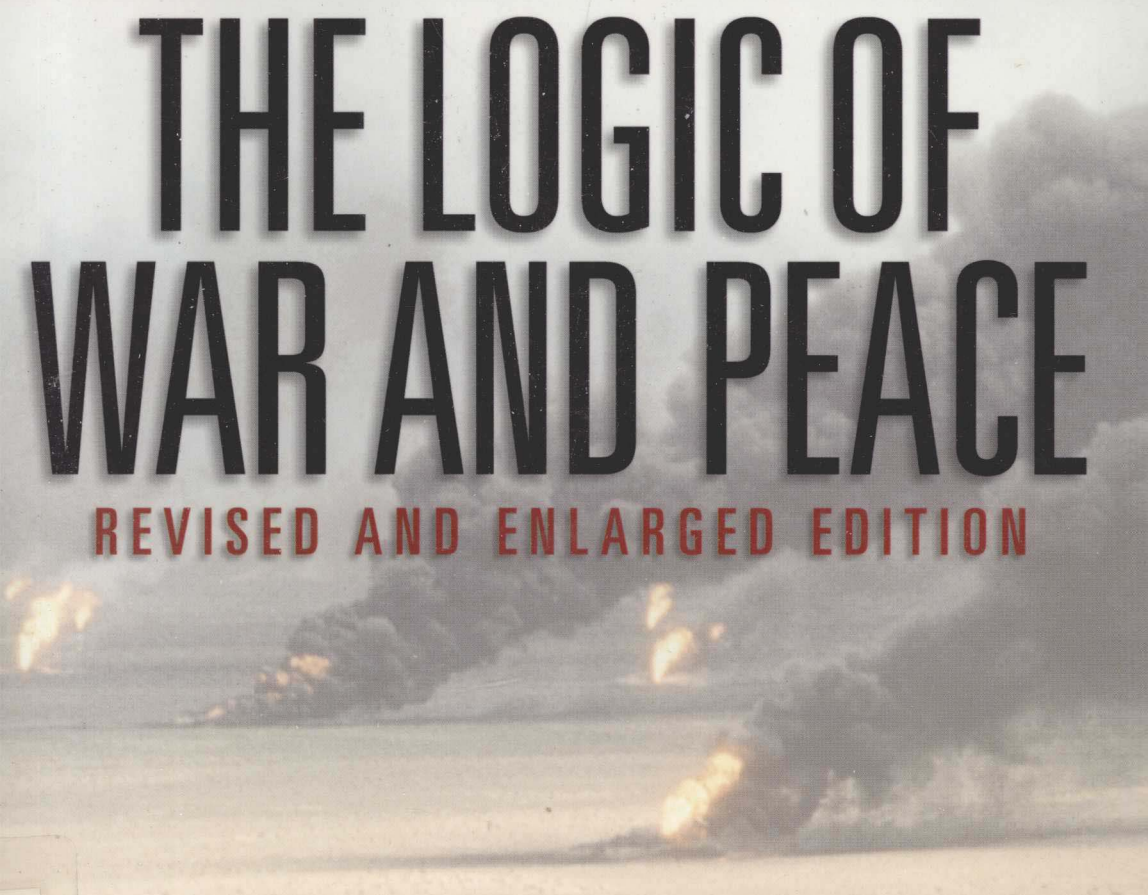# STRATEGY

THE LOGIC OF WAR AND PEACE

REVISED AND ENLARGED EDITION

EDWARD N. LUTTWAK

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To my son, Joseph Emmanuel

Acknowledgments

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Preface

Perhaps it is because I was born in the disputed borderland of Transylvania, during the greatest and most sinister of wars, that strategy has always been my occupation, and also my passion. That is a strong word for a subject both ill-defined and suspect as an encouragement to strife. But to define the inner meaning of strategy is the very purpose of this book, and any excuses become unnecessary once it is recognized that the logic of strategy pervades the upkeep of peace as much as the making of war.

No strategies are here suggested for the United States or any other country. My purpose, rather, is to uncover the universal logic that conditions all forms of war as well as the adversarial dealings of nations even in peace. Whatever humans can do, however absurd or self-destructive, magnificent or sordid, has been done in both war and statecraft, and no logic at all can be detected in the deeds themselves. But the logic of strategy is manifest in the outcome of what is done or not done, and it is by examining those often unintended consequences that the nature and workings of the logic can best be understood.

By now the critical reader will have had reason to pause before the inordinate ambition of this quest. Knowing that the events of war and peace are too irregular to be explained by science in its only proper meaning, namely by theories that can actually predict, one might suspect that only platitudes lie ahead or, worse, the pointless elaborations of pseudo-science. I can only plead that the verdict be deferred till the reading is done—but a word of explanation may be in order.

What became a long journey to a compelling destination began with no such ambitious purpose. In reading the literature of military history, in studying more particularly the Roman and Byzantine empires, in my professional work both as a deskbound military analyst and also in the field in varied conflict settings, I like others before me concluded that each

experience of war is unique, the product of an unrepeatable convergence of political aims, transient emotions, technical limits, tactical moves, operational schemes, and geographical factors. And yet, over the years, tantalizing continuities began to emerge, forming patterns more and more definite, some clarified by the literature of strategy-as-study, chiefly the *On War* of Carl von Clausewitz, while others had seemingly remained undetected. What made the investigation compelling was that these patterns did not conform to commonsense expectations: they were not ordered by any familiar, straightforwardly causal logic.

As a vision of strategy emerged out of the shadows of words read, problems investigated, and warlike events actually experienced, I found that its content was not the prosaic stuff of platitudes, but instead paradox, irony, and contradiction. Moreover, the logic of strategy seemed to unfold in two dimensions: the "horizontal" contentions of adversaries who seek to oppose, deflect, and reverse each other's moves—and that is what makes strategy paradoxical; and the "vertical" interplay of the different levels of conflict, technical, tactical, operational, and higher—among which there is no natural harmony.

What follows, then, is the route map of an exploration. The quest begins in a series of encounters with the dynamic forces of the horizontal dimension; it continues as an ascent, level by level, through the vertical dimension of strategy; and it ends when the confluence of both dimensions is reached, at the level of grand strategy, the level of final results.

Once the original edition was consigned to the printers, I did not cease to study strategy and war, nor did I stop working professionally, in practical ways in the field and as an adviser. Whether from theory or practice, the original idea continued to evolve, yielding the results incorporated in this new edition. They include the novelty of "postheroic" war—the striving to fight without casualties, and its unexpected implications—an analysis of the consequences of interrupting wars by outside intervention, and, in a radically different vein, a reevaluation of the potential and limitations of air bombardment since the advent of routine precision. Thus, although the structure of the book is unchanged, large parts of the text are entirely new, while the rest has been extensively revised and updated. The end of the Cold War has not changed the logic of strategy, but it does call for a somewhat different array of examples.

Contents

PART I

THE LOGIC OF STRATEGY

Si vis pacem, para bellum. If you want peace, prepare war, goes the Roman proverb, still much quoted by speakers preaching the virtues of strong armament. We are told that readiness to fight dissuades attacks that weakness could invite, thus keeping the peace. It is just as true that readiness to fight can ensure peace in quite another way, by persuading the weak to yield to the strong without a fight. Worn down by overuse, the Roman admonition has lost the power to arouse our thoughts, but it is precisely its banality that is revealing: the phrase is of course paradoxical in presenting a blatant contradiction as if it were a straightforwardly logical proposition—and that is scarcely what we would expect in a mere banality.

Why is the contradictory argument accepted so unresistingly, indeed dismissed as obvious? To be sure, there are some who disagree, and the entire academic venture of "peace studies" is dedicated to the proposition that peace should be studied as a phenomenon in itself and actively worked for in real life: *si vis pacem, para pacem,* its advocates might say. But even those who reject the paradoxical advice do not denounce it as a self-evidently foolish contradiction that common sense should sweep away. On the contrary, they see it as a piece of wrongheaded *conventional* wisdom, to which they oppose ideas they themselves would describe as novel and unconventional.

And so the question remains: why is the blatant contradiction so easily accepted? Consider the absurdity of equivalent advice in any sphere of life but the strategic: if you want A, strive for B, its opposite, as in "if you want to lose weight, eat more" or "if you want to become rich, earn less"—surely we would reject

all such. It is only in the realm of strategy, which encompasses *the conduct and consequences of human relations in the context of actual or possible armed conflict,** that we have learned to accept paradoxical propositions as valid. The most obvious example is the entire notion of nuclear "deterrence," so thoroughly absorbed during the Cold War years that to many it seems prosaic. To defend, we must stand ready to attack at all times. To derive their benefit, we must never use the nuclear weapons acquired and maintained at great cost. To be ready to attack—in retaliation—is evidence of peaceful intent, but to prepare antinuclear defenses is aggressive, or at least "provocative"—such are the conventional views on the subject. Controversy over the safety of nuclear deterrence was periodically rekindled during the Cold War, and there was certainly much debate on every detailed aspect of nuclear-weapons policy. But the obvious paradoxes that form the very substance of nuclear deterrence were deemed unremarkable.

The large claim I advance here is that strategy does not merely entail this or that paradoxical proposition, blatantly contradictory and yet thought valid, but rather that *the entire realm of strategy is pervaded by a paradoxical logic* very different from the ordinary "linear" logic by which we live in all other spheres of life. When conflict is absent or merely incidental to purposes of production and consumption, of commerce and culture, of social or familial relations and consensual government,† whenever that is, strife and competition are more or less bound by law and custom, a noncontradictory linear logic rules, whose essence is mere common sense. Within the sphere of strategy, however, where human relations are conditioned by armed conflict actual or possible, another and quite different logic is at work and routinely violates ordinary linear logic by *inducing the coming together and reversal of opposites.* Therefore it tends to reward paradoxical conduct while defeating straightforwardly logical action, yielding results that are ironical or even lethally damaging.

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* Lacking a good definition, *strategy* has many meanings. The word is used variously for strategy as a fixed *doctrine* or merely a plan, to describe actual *practice* or a body of theories. See Appendix A for some standard definitions.

† The politics of repression, by contrast, are warlike, even if bloodless. All its manifestations resemble military operations, with their own versions of attack and defense, of the ambush and the raid. As in war, secrecy and deception are essential: the police seek to infiltrate dissident circles by deception, while for the dissidents secrecy is survival, and surprise is indispensable for any action.

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The Conscious Use of Paradox in War

Consider an ordinary tactical choice, of the sort frequently made in war. To move toward its objective, an advancing force can choose between two roads, one good and one bad, the first broad, direct, and well paved, the second narrow, circuitous, and unpaved. Only in the paradoxical realm of strategy would the choice arise at all, because it is only in war that a bad road can be good *precisely because it is bad* and may therefore be less strongly defended or even left unguarded by the enemy. Equally, the good road can be bad precisely because it is the much better road, whose use by the advancing force is more likely to be anticipated and opposed. In this case, the paradoxical logic of strategy reaches the extreme of a full reversal: instead of *A* moving toward its opposite *B*, as war preparation is supposed to preserve peace, *A* actually becomes *B*, and *B* becomes *A*.

Nor is this example contrived. On the contrary, a paradoxical preference for *inefficient* methods of action, for preparations left visibly incomplete, for approaches seemingly too dangerous, for combat at night or in bad weather, is a common expression of tactical ingenuity—and for a reason that derives from the essential nature of war. Although each separate element in its conduct can be quite simple for a well-trained force, a matter of moving from one place to another, of using weapons in ways drilled a hundred times before, of issuing and understanding clear-cut orders, the *totality* of those simple things can become enormously complicated when there is a live enemy opposite, who is reacting to undo everything being attempted, with his own mind and his own strength.

First there are the merely mechanical complications that arise when action is opposed by the enemy's reaction, as in the naval battles of the age of sail in which each side tried to present broadside guns to impotent prow or hull; as in the classic gun combat of fighter aircraft, when each

pilot seeks to position himself behind the enemy; and as in land combat perpetually, whenever there are strong fronts, weak flanks, and weaker rears that induce reciprocal attempts to outflank and penetrate fronts. To think faster than the enemy, to be more clever in shaping the action *may* count for much (although good tactics may be bad, as we shall see) but cannot in themselves overcome the elemental difficulty created by the enemy's use of his own force, of his own deadly weapons, of his own mind and will. In the imminence of possible death, the simplest action that increases exposure to danger will remain undone unless all sorts of complex intangibles—of individual morale, of group cohesion, and of leadership—can overcome the individual instinct for survival. And once the central importance of these intangibles is duly recognized in what happens and fails to happen, no simplicity remains even in the most elementary of tactical actions conducted against a living, reacting enemy.

To obtain the advantage of an enemy who cannot react because he is surprised and unready, or at least of an enemy who cannot react promptly and in full force, all sorts of paradoxical choices may be justified. Violating commonsense criteria of what is best and most efficient—as the shorter route is preferable to the longer, as daylight is preferable to the confusions of the night, as completed preparations are preferable to hurried improvisations—the bad option may deliberately be chosen in the hope that the unfolding action will be not be expected by the enemy, thus diminishing his ability to react. Surprise in war can now be recognized for what it is: not merely one advantage among many, such as material superiority or a better initial position, *but rather the suspension, if only brief, if only partial, of the entire predicament of strategy.* Against a nonreacting enemy or, more realistically, within the limits of time and space of the surprise actually achieved, the conduct of war becomes mere administration, as simple in its total reality as each one of its elements seems to be simple in theory.

Although a widely influential thesis for the conduct of war has been erected on this one proposition,* advising paradoxical choices whenever possible in order to shape military action according to the "line of least expectation," the advice is routinely ignored, and with good reason.

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* This is Basil Liddell Hart's "indirect approach"; his ideas on the subject are scattered in biographies and diverse books and articles. For a coherent exposition, see Brian Bond, *Liddell Hart* (1977), pp. 37–61.

The Costs of Surprise

Each paradoxical choice made for the sake of surprise must be paid for, it must cause some loss of strength. In ground combat, the longer or more difficult route will tire men, wear out vehicles, and consume more supplies, and if the approach to combat is at all difficult or simply long, it will increase the proportion of stragglers who do not reach the fight when they are needed. Even with the best night-vision devices, forces cannot be deployed and moved so well, nor weapons used as effectively, at night as in clear daylight, and some, much, or even most of the strength in hand may therefore be less effective or even inactive during the fight. Similarly, to act more rapidly than an enemy might expect, on the basis of his own calculations of how long preparations should take, normally requires shortcuts and improvisations that prevent the full use of the men and machines that might otherwise be available for combat. More generally, all forms of *maneuver*—paradoxical action that seeks to circumvent the greater strengths of the enemy and to exploit his weaknesses—will have their costs, regardless of the medium and nature of combat. (The word "maneuver" is often misused to describe mere movement. Actually there may be no movement at all; but the action must be paradoxical because the enemy's strengths will presumably be arrayed against the expected forms of action.)

As for secrecy and deception, the two agencies of surprise that often set the stage for maneuver, they too exact some costs of their own. The strictest secrecy is often recommended to those who practice war as if it were costless, but an enemy can rarely be denied all knowledge of an impeding action without sacrificing valuable preparations. Stringent security measures will usually interfere with the early alert and thorough organization of the forces involved in the fight; they may limit the collection of intelligence and restrict the scope of the planning effort, excluding expertise that might be useful; they will constrain the scope and realism of exercises that can greatly improve performance in many forms of combat and that are especially necessary if the action to come is inherently complicated, as in amphibious landings or elaborate commando operations. And of course every limitation imposed on the assembly and preliminary approach of the combat forces for the sake of surprise will leave them less well positioned than they might have been. One reason for the April 25, 1980, failure of the Desert One raid that was meant to rescue U.S. diplomats then captive in Iran, was that very strict security measures (later judged excessive) prevented joint rehearsals by the army, air force, and

marine units involved, which came together only on the scene itself in a remote wasteland of southeast Iran, with deadly consequences: diverse procedures had not been harmonized, the chain of command was unclear, and orders were misunderstood or even ignored. On a far wider scale, offensives such as the German Barbarossa invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941 and Japan's Pearl Harbor air raid of December 7, 1941, successfully achieved surprise only by sacrificing valuable preparations that might have made the intent too obvious.* Nothing can be had for nothing in war. With secrecy rarely absolute, the leakage of the truth can be countered only by deception, in the hope that the "signals" generated by all that is done to prepare for action will be submerged by the contrived "noise" of misleading, outdated, or just irrelevant information.†

Deception can sometimes be achieved without any loss of strength by well-planted lies alone. But more often it will require substantive diversionary actions that misdirect the observant enemy because they do not contribute much or anything to the intended purpose, thereby detracting strength from it. Bombers sent to attack secondary targets to divert attention from aircraft headed toward the major objective will still inflict some damage if only at a less critical point; but ships sent out as a feint, whose only duty is to turn back as soon as the enemy has set course in their direction, may not contribute anything at all to the fight. More commonly, the use of (passive) dummies and (active) decoys of any kind, from fake tanks and guns or complete units, to flying or navigating decoys that simulate specific aircraft or submarines, are much cheaper than the real thing but still absorb resources that would otherwise increase the strength on hand. That was certainly true of the most successful deception campaign in modern military history, the masking of the June 1944 D-day landings in Normandy. The "turning" of German spies to have them report that the Allies would land their main forces far to the north in the Pas de Calais was almost costless, as well as enduringly effective: even after D-day, the Germans were persuaded that the Normandy landings were only a feint and still expected the major attack in the Pas de Calais—the shortest crossing of the English Channel after all. But great quantities of dummies were produced at considerable cost to ensure that German air reconnaissance would also report that vast armies were waiting to cross the Channel (in

* Some German units were kept back; the Japanese did without overflights that would have revealed the absence of aircraft carriers on the crucial day.

† These communications engineering terms were imported into strategic discourse by Roberta Wohlstetter in her seminal study of surprise: *Pearl Harbor* (1962).

the event that effort was wasted, for the Luftwaffe was no longer capable of penetrating Allied air defenses with its slow reconnaissance aircraft).

All that is done by way of paradoxical action as well as secrecy and deception must weaken the overall effort and perhaps greatly, but surprise yields its advantage whenever the enemy's reaction is weakened to an even greater extent. At the limit, surprise could in theory best be achieved by acting in a manner so completely paradoxical as to be utterly self-defeating: if almost the entire force available is used to mislead, leaving only a faction of it for the real fight, the enemy should certainly be surprised, but the venture will most likely be easily defeated even by an enemy completely unprepared. Obviously the paradoxical path of "least expectation" must stop short of self-defeating extremes, but beyond that it is a matter of probabilistic calculations neither safe nor precise.

Risk

When embarking on deliberately paradoxical action, the loss of some strength is certain but success in actually achieving surprise can only be hoped for. And while the costs of paradoxical action can be tightly calculated, the likelihood and extent of the benefit must remain uncertain until the deed is done. In theory at least, risks too can be calculated, and indeed there is an entire discipline—and profession—of "risk analysis." But failures to achieve surprise are damaging and possibly catastrophic not only because of the strength deliberately sacrificed that is absent from the fight (the starting point of risk-management calculations) but also because of the psychological impact of the collision between optimistic expectations and harsh reality. Whoever plans a surprise attack is speculating on the outcome, much as does a stock market operator who knowingly invests in high-risk paper. Both can fail, but no stock market investor is summoned to fight in deadly combat immediately after seeing his hopes of easy success cruelly disappointed. The bloodiest defeats of the First World War, and most famously the ruinous collapse of the 1917 Nivelle offensive that wrecked the French army, ensued from failed attempts to achieve surprise. Inflexible battle plans that fed more and more units into the fight—with railways and land-line telephony no greater flexibility was possible—resulted in massacres when enough enemy strength survived the preliminary bombardment of massed artillery (the intended instrument of surprise) to cut down the advancing infantry with machine-gun and mortar fire.

The failure of surprise was also a key reason for the German defeat in the July 1943 battle of Kursk, arguably the turning point of the Second World War in Europe. The strongest armored forces of the German army (including all three Waffen SS Panzer divisions) with a total of two thousand tanks were sent to penetrate and cut off from both sides a two-hundred-mile bulge in front of and on both sides of Kursk. On the map, that vast protrusion looked very vulnerable. But instead of a fast advance and an easy victory, the Germans were trapped in multiple layers of elaborate antitank defenses shielded by dense minefields. Behind them, massed Soviet tank units were waiting to counterattack. In the ensuing fight, the Soviet army for the first time defeated the Germans in their own specialty of mobile armored warfare; the exhausted Germans had lost not only many men, tanks, and self-propelled guns to mines and antitank guns before the armor-against-armor combat had even began, but also their confidence: it was all too evident that the third and final German summer offensive of the war had utterly failed to achieve any sort of surprise. Well served by its spies, scouts, and air reconnaissance and by the fruits of Anglo-American communications intelligence (by then much German radio traffic was routinely decrypted), Soviet Intelligence had uncovered the German plan. Overcoming doubts and suspicions, Stalin with his high command had taken the risk of trusting the intelligence assessment (it had been catastrophically wrong in the past), weakening all other parts of the thousand-mile front to defend the Kursk sector most strongly. The German army never recovered from its defeat; after the summer of 1943, it could only resist the relentless Soviet advance with local counterattacks, lacking the strength for any major offensive that offered any hope of victory.

Friction

The entire purpose of striving to achieve surprise is to diminish the risk of exposure to the enemy's strength—the *combat* risk, that is. But there is also another kind of risk, perhaps not deadly in itself to any one unit in the fight but potentially even more dangerous to the entire force.

That second kind of risk, which tends to increase with any deviation from the simplicities of the direct approach and the frontal attack, is the *organizational* risk of failure in implementing whatever is intended—that is, failure caused not by the enemy's reaction but rather by ordinary errors, misunderstandings, delays, and mechanical breakdowns in the de-

ployment, supply, planning, command, and operation of military forces. When the attempt is made to reduce anticipated combat risks by any form of paradoxical action, including maneuver, secrecy, and deception, the overall action will tend to become more complicated and more extended, thereby increasing organizational risks.

In between episodes of actual combat that might be quite brief, it is the organizational aspect of warfare that looms largest for those charged with its conduct. Again, every single thing that must be done to supply, maintain, command, and operate the armed forces may be simple. Yet in their totality those simple things become so complicated that the natural state of military forces of any size is a paralyzed immobility, from which only strong leadership and discipline can generate any purposeful action.

Imagine a group of friends setting out for a trip to the beach, in several automobiles, carrying as many families. They were to meet at the best-placed house at 9:00 A.M. and immediately drive out so as to reach their destination by 11:00 A.M. One of the families was already in its car, all set to drive out to the rendezvous, when a child announced urgent need; the locked house was unlocked, the child went and came back, the car was restarted, and the rendezvous was reached with only brief delay by 9:15. A second family, which had a longer drive to the rendezvous, was somewhat more seriously delayed: an essential picnic box had been forgotten. Its absence was discovered almost within sight of the rendezvous, and by the time the long drive back was done, the box found, and the meeting finally joined, it was nearer 10:00 than 9:00.

A third family caused even greater delay: with everything loaded and everyone aboard, the car would not start—the battery was depleted. After familiar remedies were tried as time passed, there was a longer wait for a towtruck with its stronger batteries. Once the engine finally started, the driving was impatiently fast, but by the time the third family arrived at the rendezvous it was well after 10:00. Still the journey could not begin. Some children had been waiting for more than an hour, and now it was their turn to ask for a brief delay. By the time everyone was ready, the road to the beach was no longer uncrowded, and instead of the planned two hours the journey lasted for over three—including unscheduled stops for one car's refueling and for another family's cold drinks. In the end the beach was reached, but by then the planned arrival time of 11:00 had long passed.

At no point was our imaginary group impeded by the active will of an enemy; everything that happened was the consequence of unintended delays and petty accidents, akin to the *friction* that impedes the workings