Chapter 2

The Theory of War

"The political object is the goal, war is the means of reaching it, and the means can never be considered in isolation from their purposes."[1]

—Carl von Clausewitz

"Invincibility lies in the defense; the possibility of victory in the attack. One defends when his strength is inadequate; he attacks when it is abundant."[2]

—Sun Tzu

"Battles are won by slaughter and manoeuver. The greater the general, the more he contributes in manoeuver, the less he demands in slaughter."[3]

—Winston Churchill

Having arrived at a common view of the nature of war, we proceed to develop from it a theory of war. Our theory of war will in turn be the foundation for the way we prepare for and wage war.

WAR AS AN ACT OF POLICY

War is an extension of both policy and politics with the addition of military force.[4] Policy and politics are related but not synonymous, and it is important to understand war in both contexts. Politics refers to the distribution of power through dynamic interaction, both cooperative and competitive, while policy refers to the conscious objectives established within the political process. The policy aims that are the motive for any group in war should also be the foremost determinants of its conduct. The single most important thought to understand about our theory is that war *must serve policy*.

As the policy aims of war may vary from resistance against aggression to the unconditional surrender of an enemy government, so should the application of violence vary in accordance with those aims. Of course, we may also have to adjust our policy objectives to accommodate our chosen means. This means that we must not establish goals outside our capabilities. It is important to recognize that many political problems cannot be solved by military means. Some can, but rarely as

anticipated. War tends to take its own course as it unfolds. We should recognize that war is not an inanimate instrument, but an animate force which may likely have unintended consequences that may change the political situation.

To say that war is an extension of politics and policy is not to say that war is strictly a political phenomenon: It also contains social, cultural, psychological, and other elements. These can also exert a strong influence on the conduct of war as well as on war's usefulness for solving political problems.

When the policy motive of war is extreme, such as the destruction of an enemy government, then war's natural military tendency toward destruction will coincide with the political aim, and there will tend to be few political restrictions on the military conduct of war. On the other hand, the more limited the policy motive, the more the military tendency toward destruction may be at variance with that motive, and the more likely political considerations will restrict the application of military force.[5] Commanders must recognize that since military action must serve policy, these political restrictions on military action may be perfectly correct. At the same time, military leaders have a responsibility to advise the political leadership when the limitations imposed on military action jeopardize the military's ability to accomplish its assigned mission.

There are two ways to use military force to impose our will on an enemy. The first is to make the enemy helpless to resist

us by physically destroying his military capabilities. The aim is the elimination, permanent or temporary, of the enemy's military power. This has historically been called a *strategy of annihilation*, although it does not necessarily require the physical annihilation of all military forces. Instead, it requires the enemy's incapacitation as a viable military threat, and thus can also be called a *strategy of incapacitation*.[6] We use force in this way when we seek an unlimited political objective, such as the overthrow of the enemy leadership. We may also use this strategy in pursuit of more limited political objectives if we believe the enemy will continue to resist as long as any means to do so remain.

The second approach is to convince the enemy that accepting our terms will be less painful than continuing to resist. This is a *strategy of erosion*, using military force to erode the enemy leadership's will.[7] In such a strategy, we use military force to raise the costs of resistance higher than the enemy is willing to pay. We use force in this manner in pursuit of limited political goals that we believe the enemy leadership will ultimately be willing to accept.

MEANS IN WAR

At the highest level, war involves the use of all the elements of power that one political group can bring to bear against

another. These include, for example, economic, diplomatic, military, and psychological forces. Our primary concern is with the use of *military force*. Nevertheless, while we focus on the use of military force, we must not consider it in isolation from the other elements of national power. The use of military force may take any number of forms from the mere deployment of forces as a demonstration of resolve to the enforcement of a negotiated truce to general warfare with sophisticated weaponry.

THE SPECTRUM OF CONFLICT

Conflict can take a wide range of forms constituting a spectrum which reflects the magnitude of violence involved. At one end of the spectrum are those actions referred to as military operations other than war in which the application of military power is usually restrained and selective. Military operations other than war encompass the use of a broad range of military capabilities to deter war, resolve conflict, promote peace, and support civil authorities. At the other end of the spectrum is general war, a large-scale, sustained combat operation such as global conflict between major powers. Where on the spectrum to place a particular conflict depends on several factors. Among them are policy objectives, available military means, national will, and density of fighting forces or combat power on the battlefield. In general, the greater this

density, the more intense the conflict. Each conflict is not uniformly intense. As a result, we may witness relatively intense actions within a military operation other than war or relatively quiet sectors or phases in a major regional conflict or general war.

Military operations other than war and small wars are more probable than a major regional conflict or general war. Many political groups simply do not possess the military means to wage war at the high end of the spectrum. Many who fight a technologically or numerically superior enemy may choose to fight in a way that does not justify the enemy's full use of that superiority. Unless actual survival is at stake, political groups are generally unwilling to accept the risks associated with general war. However, a conflict's intensity may change over time. Belligerents may escalate the level of violence if the original means do not achieve the desired results. Similarly, wars may actually de-escalate over time; for example, after an initial pulse of intense violence, the belligerents may continue to fight on a lesser level, unable to sustain the initial level of intensity.

The Marine Corps, as the nation's force-in-readiness, must have the versatility and flexibility to deal with a situation at any intensity across the entire spectrum of conflict. This is a greater challenge than it may appear: Military operations other than war and small wars are not simply lesser forms of general war. A modern military force capable of waging a war against a large conventional force may find itself

ill-prepared for a "small" war against a lightly equipped guerrilla force.

LEVELS OF WAR

Activities in war take place at several interrelated levels which form a hierarchy. These levels are the strategic, operational, and tactical. (See figure 1.)

The highest level is the *strategic* level.[8] Activities at the strategic level focus directly on policy objectives. Strategy applies to peace as well as war. We distinguish between *national strategy*, which coordinates and focuses all the elements of national power to attain the policy objectives,[9] and *military strategy*, which is the application of military force to secure the policy objectives.[10] Military strategy thus is subordinate to national strategy. Military strategy can be thought of as the art of winning wars and securing peace. Strategy involves establishing goals, assigning forces, providing assets, and imposing conditions on the use of force in theaters of war. Strategy derived from political and policy objectives must be clearly understood to be the sole authoritative basis for all operations.

The lowest level is the *tactical* level.[11] Tactics refers to the concepts and methods used to accomplish a particular mission

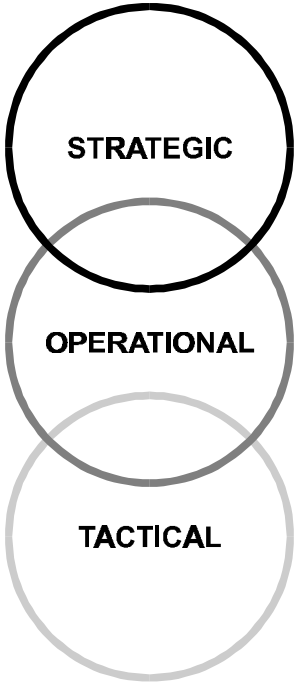

Figure 1. The Levels of War.

in either combat or other military operations. In war, tactics focuses on the application of combat power to defeat an enemy force in combat at a particular time and place. In noncombat situations, tactics may include the schemes and methods by which we perform other missions, such as enforcing order and maintaining security during peacekeeping op- erations. We normally think of tactics in terms of combat, and

in this context tactics can be thought of as the art and science of winning engagements and battles. It includes the use of firepower and maneuver, the integration of different arms, and the immediate exploitation of success to defeat the enemy. Included within the tactical level of war is the performance of combat service support functions such as resupply or maintenance. The tactical level also includes the *technical* application of combat power, which consists of those techniques and procedures for accomplishing specific tasks *within* a tactical action. These include the call for fire, techniques of fire, the operation of weapons and equipment, and tactical movement techniques. There is a certain overlap between tactics and techniques. We make the point only to draw the distinction between tactics, which requires judgment and creativity, and techniques and procedures, which generally involves repetitive routine.

The *operational* level of war links the strategic and tactical levels. It is the use of tactical results to attain strategic objectives.[12] The operational level includes deciding when, where, and under what conditions to engage the enemy in battle—and when, where, and under what conditions to *refuse* battle in support of higher aims. Actions at this level imply a broader dimension of time and space than actions at the tactical level. As strategy deals with winning wars and tactics with winning battles and engagements, the operational level of war is the art and science of winning campaigns. Its means are tactical results, and its ends are the established strategic objectives.

The distinctions between levels of war are rarely clearly delineated in practice. They are to some extent only a matter of scope and scale. Usually there is some amount of overlap as a single commander may have responsibilities at more than one level. As shown in figure 1, the overlap may be slight. This will likely be the case in large-scale, conventional conflicts involving large military formations and multiple theaters. In such cases, there are fairly distinct strategic, operational, and tactical domains, and most commanders will find their activities focused at one level or another. However, in other cases, the levels of war may compress so that there is significant overlap, as shown in figure 2. Especially in either a nuclear war or a military operation other than war, a single commander may operate at two or even three levels simultaneously. In a nuclear war, strategic decisions about the direction of the war and tactical decisions about the employment

Figure 2. The Levels of War Compressed.

of weapons are essentially one and the same. In a military operation other than war, even a small-unit leader, for example, may find that "tactical" actions have direct strategic implications.

INITIATIVE AND RESPONSE

All actions in war, regardless of the level, are based upon either taking the *initiative* or reacting in *response* to the opponent. By taking the initiative, we dictate the terms of the conflict and force the enemy to meet us on our terms. The initiative allows us to pursue some positive aim even if only to preempt an enemy initiative. It is through the initiative that we seek to impose our will on the enemy. The initiative is clearly the preferred form of action because only through the initiative can we ultimately impose our will on the enemy. At least one party to a conflict must take the initiative for without the desire to impose upon the other, there would be no conflict. The second party to a conflict must respond for without the desire to resist, there again would be no conflict. If we cannot take the initiative and the enemy does, we are compelled to respond in order to counteract the enemy's attempts. The response generally has a negative aim, that of negating—blocking or counterattacking—the enemy's inten- tions. Like a counterpunch in boxing, the response often has as its object seizing the initiative from the opponent.

The flux of war is a product of the continuous interaction between initiative and response. We can imagine a conflict in which both belligerents try to take the initiative simultaneously—as in a meeting engagement, for example. After the initial clash, one of them will gain the upper hand, and the other will be compelled to respond—at least until able to wrestle the initiative away from the other. Actions in war more or less reflect the constant imperative to seize and maintain the initiative.

This discussion leads to a related pair of concepts: the *offense* and *defense*. The offense contributes *striking power*. We normally associate the offense with initiative: The most obvious way to seize and maintain the initiative is to strike first and keep striking. The defense, on the other hand, contributes *resisting power*, the ability to preserve and protect ourselves. The defense generally has a negative aim, that of resisting the enemy's will.

The defense tends to be the more efficient form of warfare—meaning that it tends to expend less energy—which is not the same as saying the defense is inherently the stronger form of warfare. The relative advantages and disadvantages of offense and defense are situationally dependent. Because we typically think of the defense as waiting for the enemy to strike, we often associate the defense with response rather than initiative. This is not necessarily true. We do not necessarily assume the defensive only out of weakness. For example, the defense may confer the initiative if the enemy is

compelled to attack into the strength of our defense. Under such conditions, we may have the positive aim of destroying the enemy. Similarly, a defender waiting in ambush may have the initiative if the enemy can be brought into the trap. The defense may be another way of striking at the enemy.

While opposing forms, the offense and defense are not mutually exclusive. In fact, they cannot exist separately. For example, the defense cannot be purely passive resistance. An effective defense must assume an offensive character, striking at the moment of the enemy's greatest vulnerability. As Clausewitz wrote, the defense is "not a simple shield, but a shield made up of well-directed blows."[13] The truly decisive element of the defense is the counterattack. Thus, the offense is an integral component of the concept of the defense.

Similarly, the defense is an essential component of the offense. The offense cannot sustain itself indefinitely. At some times and places, it becomes necessary to halt the offense to replenish, and the defense automatically takes over. Furthermore, the requirement to concentrate forces for the offensive often necessitates assuming the defensive elsewhere. Therefore, out of necessity, we must include defensive considerations as part of our concept of the offense.

This brings us to the concept of the *culminating point*,[14] without which our understanding of the relationship between the offense and defense would be incomplete. Not only can

the offense not sustain itself indefinitely, but also it generally grows weaker as it advances. Certain moral factors, such as morale or boldness, may increase with a successful attack, but these very often cannot compensate for the physical losses involved in sustaining an advance in the face of resistance. We advance at a cost in lives, fuel, ammunition, and physical and sometimes moral strength, and so the attack becomes weaker over time. Enemy resistance, of course, is a major factor in the dissipation of strength. Eventually, we reach the culminating point at which we can no longer sustain the attack and must revert to the defense. It is precisely at this point that the defensive element of the offense is most vulnerable to the offensive element of the defense, the counterattack.

We conclude that there exists no clear division between the offense and defense. Our theory of war should not attempt to impose one artificially. The offense and defense exist simultaneously as necessary components of each other, and the transition from one to the other is fluid and continuous.

These relationships between initiative and response, offense and defense, exist simultaneously at the various levels of war. We may seize the initiative locally as part of a larger response—in a limited counterattack, for example. Likewise, we may employ a tactical defense as part of an offensive campaign, availing ourselves of the advantages of the defense tactically while pursuing an operational offensive aim.

STYLES OF WARFARE

Styles in warfare can be described by their place on a spectrum of attrition and maneuver.[15] Warfare by attrition pursues victory through the cumulative destruction of the enemy's material assets by superior firepower. It is a direct approach to the conduct of war that sees war as a straightforward test of strength and a matter principally of force ratios. An enemy is seen as a collection of targets to be engaged and destroyed systematically. Enemy concentrations are sought out as the most worthwhile targets. The logical conclusion of attrition warfare is the eventual physical destruction of the enemy's entire arsenal, although the expectation is that the enemy will surrender or disengage before this happens out of unwillingness to bear the rising cost. The focus is on the efficient application of fires, leading to a highly proceduralized approach to war. Technical proficiency—especially in weapons employment—matters more than cunning or creativity.

Attrition warfare may recognize maneuver as an important component but sees its purpose as merely to allow us to bring our fires more efficiently to bear on the enemy. The attritionist tends to gauge progress in quantitative terms: battle damage assessments, "body counts," and terrain captured. Results are generally proportionate to efforts; greater expenditures net greater results—that is, greater attrition. The desire for volume and accuracy of fire tends to lead toward centralized control, just as the emphasis on efficiency tends to lead to an

inward focus on procedures and techniques. Success depends on an overall superiority in attritional capacity—that is, the ability to inflict *and* absorb attrition. The greatest necessity for success is numerical and material superiority. At the national level, war becomes as much an industrial as a military problem. Historically, nations and militaries that perceived they were numerically and technologically superior have often adopted warfare by attrition.

Pure attrition warfare does not exist in practice, but examples of warfare with a high attrition content are plentiful: the operations of both sides on the Western Front of the First World War; the French defensive tactics and operations against the Germans in May 1940; the Allied campaign in Italy in 1943-1944; Eisenhower's broad-front offensive in Europe after Normandy in 1944; U.S. operations in Korea after 1950; and most U.S. operations in the Vietnam War.

On the opposite end of the spectrum is warfare by maneuver which stems from a desire to circumvent a problem and attack it from a position of advantage rather than meet it straight on. Rather than pursuing the cumulative destruction of every component in the enemy arsenal, the goal is to attack the enemy "system"—to incapacitate the enemy *systemically*. Enemy components may remain untouched but cannot function as part of a cohesive whole. Rather than being viewed as desirable targets, enemy concentrations are generally avoided as enemy strengths. Instead of attacking enemy strength, the goal is the application of our strength against selected enemy

weakness in order to maximize *advantage*. This tack requires the ability to identify and exploit such weakness. Success depends not so much on the efficient performance of procedures and techniques, but on understanding the specific characteristics of the enemy system. Maneuver relies on speed and surprise for without either we cannot concentrate strength against enemy weakness. Tempo is itself a weapon—often the most important. Success by maneuver—unlike attrition—is often disproportionate to the effort made. However, for exactly the same reasons, maneuver incompetently applied carries with it a greater chance for catastrophic failure. With attrition, potential losses tend to be proportionate to risks incurred.

Firepower and attrition are essential elements of warfare by maneuver. In fact, at the critical point, where strength has been focused against enemy vulnerability, attrition may be extreme and may involve the outright annihilation of enemy elements. Nonetheless, the object of such local attrition is not merely to contribute incrementally to the overall wearing down of the entire enemy force, but to eliminate a key element which incapacitates the enemy systemically.

Like attrition warfare, maneuver warfare does not exist in its theoretically pure form. Examples of warfare with a high enough maneuver content that they can be considered maneuver warfare include Allenby's decisive campaign against the Turks in Palestine in 1918; German *Blitzkrieg* operations of 1939-1941, most notably the invasion of France in 1940; the

failed Allied landing at Anzio in 1944, which was an effort to avoid the attrition battles of the Italian theater; Patton's breakout from the Normandy beachhead in late 1944; MacArthur's Inchon campaign in 1950; and III Marine Amphibious Force's combined action program in Vietnam which attacked the Viet Cong by eliminating their essential popular support base through the pacification of rural villages.

All warfare involves both maneuver and attrition in some mix. The predominant style depends on a variety of factors, not least of which are our own capabilities and the nature of the enemy. Marine Corps doctrine today is based principally on warfare by maneuver, as we will see in the fourth chapter, "The Conduct of War."

COMBAT POWER

Combat power is the total destructive force we can bring to bear on our enemy at a given time.[16] Some factors in combat power are quite tangible and easily measured such as superior numbers, which Clausewitz called "the most common element in victory."[17] Some may be less easily measured such as the effects of maneuver, tempo, or surprise; the advantages conferred by geography or climate; the relative strengths of the offense and defense; or the relative merits of striking the enemy in the front, flanks, or rear. Some may be wholly

intangible such as morale, fighting spirit, perseverance, or the effects of leadership.

It is not our intent to try to list or categorize all the various components of combat power, to index their relative values, or to describe their combinations and variations; each combination is unique and temporary. Nor is it even desirable to be able to do so, since this would lead us to a formulaic approach to war. Our intent is merely to make the point that combat power is the situationally dependent and unique product of a variety of physical, moral, and mental factors.

SPEED AND FOCUS

Of all the consistent patterns we can discern in war, there are two concepts of universal significance in generating combat power: *speed* and *focus*.

Speed is rapidity of action. It applies to both time and space. Speed over time is tempo—the consistent ability to operate quickly.[18] Speed over distance, or space, is the ability to move rapidly. Both forms are genuine sources of combat power. In other words, *speed is a weapon*. In war, it is relative speed that matters rather than absolute speed. Superior speed allows us to seize the initiative and dictate the terms of

action, forcing the enemy to react to us. Speed provides security. It is a prerequisite for maneuver and for surprise. Moreover, speed is necessary in order to concentrate superior strength at the decisive time and place.

Since it is relative speed that matters, it follows that we should take all measures to improve our own speed while degrading our enemy's. However, experience shows that we cannot sustain a high rate of speed indefinitely. As a result, a pattern develops: fast, slow, fast again. A competitive rhythm develops in combat with each belligerent trying to generate speed when it is advantageous.

Focus is the convergence of *effects* in time and space on some objective. It is the generation of superior combat power at a particular time and place. Focus may achieve decisive local superiority for a numerically inferior force. The willingness to focus at the decisive place and time necessitates strict economy and the acceptance of risk elsewhere and at other times. To devote means to unnecessary efforts or excessive means to necessary secondary efforts violates the principle of focus and is counterproductive to the true objective. Focus applies not only to the conduct of war but also to the preparation for war.

Since war is fluid and opportunities are fleeting, focus applies to time as well as to space. We must focus effects not only at the decisive location but also at the decisive moment.

We achieve focus through cooperation toward the accomplishment of the common purpose. This applies to all elements of the force, and involves the coordination of ground combat, aviation, and combat service support elements.

The combination of speed and focus adds "punch" or "shock effect" to our actions. It follows that we should strike with the greatest possible combination of speed and focus.

SURPRISE AND BOLDNESS

Two additional concepts are particularly useful in generating combat power: *surprise* and *boldness*.

By surprise we mean a state of disorientation resulting from an unexpected event that degrades the enemy's ability to resist. We achieve surprise by striking the enemy at a time or place or in a manner for which the enemy is unprepared. It is not essential that we take the enemy unaware, but only that awareness came too late to react effectively. The desire for surprise is "more or less basic to all operations, for without it superiority at the decisive point is hardly conceivable."[19] While a necessary precondition of superiority, surprise is also a genuine source of combat power in its own right because of its psychological effect. Surprise can decisively affect the outcome of combat far beyond the physical means at hand.

The advantage gained by surprise depends on the degree of disorientation and the enemy's ability to adjust and recover. Surprise, if sufficiently harsh, can lead to shock, the total, if temporary, inability to react. Surprise is based on speed, stealth, ambiguity, and deception. It often means doing the more difficult thing—taking a circuitous direction of attack, for example—in the hope that the enemy will not expect it. In fact, this is the genesis of maneuver—to circumvent the enemy's strength to strike at a weakness.

While the element of surprise is often of decisive importance, we must realize that it is difficult to achieve and easy to lose. Its advantages are only temporary and must be quickly exploited. Friction, a dominant attribute of war, is the constant enemy of surprise. We must also recognize that while surprise is always desirable, the ability to achieve it does not depend solely on our own efforts. Surprise is not what we *do*; it is the enemy's *reaction* to what we do. It depends at least as much on our enemy's susceptibility to surprise—his expectations and preparedness. Our ability to achieve surprise thus rests on our ability to appreciate and then exploit our enemy's expectations. Therefore, while surprise can be decisive, it is risky to depend on it alone for the margin of victory.

There are three basic ways to go about achieving surprise. The first is through *deception*—to convince the enemy we are going to do something other than what we are really going to do in order to induce him to act in a manner prejudicial to his

own interests. The intent is to give the enemy a clear picture of the situation, but the wrong picture. The second way is through *ambiguity*—to act in such a way that the enemy does not know what to expect. Because he does not know what to expect, he must prepare for numerous possibilities and cannot prepare adequately for any one. The third is through *stealth*— to deny the enemy any knowledge of impending action. The enemy is not deceived or confused as to our intentions but is completely ignorant of them. Of the three, deception generally offers the greatest effects but is most difficult to achieve.

Boldness is a source of combat power in much the same way that surprise is. Boldness is the characteristic of unhes- itatingly exploiting the natural uncertainty of war to pursue major results rather than marginal ones. According to Clausewitz, boldness "must be granted a certain power over and above successful calculations involving space, time, and magnitude of forces, for wherever it is superior, it will take advantage of its opponent's weakness. In other words, it is a genuinely creative force."[20] Boldness is superior to timidity in every instance although boldness does not always equate to immediate aggressive action. A nervy, calculating patience that allows the enemy to commit himself irrevocably before we strike him can also be a form of boldness. Boldness is based on strong situation awareness: We weigh the situation, then act. In other words, boldness must be tempered with judgment lest it border on recklessness.

There is a close connection between surprise and boldness. The willingness to accept risks often necessary to achieve surprise reflects boldness. Likewise, boldness contributes to achieving surprise. After we weigh the situation, to take half measures diminishes the effects of surprise.

CENTERS OF GRAVITY AND CRITICAL VULNERABILITIES

It is not enough simply to generate superior combat power. We can easily conceive of superior combat power dissipated over several unrelated efforts or concentrated on some inconsequential object. To win, we must focus combat power toward a decisive aim. There are two related concepts that help us to think about this: *centers of gravity* and *critical vulnerabilities*.

Each belligerent is not a unitary force, but a complex system consisting of numerous physical, moral, and mental components as well as the relationships among them. The combination of these factors determines each belligerent's unique character. Some of these factors are more important than others. Some may contribute only marginally to the belligerent's power, and their loss would not cause significant damage. Others may be fundamental sources of capability.

We ask ourselves: *Which factors are critical to the enemy? Which can the enemy not do without? Which, if eliminated, will bend him most quickly to our will?* These are *centers of gravity*.[21] Depending on the situation, centers of gravity may be intangible characteristics such as resolve or morale. They may be capabilities such as armored forces or aviation strength. They may be localities such as a critical piece of terrain that anchors an entire defensive system. They may be the relationship between two or more components of the system such as the cooperation between two arms, the relations in an alliance, or the junction of two forces. In short, centers of gravity are any important sources of strength. If they are friendly centers of gravity, we want to protect them, and if they are enemy centers of gravity, we want to take them away.

We want to attack the source of enemy strength, but we do not want to attack directly into that strength. We obviously stand a better chance of success by concentrating our strength against some relative enemy weakness. So we also ask ourselves: *Where is the enemy vulnerable?* In battlefield terms, this means that we should generally avoid his front, where his attention is focused and he is strongest, and seek out his flanks and rear, where he does not expect us and where we can also cause the greatest psychological damage. We should also strike at a moment in time when he is vulnerable.

Of all the vulnerabilities we might choose to exploit, some are more critical to the enemy than others. Some may contribute significantly to the enemy's downfall while others may lead only to minimal gains. Therefore, we should focus our efforts against a *critical vulnerability*, a vulnerability that, if exploited, will do the most significant damage to the enemy's ability to resist us.

We should try to understand the enemy system in terms of a relatively few centers of gravity or critical vulnerabilities because this allows us to focus our own efforts. The more we can narrow it down, the more easily we can focus. However, we should recognize that most enemy systems will not have a single center of gravity on which everything else depends, or if they do, that center of gravity will be well protected. It will often be necessary to attack several lesser centers of gravity or critical vulnerabilities simultaneously or in sequence to have the desired effect.

Center of gravity and critical vulnerability are complementary concepts. The former looks at the problem of how to attack the enemy system from the perspective of seeking a source of strength, the latter from the perspective of seeking weakness. A critical vulnerability is a pathway to attacking a center of gravity. Both have the same underlying purpose: to target our actions in such a way as to have the greatest effect on the enemy.

CREATING AND EXPLOITING OPPORTUNITY

This discussion leads us to a corollary thought: the importance of creating and exploiting opportunity. In all cases, the commander must be prepared to react to the unexpected and to exploit opportunities created by conditions which develop from the initial action. When identification of enemy critical vulnerabilities is particularly difficult, the commander may have no choice but to exploit any and all vulnerabilities until action uncovers a decisive opportunity. As the opposing wills interact, they create various fleeting opportunities for either foe. Such opportunities are often born of the fog and friction that is natural in war. They may be the result of our own actions, enemy mistakes, or even chance. By exploiting opportunities, we create in increasing numbers more opportunities for exploitation. It is often the ability and the willingness to ruthlessly exploit these opportunities that generate decisive results. The ability to take advantage of opportunity is a function of speed, flexibility, boldness, and initiative.

CONCLUSION

The theory of war we have described provides the foundation for the discussion of the conduct of war in the final chapter. All acts of war are political acts, and so the conduct of war must be made to support the aims of policy. War takes place

at several levels simultaneously, from the strategic direction of the overall war effort to the tactical application of combat power in battle. At the highest level, war involves the use of all the elements of political power, of which military force is just one. Action in war, at all levels, is the result of the interplay between initiative and response with the object being to seize and maintain the initiative. All warfare is based on concepts such as speed, focus, surprise, and boldness. Success in war depends on the ability to direct our efforts against criti- cal vulnerabilities or centers of gravity and to recognize and exploit fleeting opportunities. As we will discuss, the warfighting doctrine we derive from our theory is one based on maneuver.