
Introduction

The Study of Strategy

“The nation that draws too great a distinction between its scholars and its warriors will have its thinking done by cowards and its fighting done by fools.”¹

—Unknown

Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication (MCDP) 1, *Warfighting*, stresses that war is fundamentally political in character and that war must serve policy. What matters ultimately in war is strategic success: attainment of our political aims and the protection of our national interests. History shows that national leaders, both political and military, who fail to understand this relationship sow the seeds for ultimate failure—even when their armed forces achieve initial battlefield success. Battlefield brilliance seldom rescues a bad strategy.

The United States Marine Corps is a key instrument in the execution of American national strategy. Marine expeditionary forces possess extraordinary strategic reach. As an expeditionary force-in-readiness, the Marine Corps has been consistently called upon to implement key elements of our national security strategy and its supporting national military strategy. While the Marine Corps is not a strategy-making organization in the sense of designing a national military strategy or even drafting strategies to fight particular wars, the effective execution of strategy requires an understanding of both its intent and its context. In order to carry out our responsibilities to the Nation, Marines must possess the strategic skills and understanding necessary to participate effectively in the strategic environment of the 21st century

There are three important reasons to develop a fundamental understanding of strategy:

- Marines will find themselves working for senior leaders who participate directly in the development of strategy. Such leaders need subordinates who understand their requirements and the environment they work in.
- An understanding of how strategy is made allows Marines to see the larger picture. It enables them to better grasp the intent that underlies the military actions in which they participate and the constraints placed upon the use of military force during these actions. It also helps Marine leaders provide useful answers to questions posed by their subordinates concerning the purpose and objectives behind our involvement in a particular operation.
- By the very nature of their profession, all Marines are engaged in the execution of strategy. Every military action has potential strategic implications. Modern media coverage has intensified both the awareness of and sensitivity towards any military action. Marines must understand that the “distance” between local or tactical actions and the effects of these actions at the strategic or political level may be very short. Sometimes a seemingly unimportant action by any participant—a general, a platoon leader, or even one single Marine—can have a powerful political impact.

MCDP 1-1 focuses on military strategy in its most fundamental sense, exploring the question “How do military means relate to political ends?” It provides a conceptual basis to help us to understand both our own and our enemies’ political and military objectives, the relationships among them, and the nature of any particular situation in which military means might be used. It explores how political entities integrate military means with the other elements of their power in order to attain their political ends. A common conceptual understanding of these matters helps *Marines develop the adaptability that our warfighting philosophy demands.*