

**STRATEGY
RESEARCH
PROJECT**

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**BECOMING THE RINGMASTER: MASTERING THE THREE RING
CIRCUS OF THE STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT**

BY

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

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ABSTRACT

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A strategic leader masters the strategic environment. To accomplish this, the leader must understand the environment, its different arenas, the relationships between arenas, and the resources these relationships provide. Current literature describes the strategic environment as volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA). This paper seeks to move past the VUCA definition, offering the strategic leader a holistic, interactive, and dynamic description of the strategic environment. This paper defines a strategic environment consisting of three arenas: the internal political arena, the external partisan political arena, and the international political arena. To clarify this structure, this paper offers an analogy defining the role of the strategic leader as a Circus ringmaster. Similar to a circus ringmaster, the strategic leader must understand the relationships between the three arenas and the resources produced by these relationships. The strategic leader can then aggressively interact and focus these resources in order to bring success to his or her organization. The ringmaster must accomplish this in full view of the media, who evaluate, criticize, and possibly, praise the leader's performance. The paper concludes with three methods for using the theory. The first, an historical example, uses the ringmaster concept as a historical case study, applying it to President Truman's removal of General MacArthur from Korea. The second method illustrates the model's benefit as an analytic tool. The third method describes the model as a structure for educating officers to be strategic leaders. The paper concludes with a call for study to continue the debate for clarification of the strategic environment.

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BECOMING THE RINGMASTER: MASTERING THE THREE RING CIRCUS OF THE STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT

It became clear to me that at the age of 58 I would have to learn the new tricks that were not taught in the military manuals or on the battlefield. In this position, I am a political soldier and will have to put my training in rapping our orders and making snap decisions on the back burner, and have to learn the arts of persuasion and guile. I must become an expert in a whole new set of skills.

—George C. Marshall, Secretary of State

The complexities of the current international situation demand leaders who can think and act like former General of the Armies and Secretary of State George C. Marshall. Renowned for his international mastery of war and peace, General Marshall's name is synonymous with strategic leadership. His insight regarding the difficulty of becoming a strategic leader is omnipresent in every room at the US Army War College. Marshall discovered something late in life that faces every senior military officer while attending a senior service college: to be effective at the strategic level, military leaders must move away from the tactical and operational level of the organization and develop a mastery of the strategic/political realm. General Marshall titles these leaders as 'political soldiers,' those with the mission of determining the delicate balance between the necessities of military and diplomatic action.

Marshall reflects that the world of a political soldier/strategic leader is very complex and requires a new set of skills to be a success. The challenge to political soldiers today is the lack of a definitive model that might help the political soldier understand the complexities of the strategic environment. "The challenge to strategic leadership is two-fold: a frame of reference, or perspective, that is dynamic enough for the decision maker to recognize, understand, and explain to others; and a leader's mastery of decision tools and processes that enable him or her to bring a broader set of perspectives than just his own into the decision making process."¹

This paper accepts the first challenge. The task of this paper is nothing less than to create a holistic, comprehensive model of the strategic environment and the role of the strategic leader. By accepting this challenge, I endeavor to push the debate over strategic leadership beyond current definitions. This debate must continue for only through the friction of academic discourse may scholars achieve a firm underpinning towards understanding what is needed to create political soldiers like George Marshall. Lieutenant General Richard Chilcoat, United States Army (Retired), when he was the Commandant of the Army War College encouraged this form of debate,

"Its purpose rather is to emphasize that the search itself is important, permanent, and worth our best efforts and attention at a time when familiar landmarks have vanished and no new strategic vision has attracted a national consensus. Said another way, we have come a long way towards mastery of the tactical and operational arts—the time is now to strive for mastery of the strategic art."²

Building on current and classical literature, this paper offers a qualitative model of the strategic environment. This multi-disciplinary, comprehensive, strategic view will advance the understanding of the strategic environment, moving the discussion of strategic environments and leadership beyond ill-defined descriptions of the strategic environment into a more substantive and focused dialogue. The new model will help the political soldier in three significant ways. First, it will be a foundation the political soldier, or future strategic leader (FSL), can use to make critical strategic decisions. Second, the model will help the FSL by clarifying current vague definitions into a more defined (and understandable) construct.³ Third, the model will be dynamic, offering the FSL an easy heuristic to test different strategic options. Armed with this model and the strategic competencies being reviewed by another study, the FSL will not only understand the complexities of the strategic environment, but will know how to master it as well.

The proposed model, known as the circus model of the strategic environment, will accomplish all this and contribute greatly to the debate surrounding strategic leadership. A simple review of the model is useful at this time to assist the reader as a frame of reference throughout the work. The circus model envisions that the strategic environment may be broken into three interlocking arenas; the internal, external, and international. The interactions or relationships between these arenas yield resources; money, credibility, and legitimacy. The strategic leader's mission then becomes using these resources to accomplish assigned missions and reflect positively upon the organization. To be successful, the FSL must internalize the relationships between the arenas and the resources these relationships produce. These resources then provide cues for the strategic leader on when and how to influence the strategic environment for the good of the nation or the organization. The resources, their creation and subsequent use, are also the cues for when to utilize critical strategic leader competencies.⁴ The strategic leader must accomplish this in a fishbowl of media attention that

reflects the court of public opinion. Using the circus model, the strategic leader can master the environment.

This paper's purpose is to structure the environment for the strategic leader, advancing the debate on conceptual models of strategic leadership, decision-making, and political interaction. The end state for this paper is to enable the FSL to use the model as a structure to solve complex international issues. Using this model will make every strategic leader more like Marshall, giving them the skills necessary to be a master of the strategic environment.

To meet this purpose, I have divided the paper into four parts. The first reviews the current literature and the need for need for a model. The second part is a description of the model, the interactions within the model, their relationships, and the resources these relationships provide. Included in this is a discussion of the strategic leader as a master of that environment. The third segment describes different means to operationalize the ringmaster concept. The first method is historical, the second is analytical, and the third is pedagogical. The paper concludes with a call for more debate on structuralizing the strategic environment, the importance of the debate, and how the circus theory is a step forward in understanding the world of the strategic leader.

THE LACK OF AN INTERACTIVE MODEL:

We need leaders who can move beyond special fields to deal with problems of the total community.

—John Gardner.

What is the strategic environment? What is a strategic leader? How does a strategic leader master this environment? Given recent world events, these are the most critical questions the Senior Service Colleges address today. The academic community needs to debate this issue. However, finding a starting point for the debate on strategic leadership is difficult. The definitions of the strategic environment remain vague, the epistemology lacks precision, and the academic approach to the strategic environment offers the FSL no focused starting point for unraveling the mysteries that face the strategic leader. Now that history has begun again and the Cold war structures are not being removed, but reformed, it is imperative to find an adequate structure for the post-911 world.⁵

Current definitions of the strategic environment are wanting in three ways to provide true insight into the nature of the strategic environment. First, the description of the strategic environment as volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) is inadequate. Its vague

nature offers little clarity for the FSL. Second, although some definitions of strategic leadership identify the actors and the need for influence, these definitions are inaccurate or vague about the roles of the actors in the environment, and the outcome of the interaction of those actors. Third, the emphasis on management reflects the static nature of current definitions. These explanations fail to adequately demonstrate the dynamic or political nature of the strategic environment. Instead of teaching the active role that strategic leaders may play, the current thought tends to emphasize management, not influence or innovation.⁶

THE VAGUE NATURE OF THE VUCA DESCRIPTION

The first challenge to current thought is the lack of insight into the strategic environment, specifically failing to structure the strategic environment. This structure is important, for it addresses the context within which one becomes a strategic leader. As Spreitzer and Cummings state the problem, "... [t]he specific context a leader faces is hard to grasp because it is like stepping into a river—you can never step into the same place twice because the flow is constantly changing."⁷ Chapter 2 of the Strategic Leadership Primer, distributed to students at the Army War College, offers the VUCA description of the strategic environment. This description is so broad and so unfocused as to cause the student more confusion than clarity. However, the VUCA description's strength lies in its ability to be used in any situation. Nevertheless, being everything to everyone is a weakness as well, for it does not offer the foundation necessary for true analysis of different situations.

Another attempt to provide a structure to the FSL in the Strategic Leadership Primer, is the effort to discuss the difficulty of interpreting interrelated events and actors. Instead, the work turns directly to roles of the strategic leader:

- Provide Vision
- Shape Culture
- Manage Joint, Combined and Interagency Relationships
- Manage High-Level Relationships
- Represent the Organization
- Lead and Manage Change⁸

The work continues, stating the need for the strategic leader "to become the master of information and influence."⁹ In short, the primer raises the issue of the VUCA nature of the

strategic environment, and the importance of the strategic leader, but fails to adequately define what this means.

The National Defense University, however, makes an attempt at clarification by stating that,

Strategic decision making is the ability to think insightfully about consequential events over time, to understand what causes long range effect in and on complex and dynamic systems, and to bring partisan, competing interests together under shared goals. Within the context of decision making, 'strategic' implies consequential, long term, complex, system wide and, at times, poorly understood ambiguous, and uncertain characteristics. Increasingly, the worldwide environmental context of strategic decision-making is also fast changing and volatile.¹⁰

This begins a clarification of the VUCA environment, but still offers the FSL little foothold on the convolution of the strategic environment. In sum, the VUCA description does not offer the FSL the structure needed to fully understand or become a master of the strategic environment.

THE LIABILITY OF LINEAR THINKING

The second shortcoming of current theories is the failure to clarify the importance of the interaction between the actors' internal and external environments and the outcomes of this interaction. FM 22-100, ARMY LEADERSHIP, the basic manual for leadership in the US Army, argues that there are two environments for the Army leader – the internal and the external. Many authors on leadership adopt this simple, yet strong construct. For instance, Chilcoat writes, "[that]...What constitutes success in the coming years will depend...on our ability to reconcile the often-conflicting demands of domestic and international politics. This means, in turn, that civilian and military strategic leaders will face even greater challenges in this transition period in building a consensus among the American people with regard to the increasingly complex concept of national security."¹¹ This insight defines the variables that make up the arenas within which the officer must operate. Chilcoat defines the internal and external environments of domestic and international politics. He sums up the need for leaders to build consensus, and he states the pressing need to explain the complexity of the strategic environment. This offers the FSL a much more focused description than VUCA. Like many writings, however, Chilcoat's reflection on leadership success is lost amidst a jumble of organizational hyperbole. Although the clarification of the internal and external environments offers a good start on the arenas and the dynamic nature of the environment, it is inadequate regarding the complex interrelations that are necessary for a strategic leader to be a success.

Haagen also falls prey to this linear construction as he writes, "...[strategic leadership] requires the ability to accommodate and integrate both external and internal conditions, and to manage and engage in complex information processing."¹² Warren Bennis discusses the need for the leader to understand that bureaucracy must understand the mutual human process of reciprocity (internal) and the external process of adaptability.¹³ This understanding of interaction is important, for the leader has emerged from within a certain service or organization and is more familiar with the internal cultural environment of that organization than with the external political environment. However, the generality in this linear theory fails the student, for both environments are so broad, they offer the student very little to grasp on what he or she should understand about either environment. What is internal? What is external? How are they interrelated?

The comfort zone of the internal arena is critically important to FSLs.¹⁴ Most bureaucracies develop leaders according to very strict rules and procedures. A concise understanding of one's role and emphasis on mission accomplishment is more important than an understanding of how or why things work. As a leader advances, the organization rewards him for being effective within its very narrow range of responsibility and authority. Thus, FSLs arrive at executive levels with very narrow views of the world, their role in it, and how they might influence it.¹⁵

The Army's senior leaders recognize this fact. Enlisting the aid of forward thinking scholars at the Army War College, the Army Chief of Staff has initiated a study of strategic leader competencies.¹⁶ The study group is still meeting today, and the results thus far have not been released for public study. However, informal discussions reveal that the group has developed six important competencies that the FSL might use for success. These competencies are an important advancement in the study, but are only one important part of the totality of creating a strategic leader. To complete the study, the Chief needs to commission a work on how the FSL might apply these competencies within a complex environment. To accomplish this, there must be a model of the strategic environment with the structure and focus necessary for testing and critique. To date, no model exists.

FSLs require a model that not only demonstrates the necessity for critical competencies, but also how to apply them in a manner both internal and external to the organization. Perhaps the best area to find this explanation is not in the leadership literature, but in the body of knowledge regarding public administration. Authors such as Francis Rourke, Randall Ripley, Peter Kobra, and others, have amassed voluminous works devoted to the role of the public manager in the political environment. They argue that the external environment is not simply

that area outside their internal world. It involves the partisan activity that yields dollars and returns trust.¹⁷ This external environment may include military leaders, Foreign Service personnel, elected leaders, leaders of other countries, non-governmental actors, belligerents, insurgents, and perhaps most important, the media. This literature offers important insight into how interaction occurs between the internal and external spheres of the organization.

However, even the public administration literature falls short when describing the strategic environment, since it fails to address the international arena, one of the FSL's dominant arenas. Any future model that seeks a comprehensive structure of the strategic environment must include interactions not only internal and external to the organization, but international interaction as well.

THE IMPORTANCE OF INTERACTION

The linear descriptions lead to another challenge: they fail to clarify the necessity of interaction to the strategic leader. Current static definitions only demonstrate the challenge of the strategic involvement, falling short of discussing the need for interaction, and the critical points for interaction. In essence, how can the strategic leader determine 2d and 3d order effects if there is no structure of the variables involved or their relationships?

In short, the strategic leader fails to learn the return on his investment in getting involved and understanding the strategic environment. This is an important point, since the future leader will remain in the comfort zone unless compelled to leave it. Understanding the importance of interaction and how it will benefit the leader and the organization are fundamental steps in getting the strategic leader to step away from organizational myopia into the more difficult world of strategic complexity. When a FSL accomplishes this, they are making the transition from direct to strategic. This is a glaring deficiency in the literature. There is yet to be a comprehensive model that adequately defines the strategic environment in terms of actors, their relationships, and the resources produced through these relationships.

The best place to look for this type of theory is in the political science literature. That body of work includes descriptions of 'iron triangles,' described best by Hedrick Smith in his work, "The Power Game." This work describes the dynamic interaction between bureaucracies, committees and interest groups, their relationships and their exchange of resources. Structurally, this clarifies the environment, providing three bases for power. However, akin to the public administration literature, it fails to create a bridge between the national and international arena.¹⁸ In their work on congress and foreign policy, Randall Ripley and James M. Lindsey offer insights into the relationship of the legislature and the International Community.

Although thorough and insightful, this work does not offer the FSL any clues regarding how the FSL should interact or influence either Congress or the international community.¹⁹

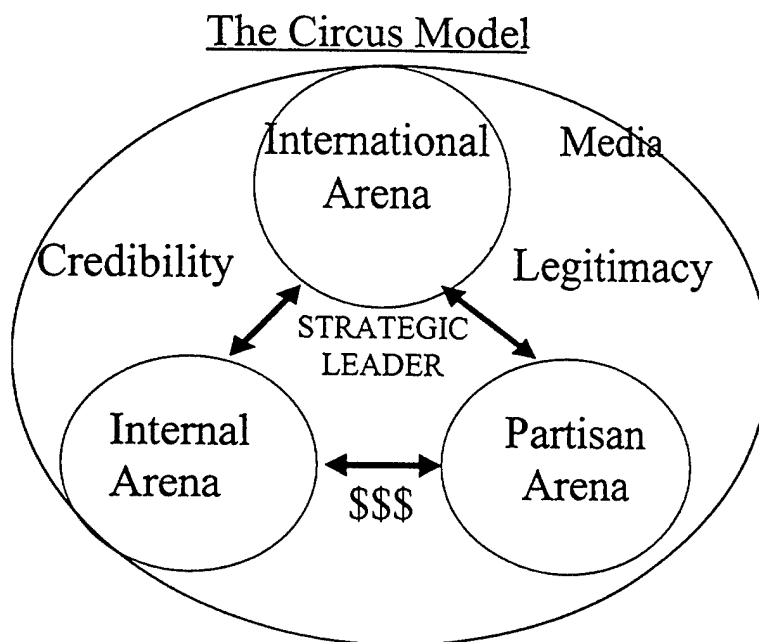
Current descriptions of the strategic environment are flawed in three fundamental ways: they fail to define the VUCA nature of the environment, they offer inadequate insight into the interaction necessary to understand relationships, and their linear nature limits a true understanding of the complexity of the environment. FSLs demand a new model to address the aforementioned shortcomings. This model would do three things. First, structure the complexity of a VUCA environment into distinct arenas. Second, clarify the importance of interaction and the relationships between arenas. Third, define the resources that result from this interaction. A model that allows a FSL to become a master would accomplish one more critical item: it would demonstrate how the leader might transparently influence this complex environment within a media fishbowl.

ENTER THE CIRCUS MODEL: THE THREE ARENAS OF THE STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT

The difference between leaders and managers is the difference between those who master the context and those who surrender to it.

—Warren Bennis

The circus model is very straightforward. The strategic environment consists of three arenas; internal, partisan, and international, those through their relationships produce resources



the leader then manages for the success of the organization. Most important, the entire time the leader is managing the resources, he is in a public eye of the media, constantly observing and commenting upon his every move. For the FSL to become a master of the environment, he must internalize the three dominant arenas, their relationship, and the role of the leader in this structure. Like a ringmaster of a three-ring circus, the strategic leader must understand three critical arenas of activity, their interaction, and their outcome. In addition, the strategic leader, like the ringmaster, must do this in a fishbowl of public awareness, constantly under public scrutiny and evaluation.

This circus model offers a strong description of the strategic environment. In your mind, picture a three-ring circus. As you enter the large circus tent, all is chaos. One sees all manner of animals, acts, clowns, and people flying through the air. However, in the center of it all is the calm ringmaster, directing each act with a control and precision that heightens the suspense and sense of awe to the pleasure of the crowd. Now place the strategic leader in the role of the ringmaster. The crowd is actually the media, constantly observing the ringmaster (strategic leader) as he or she seeks balance among the three political arenas. In one arena is internal bureaucratic politics (mental picture – lions, tigers, and bears); the center ring may be external partisan politics (perhaps the clowns), and finally, the last ring may include the constantly shifting highly visible commitments of international politics (the trapeze acts). Although each arena is an important sphere of activity, the ringmaster deftly directs the entire performance through a unique interactive choreography, demonstrating his skill at bringing the crowd to levels of delight and awe. Although the different acts may overlap in time and space, the ringmaster controls the interaction of each arena to produce a successful outcome. In this case, success is the delight of the patrons and increased revenue. To better understand the arenas, let's look at each individually, and then evaluate the relationships between them.

THE ARENAS

The internal arena is the area that produced the leader. This arena is best understood in concentric circles around the FSL's desk. At the core of the arena is the leader, captured by the organizational culture of the organization. Outside this ring are the traditions, procedures, and customs that surround the organization. Since the organization promoted him to this level of authority, the FSL owes an allegiance to the system that placed him in a position of strategic importance. Thus, the arena is important to the leader for this is a source of his reputation, political support, and authority. By understanding this arena, the FSL can understand not only how decisions are made, but also why they are made in a certain manner.²⁰ The internal arena

is also the organizational bureaucracy that provides information to Congress, which in turn yields funds for the organization. Finally, the internal arena sets the framework for the interaction between the leader and international agencies. The two key resources related to the internal arena are credibility and funding. Credibility, both for the leader (based upon past deeds) and the organization (based upon past performance and support by the government). Funding, because without this the organization and the leader cannot long survive.²¹

Outside the specific agency or organization is the external partisan arena. This arena may be the most perplexing. The pivotal actors in this partisan-dominated arena include the Legislative and the Executive branches. Also included are interest groups, service organizations, and constituents of areas surrounding military bases. This arena is the foreign to the military officer, and often seen as unworthy of their interest. As self-proclaimed guardians for the republic, they believe they stand above partisan politics in such a manner that they fail to see the benefits derived from proactive interaction within this arena.²²

One of the reasons for the lack of interaction in this arena is the confusion surrounding the method of interaction. The interaction with the Executive branch is clear, outlined in the Constitution, and defined by the services through a chain of command. This structure fits within the cognitive (autocratic) construct of the service member. The relationship with Congress is problematic. This relationship is not codified in any founding document, save to offer the services money and legitimacy when fighting by ratifying treaties and declarations of war. The ad hoc structure required when working with Congress leaves the officer in a political morass for which he has little understanding or training to build upon. To add to the difficulty, the FSL often has to work through either a service secretary or an appointed civil servant who's mission is to watch over the military. Yet many of these civilians have very little experience (in general) working with the military officer, may be younger than the military leader, and who exist within a partisan political world. The following section will describe the criticality of this arena, how it creates two critical resources: budgets and legitimacy. Budgets are the lifeblood of the internal arenas' present and the window on its future. Legitimacy emanates from treaties it passes and the guidance it gives the military force.

The third and final arena is the international political arena. Given that the FSL's career is spent at the tactical and operational level, he may be familiar with operating in foreign lands, but not familiar with the political necessities involved. This is the arena where words such as 'realpolitik,' grand strategy, and 'power politics' take shape, definition, and meaning. This arena reflects on the nation's ability to accomplish its international mission. The breadth of this arena is so wide, it encompasses every potential ally and enemy, plus the combinations of each. The

importance is that this arena yields credibility for the force. The international political arena determines whether the force is needed and whether the force utilized was a success. When a nation has the capability to defeat a threat and fails, either to engage, or after engaging is defeated, the result is a lack of credibility. There exist many examples of forces available, but not used, reflecting a lack of confidence in the capability of force to handle what may be a difficult mission. In the international arena, credibility yields authority.

Encompassing all three arenas is the media. Like a crowd watching the circus, they interpret the effectiveness of the acts. In their own way, they represent the public, for their interpretation of events is what the public receives as information on what is happening (or not happening) in the arenas. The media is a critical observer, acting as the window on the world of the FSL. Satisfying the media, primarily in times of crisis, is critical. Misunderstanding the media creates an information void harmful to the leader and the organization. Media success is not analogous to a successful operation. The Tet offensive in Vietnam is a case worth reviewing. Like a ringmaster pleasing the crowd, the FSL knows that media success is providing the media the information necessary to maintain control of the environment.

THE RELATIONSHIPS AND THE RESOURCES

The sum of the relationships between the arenas is the resources so badly needed by the FSLs. These resources are funding, legitimacy, and credibility. When the interaction lacks focus, however, not only is it detrimental to the organization, but it may also damage the ability of the organization to accomplish its mission. This is why understanding the relationships between the arenas and the resources they produce are so important. Understanding the relationship and the resources provides the FSL with the clues needed for pinpoint interaction in order to achieve the best results for the organization. The relationships provide the FSL the cues needed regarding when to apply strategic competencies. Of course, the entire gamut of activity can happen without the ringmaster. The three arenas naturally interact, but when the ringmaster directs the use of the resources produced by each arena, the interaction can lead to great success for the organization and for the leader.

The relationship between the internal organization and the partisan external environment rests upon funding. Government organizations depend upon the partisan arena for operating funds. Thus, the relationship between the organization and politically elected or connected officials is critical to the success of the organization.²³ Quite simply, this is the reason the services focus so much of their time, training, and manpower on the Program Objective Memorandum (POM). Following the adage that 'money is policy, all else is rhetoric,' the POM

identifies the center of gravity for the organization. When the FSL is adept at the interaction between the arena of internal politics and the partisan environment, he will return financial resources to the organization, thus enhancing his reputation in the internal arena. Congress often responds favorably, providing the funds based on the POM, since it reflects the trade between financial resources of Congress and the capability of the services. This capability is witnessed through key projects, bases, and jobs. Of course, these translate to votes for the legislator.

The relationship between the partisan arena and the international arena produces external legitimacy for the use of the force. Legitimate is defined as an action taken in accordance with appropriate authority or law.²⁴ The relationship is between the event and the level of legitimate reaction the government takes to address the problem.²⁵ The legislative and the executive provide legitimacy in different ways. The President legitimizes military activities through his role as Commander in Chief, using Executive Orders, Declarations of War (that must be ratified), National Security Strategy, and speeches.²⁶ Congress legitimizes the use of force through treaties, declarations of war, and most recently, sanctions approving the use of armed force.²⁷ The process required by the Constitution prior to using force produces the clarity needed to conduct focused, effective military operations. It legitimizes not only the role of the organization in the conflict, but the role of the officer as well. The officer, defined by Huntington, is a manager of violence.²⁸ The orders of the President or the approved use of force by Congress legitimizes the use of force, validating the definition of the officer. The overt legitimacy of the action, combined with funds to execute the operation, imply another form of legitimacy to the strategic leader. In essence, the politicians have granted the leader legitimacy in addition to a degree of autonomy with which to accomplish the assigned mission.²⁹ Armies prize this autonomy, for its clarity as well as its legitimacy. Achieving that measure of autonomy marks the true strategic leader.

Finally, the relationship between the international arena and the internal organizational arena creates credibility for the organization. This relationship is based upon the international community's perceptions of the organization's ability to accomplish critical missions. These perceptions lead to the credibility of the organization. Credibility is the 'belief or confidence' of in the truth of something...³⁰ Thus, positive perceptions reflect favorably on the organization and its leadership, granting it credibility. Let's say an event has occurred on the world stage that demands U.S. involvement. The US commits forces and resources to the event, legitimizes the event through political approval, then the forces are committed. As the video streams back from the event in a positive manner, it raises the credibility of the US force with allies abroad.³¹ One

of the enduring challenges faced during the recent War in Afghanistan has been the necessity to demonstrate the positive effects of the US intervention in Afghanistan. A significant focus of CENTCOM's information operations campaign has been focused on demonstrating the effectiveness of the US forces, thus enhancing the credibility of the force amongst the Islamic population of the Middle East. The use of force has its own credibility, but the proper use of legitimate force yields a positive credibility that becomes a force multiplier. It is that credibility the FSL wishes to achieve by understanding the relationship between the internal organization and the international political arena.

In sum, the FSL must understand not only the internal, political, and international arenas, but the relationships between the three and the resources generated by these relationships. Given these arenas, relationships and resources, the FSL can more carefully choose the point of interaction and use the resources more appropriately. Success for both the ringmaster and the strategic leader is simple: for the ringmaster, the cheers of the crowd and returns to the show. For the FSL, success is the organizational autonomy brought about by the trust of all the partners in the strategic environment. Isn't this truly the goal of strategic leadership?

THE STRATEGIC LEADER

Having described the strategic environment and its complexity, it is now time to review and define the role of the strategic leader. The role of the strategic leader is quite easy: the strategic leader must use his knowledge of the strategic environment to bring success to his organization. The question then becomes what kind of leader can do this? What type of leader can grasp that he sits at the nexus of three intersecting arenas, responsible for balancing the arenas, their relationships and resources in order to bring success to their organization? A new definition is needed for the strategic leader, a definition extending the concept of leadership beyond the two-dimensional aspect of the internal and external elements – a definition that includes the international and interactive aspects of the strategic environment.

Although we might extrapolate what Marshall implied by the term political soldier, many others have developed definitions and meanings for the term strategic leader. Chilcoat, for instance, moves the debate forward through his discussions of the strategic art and its relationship to strategic leaders. He argues that the practitioner of the strategic art is really three actors: the strategic leader, the strategic theorist, and the strategic practitioner. He defines the strategic leader as "[one who] provides vision and focus, capitalizes on command and peer leadership skills, and inspires others to think and act."³² Following this definition are the explanations of the strategic theorist and the strategic practitioner. This analysis offers a

starting point for the examination of the study of the strategic leader, however Chilcoat stumbles as he attempts to explain the environment in which the strategic leader must work.

Other authors, including Kobrak et al fall into the same trap – they cast the FSL as an administrative statesman, able to interact between the organization and the political partisan. However, they do not include how the FSL might interact successfully on the international level.³³

What is missing is a structure that demonstrates the role of the leader in the strategic environment – not simply the organizational and political context, but the international context as well. The circus model helps to address this shortcoming. The strategic leader is indeed a practitioner and theorist, but I argue he must use all these traits simultaneously in different environments, understanding the relationships involved in each and how these relationships produce resources for the leader. This area is what Wittenberg refers to as the social economic and political milieu of the organization and leadership. Within this milieu, when persons with certain motives and purposes mobilize, in competition with others, institutional, political, psychological, and other resources to arouse, engage, and satisfy the motives of the followers.³⁴ It is in this arena where the strategic leader will succeed or fail.³⁵

Haagen et al offer a more appropriate and functional model of the strategic leader. They define the strategic leadership as 'the leader's ability to anticipate, envision, maintain flexibility, and empower others to create strategic change as necessary.'³⁶ They go on to state that strategic leadership requires the ability to accommodate and integrate both external and internal conditions, and to manage and engage in complex information processing.³⁷

This is the area where the idea of 'key competencies' plays a critical role. Key competencies are the watchwords taught future strategic leaders at the Army War College. Researchers there have identified a critical skill set of six key competencies needed by strategic leaders: self-aware, adaptive, globally astute, a strategic warfighter, cognitively complex, interpersonally mature.³⁸ The critical role of these competencies is as tools for the strategic leader to manage the events within the strategic environment. A prudent strategic leader will use all of these competencies to affect change. However, without a structure within which to exercise these learned skills, the leader is adrift with a lot of tools and inadequate direction.

Chilcoat and Haagen provide important internal and external pieces towards an adequate definition of the strategic leader. Kobrak adds the interactive element. The war college study provides the tools. I will add two more simple elements -- the issues of transparency and core values. The idea of transparency reflects public scrutiny of the leader. This is the media, watching the leader's every move as he orchestrates the relationships between the three

arenas. The idea of core values is critical as well. The leader will protect these, for they support his reputation as a leader of his internal environment. Jeopardizing these core values will have an adverse affect on his reputation within that environment. This is the type of leader described by James McGregor Burns who can maintain overlapping relationships and interpersonal communications between local and cosmopolitan groups.³⁹ More important, it defines a leader who makes decisions, but also designs, regulates, and selects social systems that make decisions. This type of leader satisfies the first requirement of a leader – establishing communications among highly organized segments of society.⁴⁰

The strategic leader must be an insightful theorist and credible practitioner who understands the internal and external environments. More important, he must be able to influence those arenas in a public environment – operating in an uncomfortable fishbowl of media scrutiny that influences public accountability. Perhaps as important, the strategic leader must accomplish the mission without compromising the organization's core values. If those outside the environment perceive that the leader has jeopardized any core values, their worth as a strategic leader of that organizations' is extremely damaged, perhaps mortally. The leader will have to 'go to the well' using more resources to repair the damage than actually addressing the problem that needs to be fixed.⁴¹

Given the above, I offer the following as a definition of a strategic leader:

The strategic leader is an executive decision maker who masters the complexity of the organization's internal, external and international environment in such a manner that they can transparently utilize actual and implied resources to achieve success.

USES OF THE CIRCUS MODEL

The FSL now has a powerful, comprehensive, and holistic model at his disposal. The model helps to clarify the strategic environment by structuring critical arenas, their resources, and their relationships. This model is an example of interdisciplinary study. The model draws from the best minds of political science, public administration, psychology, anthropology, sociology, and leadership studies. Using this wealth of scholarship, the model becomes a priceless heuristic, applicable in many disciplines, accurate in its interpretation and description of the strategic environment.

This begs the question of how an FSL might use this knowledge. I offer three options for utilizing this information to help the FSL master the strategic environment. The three options demonstrate the analytic, structural, and heuristic strength of the circus model. The different uses of the model also demonstrate the timelessness of the circus model, its ability to study

past, present and future strategic problems. Finally, the case studies reveal the importance of the circus model as to review the full spectrum of military operations, from high intensity conflict to peace support operations to training officers for future conflicts.

The first option is a case study method using the structure as a guide for historical analysis. This case study describes the role of a strategic leader in high intensity conflict, reviewing the relief of General Douglas MacArthur by President Truman. The second option is a concise overview of using the theory as a heuristic for understanding the current political/military environment overseas. The third option is its use as a structure for training FSLs.

TRUMAN AND MACARTHUR: A CASE STUDY IN STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP

I was left with one simple conclusion: General MacArthur was ready to risk general war. I was not.

—Harry S. Truman

During the Korean War, General Douglas MacArthur offers an excellent case study of the role of the strategic leader and the failure to balance all three arenas. Following the invasion of South Korea and the establishment of the Pusan perimeter, General MacArthur launched a daring assault into Inchon, while simultaneously launching attacks from the Pusan perimeter. The Inchon invasion led to extremely positive media coverage and international support, restored the faith of the UN forces in themselves, plus gained the support of a recalcitrant President and Congress about involvement in this 'police action.'

However, General MacArthur's success in balancing all three arenas did not continue, because as he continued his offensive he moved further and further away from the President's original war aim, to limit the war in Korea. In addition, General MacArthur overextended his lines in the country through an egotistic miscalculation regarding the involvement of Chinese forces. This operational miscalculation regarding his internal arena (the UN Forces) and the political arena (Truman's desire to limit the war) resulted in his eventual relief by Truman.

Of the three arenas, the most important in this case was the international arena. With the United Nations coalition as a key center of gravity necessary for the legitimacy of the police action, Truman could not allow anything to render that coalition. Shortly after making a statement about the possible use of the atomic bomb, the allies made their position about China very clear – they desired no extended war with China. The credibility of American leadership was critically shaken by the Chinese Communist attacks:

The UN in June had been almost wholly responsive to American leadership, and the United States had chosen to implement its national policy under the aegis of the UN, at the time a great moral victory. With the entry of Red China into the fighting, the sharp U.S. setback in the North, and the prospect of an enlarged war

yawning ominously, the nations composing the U.N. suddenly became restive. American leadership unfortunately had lost a great deal of prestige on the battlefield.⁴²

This lack of credibility made MacArthur's hold on his internal arena tenuous. Despite a brilliant reputation for his victories during World War 2, his intellect, and his success in Japan following its capitulation, his many constituencies were apprehensive about his vision for the Korean War. The leadership of the newly created Department of Defense (DoD) would not come to his aid. Although Generals Bradley and Taylor respected MacArthur, they saw him as a holdover from World War 2, an anachronism who failed to understand the necessary politics of this new, cold, war.⁴³

The Chiefs of Staff sent GEN Lawton Collins to Japan to brief MacArthur on three possible strategies for the war. The first strategy was limited war, the second was a fight that would include the nationalist Chinese, and the third was to get the CCF north of the 38th parallel and arrange an armistice. MacArthur agreed to try the third option, but with grave reservations. This did not endear him to the estranged constituency in Washington, or to the President.

In the partisan arena, the President's goal was to maintain the legitimacy that sent the U.S. troops to Korea in the first place. The U.N. coalition was key to sustaining public will for a limited 'police action.' The President did not desire a larger war nor did he see this as a time when the U.N. should choose to defeat Chinese Communism. The President believed that the U.S. should not expend resources to defend Korea at the expense of Europe. MacArthur disagreed, stating in a letter to a Congressman that was later read on the house floor, 'there is no substitute for victory.'⁴⁴ Truman saw this, rightly, as a case of blatant insubordination, and relieved MacArthur.

Although streamlined, the MacArthur case study clearly demonstrates the shortfalls of a strategic leader failing to adequately address the needs of important arenas. The losses in Korea damaged his credibility in the international arena. His internal reputation was damaged due to his poor relationships with his superiors in Washington. His headstrong devotion to total war, against the wishes of the administration injured the legitimacy of the US involvement in Korea. President Truman's relief was an aftershock – the damage had already been done. He had failed to adequately focus the three arenas, and their resources for success.

THE MODERN CIRCUS: TASK FORCE FALCON 2B IN KOSOVO

Moving forward to a more modern era, we might use the circus model as a structure to understand the complexity of certain Peace Support Operations. In the highly volatile Balkans region, the Multi-National Brigade East (MNB-E) Commander encountered the possibility of a

critically destabilizing insurgency in an area controlled by KFOR (Kosovo Forces), but within the territory of Serbia. This area, known as the Ground Security Zone (GSZ), was demilitarized following the war in July 1999. In accordance with the Military Technical Agreement of 1999 (MTA), KFOR was responsible for monitoring this area for the presence of Serb military forces.⁴⁵ However, a rising insurgency backed by supporters within Kosovo began destabilizing the region in late November 2000, with the effect of possibly destabilizing the strength of KFOR.⁴⁶

The MNB-E Commander was in unique situation. The insurgents were firing mortars against the Serbs on a daily basis. Some of these mortars were falling inside Kosovo, inside the MNB-E sector. MNB-E Headquarters had identified that the insurgents were receiving a constant flow of supplies from inside Kosovo, despite allied ground and air interdiction campaign. The of US forces were facing a requirement to stem the tide of arms, calm the insurgency, and protect Kosovo from an Albanian uprising.

During this confusing situation, the G3 might use this model to help the Commander understand the relationships between the actors involved, their resources, and the outcomes of these relationships. Using this model, the G3 could easily determine the relationships and resources involved in this conflict. The internal arena was clear – no casualties. The external political arena was not as critical in this situation, unless something went wrong and personnel were hurt. More important, then, was the relationship between the internal arena (MNB-E) and the international arena (KFOR). The insurgency indirectly challenged the credibility of KFOR with developing and sustaining a safe and secure environment within Kosovo. Although operating as a coalition, each was operating under different orders from their respective governments. This might create friction, a rift in the force, or worse, public disagreements between KFOR forces. More important, the insurgency challenged the credibility of MNB-E, clearly the dominant armed force in Kosovo, with sealing off the border and demonstrating that its pre-eminence in Kosovo was well deserved.

Peace Support Operations both enhance and threaten international stability. Thus, by their nature, they are strategic operations. Kosovo is definitely in a strategic position, between two warring nations, involving a coalition of five different lead nations (and 37 other nations), and possessing the possibility of preventing or starting a third Balkan War. By using the Circus model structure to analyze the different relationships, the Commander might develop different courses of action to not only stop the insurgency, but also to insure that conditions that threaten the coalition do not arise again between the nations.

THE FUTURE RINGMASTERS: EVERY OFFICER A STRATEGIC LEADER

The last method for using the circus model may be the most important. The services can use this model to train their future strategic leaders. This model offers a focused heuristic for creating lessons and simulations that allow future leaders to grow in their understanding of the arenas and the relationships between them. This education begins with the assumption that due to the need for international stability, every officer will spend time abroad, with leaders and soldiers of different nations. Officers today are placed in strategically critical assignments at a very young age. Although given tactical level missions, commensurate with their experience, these assignments could have critical strategic implications.

Beginning in basic officer training, the junior leader should understand the basic concept of the model. The school might use it to help the officer understand where he is in the model and the important role that he plays. As the officer moves higher in terms of responsibility and authority, he might advance to more in-depth lessons focused upon the resources and the relationships. Finally, as the officer reaches senior service college, he receives a review of the circus model and is then placed in a simulation calling upon him to utilize the model to gain understanding of a complex strategic problem.

This model would help to demonstrate the critical importance of events such as the Strategic Crisis Exercise held at the Army's Center for Strategic Leadership. This exercise places the future leaders of the Army in a future situation where "someone has put a Zippo to the world..."⁴⁷ The circus model would assist these future 'strategic leaders' with a tool to help them understand the nature and effect of each crisis they encountered. The SCE would be the capstone learning exercise for a future strategic leader who had received insight on the circus model since his earliest days in the force, and could use his tactical and operational experience to add depth the analysis aided by the circus model.

CONCLUSION

The three methods above demonstrate the circus model is a comprehensive tool for understanding the strategic environment. More than this, these different case studies demonstrate that the circus model offers the strategic leader a structured, focused model to use in order to interpret the complexity of the strategic environment. The three arenas enable the FSL to quickly analyze a complex situation, the critical relationships, and what resources to use to influence that environment. The case studies also reveal the importance of the media and the critical role it plays in the strategic environment. The circus model also offers the strategic

leader insight towards when and how to apply the critical skill strategic leader skill sets necessary to manage these complex interactions.

John Gardner challenged the academic community over thirty years ago to “find ways of bringing together in some form of working relationship the varied leadership elements in the community - the elected and appointed political leadership, business, unions, educators, ministers, minority group leaders and the press.”⁴⁸ Likewise, Lieutenant General William Steels challenges the military community to use FM 22-100 as a basis for knowledge, but look beyond the manual. He asks what are the new leadership skills and competencies needed by the objective force.⁴⁹ The Circus model answers his call, through a model that defines the context, the interaction, and the skills needed to be a competent and knowledgeable leader – the ringmaster.

These are the types of ‘whole new skills’ that General Marshall had to develop. These are the skills necessary for the FSL to master the strategic environment. This model helps the FSL transform into a successful ringmaster, a true political soldier; the true strategic leader.

Word Count = 8,297

ENDNOTES

¹National Defense University, Strategic Leadership and Decision Making: Available from <http://www.ndu.edu/ndu/inss/books/strategic/cont.htm>. Internet. Accessed on 26 November 2001.

²Richard A. Chilcoat, Strategic Art: The New Discipline for 21st Century Leaders, October 10, 1995, (US Army War College, Strategic Study Institute, 10 October 1995), reprinted in Roderick R. Magee II ed., USAWC Strategic Leadership Primer (Carlisle Barracks, Pa: United States Army War College, 1998), 21.

³The term Future Strategic Leader (FSL) is an attempt to clarify the different terms and definitions used for a senior or strategic leader. The term future strategic leader encompasses the terms senior leader, strategic leader, political soldier, administrative statesman and senior executive or manager.

⁴The U.S. Army War College is currently involved in a series of studies for the Chief of Staff of the Army regarding strategic leadership and the necessary competencies for strategic leaders. I learned of this study through discussions with Dr. Leonard Wong and LTC Stephen Gerras, Ph.D.

⁵Anatol Lieven, "The Cold War is Finally Over," and Fareed Zakaria, "The Return of History," found in How Did This Happen: Terrorism and the New War, ed James F. Hoge and Gideon Rose, (NY: Public Affairs Books, 2001).

⁶The different perspectives of the Army War College and the Naval War College are important at this point. The Army War College conducts the Strategic Crisis Exercise, an exercise involved with Crisis Management and teaching the student the steps for Crisis Action Planning. In contrast, the Naval War College has its students develop grand strategy, then fight this strategy given certain scenarios, in order to test its feasibility and validity. I argue that the Army approach is reactive, and counter-productive to strategic leadership. The Naval approach prepares the future officer through a foundation of knowledge they can then use to build policy for the future. These thoughts were the result of discussions with Professor Bill Turcotte, Dr. Jeff McCausland, LTC John Burns, and COL Jay Simpson, USA during meetings conducted from 27 – 29 March 2002, at the Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island.

⁷Warren Bennis, Grechen Spritzer, and Thomas Cummings, The Future of Leadership (NY: John Wiley and Sons, 2001), p. 242.

⁸Roderick R. Magee II ed., USAWC Strategic Leadership Primer (Carlisle Barracks, Pa: United States Army War College, 1998) p. 45.

⁹Ibid., 11.

¹⁰NDU, Strategic Leadership and Decision Making.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Abdalia F. Hagen, Morsheda T. Hassan, Sammy G. Amin, "Critical Strategic Leadership Components: An Empirical Investigation," Advanced Management Journal, (Summer 1998): 39.

Quoted in US Army War College, Course One Strategic Leadership, Selected Readings (Carlisle Barracks, PA: US Army War College, 2001).

¹³Warren G. Bennis, Changing Organizations: Essays on the Development and Evolution of Human Organization (NY: McGraw Hill, 1966), 4 – 10.

¹⁴For more on officers in the strategic arena, see Bernard Brodie, War and Politics, (NY: MacMillan Publishing, 1973). Also see Samuel P. Huntington, The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations(Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press, 1957,1985).

¹⁵Elizabeth M. Christopher and Larry E. Smith, Leadership Training Through Gaming: Power, People, and Problem Solving, (London, Kogan Page, 1987), 4 – 11 (specifically p. 11. Also see Jay A Conger, The Charismatic Leader (SF: Jossey-Bass, 1989).

¹⁶The Leadership competencies and how to train or educate future leaders is an ongoing study at the Army War College. Headed by Dr. Leonard Wong, a small, selected group of Army scholars is performing research and study to determine the best course ahead for the Army as it moves through transformation. Although the study is not yet complete, the initiation of the study by the Chief of Staff of the Army reflects the necessity for developing innovative, contemporary, and proactive views of the strategic environment and strategic leadership.

¹⁷See Peter Kobrak, The Political Environment of Public Management (NY: HarperCollins, 1993), Randall Ripley and Grace Franklin, Congress, the Bureaucracy and Public Policy, Francis Rourke, Bureaucracy, Politics and Public Policy, 3d ed. (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1984).

¹⁸Hedrick Smith, The Power Game, How Washington Works

¹⁹Randall B. Ripley and James M. Lindsey, ed. Congress Resurgent: Foreign and Defense Policy on Capitol Hill (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1996).

²⁰To avoid a long description of the service cultures, the best reference is Carl Builder, Masks of War (RAND, 1993). This offers great insight into the different service icons and why they are important to the different services' leaders.

²¹The Army's transformation, led by General Shinseki offers insight into an organization that must change in order to maintain its credibility and it's funding. TF Hawk revealed the Army's inability to rapidly deploy. This issue of credibility translated to a demand for reform by certain members of the legislature. For more on TF Hawk, see Wes Clark's memoir, To Wage Modern War (NY: Foreign Policy Press, 2001).

²²Brodie, pp 486-496. See also Huntington, pp 89 – 94.

²³There is an oft-heard truism within government: "Money is Policy, all else is rhetoric." Money is the predominant lifeblood of government agencies – although an organization will always receive some funding, whether or not it is enough for present and future needs is always subject to debate.

²⁴Merriam-Websters Collegiate Dictionary, 10th Edition. (Springfield, MA, 1993).

²⁵Chilcoat, 30.

²⁶Constitution of the United States, Article 2, Section 2.

²⁷Constitution of the United States, Article 1, Section 8.

²⁸Huntington, 13-15.

²⁹James Q. Wilson's work, Bureaucracy states that a successful organization must include three critical elements: a mission, the workers must agree that is the mission, and the organization must have the autonomy to accomplish the mission. James Q. Wilson, Bureaucracy (RAND, 1993), 11 – 13.

³⁰Merriam-Websters Collegiate Dictionary, 10th Edition. (Springfield, MA, 1993).

³¹Perhaps the most recent case study in recent times is the US involvement in Somalia. The United States entered Somalia to accomplish one task, however, this mission emphasis changed. The result was a confusing situation where one US force was working autonomously and the other was under the control of the United Nations. Involved in only one fight, the US was unable to extricate its forces from a battle scene and encountered casualties. Although the US forces were successful in the mission, the casualties involved resulted in the US abandoning the mission within months after the unsuccessful battle. The result was a significant loss of credibility within the international arena, which may have given rise to Osama Bin Laden.

³²Chilcoat, 30.

³³Francis E. Rourke, Peter Kobrak, "Mobilizing Political Support," The Political Environment of Public Management, (NY:HarperCollins, 1993), 75-92.

³⁴James McGregor Burns, Leadership (NY: Harper and Row, 1978), 18 – 23.

³⁵Rudolph Witemberg, Art of Group Discipline, 1951.

³⁶Byrd, 1987.

³⁷Abdullah f. Hagen, Morsheda T. Hassan, Sanny G. Amin, "Critical Strategic Leadership Components: An Empirical Investigation," Advanced Management Journal, (Summer 1998), 39. Reprinted in Department of Command, Leadership and Management, Strategic Leadership Primer, (United States Army War College, 1999): 48 – 53.

³⁸Discussion with Lieutenant Colonel Stephen Gerras, member of the Strategic Leader Task Force, US Army War College, March 2002. More insights on critical leadership competencies can be found by reading Lieutenant General William Steel (retired) and Lieutenant Colonel Robert Walters, Jr, "21st Century Leadership Competencies; Three Yards in a Cloud of Dust or a Forward Pass," Army Magazine, August 2001.

³⁹Burns, p. 294

⁴⁰Burns, p. 294

⁴¹Charles Krulak, the former Commandant of the US Marine Corps, discusses 'the well' in numerous speeches and writings. Roughly interpreted, the well is the public's good faith in the military and trust in its ability to accomplish assigned missions. When a leader has to 'go to the well,' he is drawing from the reserve of public faith and confidence in the armed forces.

⁴²T.R. Fehrenback, This Kind of War (London: Brassey's, 1963), 268.

⁴³David McCullough, Truman, (NY: Simon and Schuster, 1992), 833 – 840.

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵UN Security Council Resolution 1244, <http://www.nato.int/kosovo/docu/u990610a.htm>. Internet. Accessed 8 April 2002.

⁴⁶The source for the information involved in this case studies comes from my personal notes and reflections. During the time of the insurgency, I was the Chief, MNB-E Joint Implementation Commission (JIC). My mission during this time was to monitor compliance with the treaties by all the signatories. This dealt primarily with going into the GSZ and working with the Serbian Ministry of the Interior (Known by the Serbian acronym MUP) as we attempted to resolve the challenges in the GSZ. The position of the JIC led me into discussion with the TF Falcon CDR, the Serb 3d Army CDR, and the leader of the insurgents.

⁴⁷These comments emanate from a discussion between LTC Greg Dunlap (USMC), me, and other members of Seminar 11 at the US Army War College, 26 March 2002.

⁴⁸John Gardner, No Easy Victories, NY: Harper and Row, 1968), p. 131.

⁴⁹Steele and Walters, p. 30.

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