the requirements for post hostility operations and the establishment of a new democratic government in Iraq.¹¹⁷

Arguments have been made that the initial premise of using military power in Iraq was flawed from the beginning, as Saddam Hussein did not have the WMD or ties to terrorism that provided the foundation for going to war in 2003.¹¹⁸ From a strategic perspective this argument is irrelevant. National strategic goals were and are clear with regard to WMD and terrorism. All elements of national power, to include military force, can and will be used to meet national strategic goals. Despite the fact that no WMD were found and that Saddam Hussein did not maintain terrorist ties (arguably due to incorrect intelligence assessment), this does not negate the U.S. ability to use elements of national power in pursuit of national goals.

What can be described as failure is our inability to clearly identify, articulate and resource the attainment of the desired endstate for OIF. Consumed with the focus on forces required for combat operations, civilian and military leaders lost sight of the equally (if not more important) post-conflict environment. There are many reasons why civilian and military leaders did not apply the same rigor in planning to post combat operations as they did to initial combat operations in Iraq. Assumptions were made that were incorrect. The amount of military force prescribed by the Secretary of Defense for

¹¹⁷ Yarger, 55.

¹¹⁸ Michael R. Gordon and Bernard E. Trainor *COBRA II* (New York,,: Pantheon Books, 2006), 15. (Hereinafter Gordon and Trainor).

OIF was arguably an appropriate amount of capability given the nature of the threat.¹¹⁹ What does not appear to have been taken into account was the need for military capability after major combat operations had ended. A strategic endstate in Iraq (establishment of a democracy) was expected to materialize as a result of the defeat of Iraqi forces and removing Saddam Hussein from power. Planning and resourcing this phase of the operation was insufficient.¹²⁰

Factors that influenced the lack of planning for stability and nation building were based on the personality, experiences and perceptions of key leaders. President Bush had stated while campaigning for his first term in office that, “I don’t think our troops ought to be used for what’s called nation-building.”¹²¹ Although this sentence can be taken out of context if not related to the discussion at the time (President Clinton’s use of the military for operations other than warfighting) it does capture the sentiment of the President of the United States.¹²² Similarly, the Secretary of Defense entered office with a vision for transformation of the military. Military leaders were slow to accept some of the Secretary of Defense’s initiatives. The Secretary sought a lean, efficient, effective military that leveraged technology to achieve decisive results. Arguably the military operation in Afghanistan had validated his vision and could potentially be applied in Iraq. The Secretary despised the Pentagon bureaucracy and once claimed, “The topic today is an adversary that poses a serious threat, to the security of the United States of America...The adversary’s closer to home. It’s the Pentagon bureaucracy.”¹²³ Most

¹¹⁹Ibid., xxxii.

¹²⁰ Zinni, 26-27.

¹²¹ Robert K. Brigham *Is Iraq Another Vietnam?* (New York.: Public Affairs, 2006), 69.

¹²² Gordon and Trainor, 5.

¹²³ Ibid., 9.

likely this comment was made in partial jest, however, it unquestionably contributed to the friction between civilian and military leaders.

The Secretary of Defense dominated the military planning effort. He was more concerned about the numbers of military forces to apply to operations in Iraq than was the President.¹²⁴ Military leadership likewise did not assess the post hostility environment with required rigor. General Franks was assured that he was not responsible for post hostility planning and subsequently provided little guidance and oversight to the effort.¹²⁵ When the Secretary of Defense finally argued to have the Department of Defense take the lead in postwar Iraq, most senior leaders were in agreement. This would be the first time since World War II that the Department of Defense would lead postwar operations. They would have the resources (\$400 billion)¹²⁶ to conduct the mission, but arguably not the experience.

Although establishing democracy in Iraq would become a recognized strategic goal of the administration, civilian and military leadership would not agree on how to achieve the strategic goal. Regardless of the amount of time spent preparing for the post conflict environment, achieving strategic success required leadership and unity of effort with regard to resources, and methodology. Confusion, misinterpretation and lack of focus seem to have negatively impacted the post conflict planning effort.¹²⁷ The assumptions that were made also were incorrect. Some felt that even with a small military footprint, the goals of stabilization and democracy could be attained as the Iraqis would contribute to and participate in the effort. This was not the case. Blame can be placed with both

¹²⁴ Ibid., 31.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 138-139.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 141. NSPD 24 signed January 20, 2003 formalized Rumsfeld's authority for post war Iraq.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 143.

civilian and military leadership. Assigning blame, however, does little to remedy the problems. What is important is that even with clear guidance and national strategic goals, unity of effort and balanced coordination are critical in achieving a successful outcome.¹²⁸

The endstate of the plan or operation has to support the overall national strategic objective, in this case regime removal. It is the responsibility of key civilian and military leaders to ensure that this happens. The President made the nations' strategic goals very clear throughout OEF and OIF. Those goals led to clearly delineated military objectives. Continual refinement and definement of the goals and objectives is critical. Equally important is a continual assessment of the progress towards the accomplishment of the goals and objectives. The strategic endstate of regime removal and the subsequent goal of establishing a democracy in Iraq was a clearly defined national strategic goal from which civilian and military leaders could have set objectives that would lead to the accomplishment of the goal. Instead, a piecemeal approach to post conflict operations took place that could not realistically accomplish the desired result. Planning early and continuously could have mitigated initial mistakes. Four years into OIF, national strategic goals and military strategic objectives have not been accomplished. Violence in Iraq continues, and the safety and security of the people of Iraq is questionable. Civilian and military leaders need to assess the goals and objective to determine if they are still desirable and achievable. If they are, then the methodology for accomplishing the desired endstate needs reassessment.

¹²⁸ Thomas E. Ricks *Fiasco, The American Military Adventure in Iraq* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2006), 80.

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President Bush has recognized that although the national strategic goal of democracy in Iraq is still desired, the methodology for accomplishing the goal must change. The President has recently declared that he is sending additional combat forces into Baghdad to stabilize the city, bring order and stem the violence. Military leaders develop their own assessment of accomplishing the national strategic goal through military strategic objectives. They must continually assess and communicate regarding conditions imposed by higher authority. This is not to say that they should be critical of higher strategic goals. Senior commanders cannot use the conditions imposed by higher authority as an excuse for military failure.¹²⁹ But communication and dialogue are essential. Many military leaders (active duty and retired) criticized the President for sending too few combat forces into Iraq. As a result of inadequate amounts of combat forces, the military was never able to effectively provide the security required to stabilize the population. This inability to stabilize the population can compromise the future establishment of democracy in Iraq. “Military leaders must work with the other members of the national security team in the most skillful, tactful and persistent ways to promote unified action.”¹³⁰ Civilian and military leaders now argue that sending additional combat forces is “too little too late,” and some argue for withdrawal. If we can abandon criticism and blame to pursue unity of vision and purpose, the United States may be able to get back on the road to success in Iraq.

¹²⁹ United States Marine Corps, *MCDP 1-2 Campaigning* (Washington D.C. 1997), 12. (Hereinafter referred to as MCDP 1-2).

¹³⁰ Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff. Pub 5-0. *Joint Operation Planning*. (Washington D.C.: 2006), II-6. (Hereinafter referred to as JP 5-0).

Findings and Conclusions

Requirements for Strategic Success:

- 1) *Forces must be internally coherent, which is to say competently joint.*
- 2) *Forces must be of quantity and provide a strategic effect scaled to the tasks set by high policy.*
- 3) *Forces must be employed coercively in pursuit of military objectives that fit military goals.*¹³¹

The United States Armed Forces can achieve tactical and operational success on the battlefield without clearly delineated national strategic goals. Achieving strategic success, however, requires an understanding of clearly stated strategic goals that are continually refined, defined and coordinated with the military campaign plan. This thesis statement is valid. Through the course of this paper, the concept of strategy has been defined, assessed and applied to the world situation today. Although history does not repeat itself directly, it does repeat itself in themes. As a nation, we have had numerous instances where we got “strategy right.” The United States has also gotten strategy wrong. With deliberate study, strategic challenges can be mitigated and efficiently and effectively resolved. By examining and assessing strategic concepts through historical examples, themes can be either repeated or avoided. Continual refinement and definition of strategic goals and objectives is critical to successful achievement of those goals and objectives.

General Zinni argues that strategy is not realized in ideas, but instead is realized in the foxhole.¹³² By the “foxhole” he implies that by studying an area, understanding and interacting with local people, experience and education will lead to a better assessment and implementation of strategy. Leadership is also critical for the development of

¹³¹ Gray, 86.

¹³² Zinni, 153.

strategic ends ways and means. Establishing these does not in and of itself mean that the desired results will be achieved. Continually refining and defining the strategic goals and objectives will lead to a better chance of success.

Today the United States is engaged in a Global War on Terrorism. Civilian and military leaders have often spoken of the “Long War” that we are engaged in and how it may be the defining struggle of our generation. Regardless of the length of the conflict, understanding strategy and the implementation of strategy will improve the posture of our efforts in the achievement of strategic goals and objectives. We must learn from past actions and apply these lessons to our current and future struggles. Failure to do so is irresponsible. OEF and OIF are ongoing operations that require continued monitoring and assessment. Strategic goals and military strategic objectives have been clearly developed and can be easily identified in the numerous strategic documents published by the administration.

Initially (just after September 11 2001), strategic guidance may have been difficult to discern. This is not the case today. Since 2002 clear and prolific guidance has been disseminated. The guidance has been unclassified and is readily available and also is contained in classified sources. Regardless of the source, the national strategic goals and national military objectives are defined and readily available. What may be missing is an understanding of the effective ways to achieve an endstate. Applying political will, resources and technology to achieve a desired endstate requires a procedural scientific and artistic approach.

Variables and complexity are mitigated in the military through the scientific application of process. Military planners adhere to delineated planning steps that will

yield a result and Course of Action (COA) certain to achieve desired results. The art of warfare resides with the successful commander, who through his years of experience and education is able to intuitively select the proper approach to the problem at hand. In combat operations, the commander takes the plans and upon execution uses all tools at his disposal to ensure the successful outcome. Strategic development is very similar, but challenges lie in the fact that strategic development and execution involve many more agencies, departments and complex factors.

This complexity requires extraordinary leadership and focus. “All this is easily summarized: leadership itself is today the truly forgotten dimension of strategy.”¹³³ Even with study, focus and experience, strategy is difficult. Multiple inputs can lead to an unfocused implementation of the national elements of power. Personalities can impact significantly the strategy that is to be pursued and how it will be pursued. Our very governmental structure complicates the development and implementation of strategy. With three branches of government serving as checks and balances to each other it is amazing that we as a nation are able to come up with any coherent strategy.

The importance of understanding strategy and all of its complexities and nuances is critical to military leaders. Their input is a critical input to national strategy; military leaders can provide their “foxhole” experience to directly effect the attainment of strategic goals and military objectives. Candid input and advice to civilian leaders is critical. Requests for clarification and adjustment to strategic goals are imperative at times. Personal beliefs and prejudices must be mitigated and attempts to sway strategy for institutional benefit must be avoided. “In order to function in a complex world, military leaders must overcome their objections to ‘civilian interference’ and actively seek

¹³³ Lord, 4.

ongoing political guidance.”¹³⁴ The President and the administration did have and still do have national strategic goals for OEF and OIF. National military objectives must be continually reassessed, refined and defined in order to achieve desired strategic endstates. If the need arises over time to change strategic goals and objectives, then military leaders have the responsibility to make recommendations that support change.

The military has learned a great deal since the terrorist attacks of 9/11. All aspects of how we fight have been adapting and will continue to adapt to the threat that we face today. From equipment to tactics to doctrine, the military is improving and changing to operate with the utmost efficiency and effectiveness. The current series of Joint doctrinal publications support this effort. Joint Publication 3-0, Joint Operations and Joint Pub 5-0, Joint Operation Planning specifically address the importance of strategy to military planners. Military leadership is involved in determining the strategic focus of the military and representing that focus to the civilian leaders.¹³⁵ The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff notes that, “Commanders, planners, and legal advisors must consider the national strategic endstate, political goals, and legal constraints when making targeting decisions.”¹³⁶ This statement makes absolutely clear the importance of understanding strategy and its development by tying strategy to critical tactical decisions.

The importance of understanding strategy is even more imperative for military planners when considering military objectives and recommending termination criteria. Adapting to the current operating environment, military doctrine has clearly delineated the need for the establishment of clear military objectives and the need to understand and

¹³⁴ Vizzard, 84.

¹³⁵ Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff. Pub 3-0. *Joint Operations*. (Washington D.C.: 2006), 1-7. (Hereinafter referred to as JP 3-0).

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, III-18.

work with civilian leaders to establish realistic termination criteria. “Strategic military objectives define the role of the military forces in the larger context of national strategic objectives.”¹³⁷ “The CCDR (Combatant Commander) must work closely with the civilian leadership to ensure a clearly defined military endstate is established.”¹³⁸ Doctrine clarifies the role of the military in the planning and execution of strategy. Civilian leaders rely on our candor and experience. In order to effectively advise and support the goals of the nation, military leaders must understand the administrations’ strategy and the documents that support the strategy. “Lower echelon commanders must understand the strategic context of their tactical missions if they are to provide useful feedback to higher levels on the effectiveness of field operations. Consequently, our strategic goals must be communicated clearly to commanders at every level.”¹³⁹

Our strategy in the conduct of OEF and OIF will continue to mature and evolve, as it should. This is readily apparent in the national strategy documents. Goals and objectives are much more clearly delineated in documents released in 2006 than they were in 2002. Military doctrine has evolved as well. These are positive accomplishments that should contribute to the successful prosecution of OEF and OIF. There are many different ways to achieve successful strategic results, and the desired results can be realized more efficiently with an adaptive and recursive planning method. “Strategists must prepare themselves in times of stability for periods of instability by mastering knowledge and understanding of the many subsystems and their interactions, as well as the whole of the strategic environment.”¹⁴⁰ As military professional and leaders we have a significant

¹³⁷ JP 5-0, III-11.

¹³⁸ Ibid., III-8.

¹³⁹ MCDP 1-2, 64.

¹⁴⁰ Yarger, 39.

contribution to make toward the successful development and achievement of strategic goals. Our contribution will only be as good as our study and understanding of strategy and the strategic environment.

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Vita

LtCol Mahaney was born in Santa Cruz, California and attended the University of California at Davis, graduating in 1983. He was commissioned a Second Lieutenant in the Marine Corps in April 1987. In 1988, LtCol Mahaney attended the Field Artillery Officer Basic Course, Fort Sill, Oklahoma and then reported for duty with Battery H, 3d Battalion 11th Marines, Camp Pendleton, California where he served as Forward Observer, Fire Direction Officer and Liaison Officer. During this tour he deployed to Okinawa, Japan and Korea.

Ordered to 1st Recruit Training Battalion, Recruit Training Regiment, Parris Island, South Carolina in July 1990, LtCol Mahaney served as Series Commander, Company Executive Officer, and Company Commander. During this tour he deployed to Saudi Arabia with Combat Replacement Company 2, Combat Replacement Regiment in support of Operations Desert Shield/ Desert Storm.

LtCol Mahaney attended the Field Artillery Officer Advanced Course, Fort Sill, Oklahoma in 1993 and then reported for duty with the 2d Battalion 11th Marines at Camp Pendleton, California. LtCol Mahaney served as Assistant Operations Officer, Operations Officer, and Battery Commander of Battery K, 3d Battalion 12th Marines. LtCol Mahaney deployed to Okinawa, and Camp Fuji, Japan with Battalion Landing Team 2/5 and the 31st MEU (SOC) during this tour.

Following his tour with 2/11, LtCol Mahaney reported to Marine Aviation Weapons and Tactics Squadron One in Yuma Arizona in 1996, serving as the Ground Combat Department Head and artillery/fire support instructor. In 1999, LtCol Mahaney attended the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas and was subsequently selected to attend the School of Advanced Military Studies graduating with a Masters degree in Theater Operations.

Assigned as a CENTCOM Regional Plans Officer to I Marine Expeditionary Force in 2001, LtCol Mahaney worked in the G-3 Future Operations section, deploying with Task Force 58 to Afghanistan supporting Operation Enduring Freedom. Returning from Afghanistan in 2002 LtCol Mahaney was assigned to the I MEF G-5 Deliberate Plans section deploying to Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Upon his return, LtCol Mahaney was assigned as the 1st Marine Division Plans Officer, deploying back to Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom II.

LtCol Mahaney subsequently served as Inspector Instructor for 5th Battalion 14th Marines at Seal Beach, California. During his tour he prepared the battalion for its first activation in 60 years. The battalion deployed to the Al Anbar Province as Provisional Military Police in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

LtCol Mahaney has published an article in the Marine Corps Gazette, and has written two Monographs. He was the principle author of the Task Force 58 Narrative Summary, describing Task Force 58 operations in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. LtCol Mahaney is married and has three children.