
Conclusion

“Those who know when to fight and when not to fight are victorious. Those who discern when to use many or few troops are victorious. Those whose upper and lower ranks have the same desire are victorious. Those who face the unprepared with preparation are victorious.”¹

—Sun Tzu

At the risk of belaboring a point, we will repeat for the last time that tactical success of itself does not necessarily bring strategic success. "It is possible to win all the battles and still lose the war. If the battles do not lead to the achievement of the strategic objective, then, successful or not, they are just so much wasted effort."² Strategic success that attains the objectives of policy is the military goal in war. Thus we recognize the need for a discipline of the military art that synthesizes tactical results to create the military conditions that induce strategic success. We have discussed the campaign as the principal vehicle by which we accomplish this synthesis.

Understandably perhaps, as tactics has long been a Marine Corps strength, we tend to focus on the tactical aspects of war to the neglect of the operational aspects. This neglect may be also caused by the often contradictory virtues of the two levels: the headlong tactical focus on winning in combat (and the spoiling-for-a-fight mentality it necessarily promotes) compared to the operational desire to use combat sparingly. As we have seen, actions at the higher levels in the hierarchy of war tend to overpower actions at the lower levels, and neglect of the operational level can prove disastrous even in the face of tactical competence. Without an operational design which synthesizes tactical results into a coalescent whole, what passes for operations is simply the accumulation of tactical victories.

Tactical competence can rarely attain victory in the face of operational incompetence, while operational ignorance can squander what tactical hard work has gained. As the price of war is human lives, it is therefore incumbent upon every commander to attain the objective as economically as possible. Operational leaders must understand strategic issues and the fundamentally political nature of all strategic goals. The design and conduct of a successful campaign results from a clear understanding of the relationship between strategic and operational objectives, the interaction between the military and other instruments of national power, and the need for judicious and effective use of combat to achieve the objectives.