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Strategy as a Political Phenomenon and Concept

Vasily K. Belozerov

Moscow State Linguistic University, Moscow, Russia
✉ vk_belozerov@mail.ru

Abstract. Modern science doesn't sufficiently disclose the essence and content of strategy (political strategy), even though the term and its derivatives actively circulate in theoretical and political discourse. This highlights the necessity to establish terminological clarity regarding the understanding of strategy. This article reveals the genesis of strategy as a practical management activity and as a science, as well as shows its connection with the military sphere. For a long time, the development of strategy as a science was closely connected to military affairs. The political component in strategy appeared in the 19th century, and has been gradually expanding. To separate political strategy from military and give it an independent scientific status, various authors have attempted to develop such concepts as higher strategy, grand strategy, and state strategy. Throughout time two approaches to understanding strategy emerged: the first focuses mainly on goal-setting, and the second — on coordinating goals with the ways and resources required to achieve them. According to the author, strategy in politics means a purposeful and long-term action program implemented to achieve a designed result. Military strategy acts not only as the highest level of military art, but also as an integral component of state strategy. At the turn of the 2010s attempts were made to conceptualize political strategy, but they did not find further development. The generation of a full-fledged concept of political strategy seems to be heuristic and promising in both theoretical and practical domains.

Keywords: political strategy, higher strategy, state strategy, conceptualization

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Стратегия как политическое явление и понятие

В.К. Белозёров

Московский государственный лингвистический университет,
Москва, Российская Федерация
✉ vk_belozerov@mail.ru

Аннотация. В современной науке сущность и содержание понятия стратегии (политической стратегии) раскрыты недостаточно, при том что само понятие и производные от него активно циркулируют в теоретическом и политическом дискурсе. Наряду со стратегией широко используются и такие схожие по смыслу понятия, как концепция, доктрина, стратегия, основы государственной политики. Сложившаяся ситуация обусловливает необходимость установления терминологической ясности в отношении понимания стратегии. В исследовании раскрывается генезис стратегии как практической управленческой деятельности и как науки, показана ее связь с военной сферой социальной действительности. В течение длительного времени развитие стратегии как науки шло в связи с военным делом. Политический компонент в стратегии появился в XIX в., постепенно расширяясь. В интересах обособления политической стратегии от военной, придания ей самостоятельного научного статуса в разное время и разными авторами предпринимались попытки разработки концепций высшей стратегии, большой стратегии, государственной стратегии. В понимании стратегии сложилось два подхода. Сторонники первого сосредоточены преимущественно на целеполагании, второго — на согласовании целеполагания со способами и ресурсами достижения цели. По мнению автора, стратегия в политике означает целенаправленную и долгосрочную программу действий, реализуемую для достижения спроектированного результата. Военная стратегия выступает не только как высший уровень военного искусства, но и как неотъемлемый компонент государственной стратегии. На рубеже 2010-х гг. были предприняты попытки концептуализации политической стратегии, которые не получили дальнейшего развития. Выработка полноценной концепции политической стратегии представляется эвристичной и перспективной в теоретическом и прикладном плане.

Ключевые слова: политическая стратегия, высшая стратегия, государственная стратегия, концептуализация

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Introduction

Words — even the finest — turn into litter, wearing threadbare with use and barter.
V.V. Mayakovsky

The concept of “strategy” has long been entrenched in scientific and political discourse. Derivatives of the word — such as “strategic management”, “strategic planning”, and “strategic culture” — are also commonly used and have de facto

acquired signs of conceptualization and institutionalization. Moreover, the concept of "strategy" by default is considered something self-evident, given a priori, obviously understandable and at the same time containing a higher sacred meaning.

At the same time, there is still no well-established point of view on what a "strategy" is. Scientific works, official documents issued by states and international organizations (not to mention works of other genres) containing the word "strategy" or its derivatives in their names appear regularly in Russia and abroad, however, they do not make the term clear and are even capable of disorienting. It is even sometimes difficult to distinguish the numerous Russian strategic planning documents issued at the federal, subject and municipal levels. It is also difficult to explain their different designations as concepts, doctrines, strategies, and foundations of state policy. As we know, "a theorist cannot do more than preserve concepts and call things by their proper names" [Schmitt 2007: 144]. To begin with, it makes sense to outline the concept of strategy.

The Emergence of Strategy

It is known that as a means of military administration, strategy has been defined since Antiquity (Greek: stratos — army, and ago — I lead). German military historian G. Delbrück (1848–1929) [Delbrück 1999] drew attention to the qualitative transition in military affairs from considerations of tactical nature to strategic thinking, which spread in the 5th century BC under Pericles, and the negative consequences of the loss of strategy for Athens.

To understand the role and functions of a strategist in the organization of social and political life, it is important to take into account the fact that under Athenian democracy, when the political structure of society reached a sufficiently high level of development, the position of supreme strategist — strategos — remained the only elected public position [Weber 1990: 667]. Moreover, the number of re-elections was not limited. A strategos in Athens combined the functions of an official and a military leader. Having freedom of action, he had to report to the people's assembly about his actions. That is, in ancient Greece, strategy combined activities in both military and political spheres.

After more than two millennia, the concept of strategy was brought back to life thanks to the intellectual efforts of Prussian military theorist D.H. Bülow (1757–1807), who introduced the term in a revolutionary move. Russian military thinker A.A. Svechin considered Bülow a genius and put him "above many other classics" of strategy [Svechin 2003]. Several ideological achievements should be attributed to him, despite all their debatability and incompleteness.

1. Separation of strategy from tactics in the art of war, according to the criteria of time and space. Moreover, Bülow also introduced military operations, i.e. actually singled out all three levels of military art.

2. Substantiation of the possibility of defeating the enemy without a combat clash (according to Bülow, due to maneuvering and special deployment of troops).

3. The dual understanding of strategy: a) as a practical activity, b) as a science. Here we have to mention the ongoing misunderstanding and misconception when researchers of strategy are called strategists without any reservations.[1]

4. The introduction of the political component into military science (the science of war). Bülow's following statement is characteristic: "The knowledge of war conditions the knowledge of politics…" [Bülow 1806: 5]. Defending his approach, he rhetorically asked: "Military science is strategy and tactics (but by no means the art of parades and drills), or the science of using the state's power to strengthen and protect the society, in the name of the public good and honor: how can it not include politics?" [Svechin 2003: 366].

5. The indication of the existence of a political strategy and the need to develop a special science about it. Bülow emphasized that "political strategy … is still an unknown science; in order to initiate it, I will tell the world the principles of political strategy, and there will be no shortage of lamps that will try to illuminate them" [Svechin 2003: 366]. He put forward serious ideological claims: "… The first principle of science … will be the following: "Political strategy is related to the military the same way as the latter is related to tactics, and political strategy is higher." As a military strategy regulates the operations of one campaign, at most one war, so a political strategy focuses on the prosperity and existence of the state for centuries and millennia" [Svechin 2003: 367]. Insisting on the novelty and originality of his approach, Bülow wrote that his contemporaries "have not yet known such a political-military view [coup d'oeuil]" [Bülow 1806: 160]. Although he didn't complete his plans on the theoretical explanation of political strategy.

6. The statement and the solution of the problem of identifying the connection, correlation and hierarchy of various levels of military administration, determining the dominant status of political strategy. That, in fact, proclaimed the primacy of politics over military considerations, which soon was completed by Clausewitz, who paradoxically developed as a political thinker in ideological confrontation with Bülow.

In defining the content of strategy as a practical activity, Athens of the times of Pericles and Bülow have something in common: its coverage of the civil and military spheres of social reality.

Military strategy emerged and began to establish itself as an independent science in Europe in the last quarter of the 18th century and started penetrating into Russia. The heroes of the novel "War and Peace", even before "the thunderstorm of the twelfth year", considered strategy as of great interest precisely as a recently emerging science.[2]

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[1] See, for example: Austrian Defense Ministry strategist Reisner: Russia wins in Donbass through three tactics. Retrieved from https://ria.ru/20220604/donbass-1793071871.html (accessed: 26.03.2023).

[2] "Tell me how the Germans have taught you to fight Bonaparte by *this new science you call 'strategy'*." "Instead of an offensive, the plan of which, carefully prepared in accord with *the modern science of strategics*, had been handed to Kutúzov when he was in Vienna by the Austrian Hofkriegsrath, the sole and almost unattainable aim remaining for him was to effect a junction with the forces that were advancing from Russia, without losing his army as Mack had done at Ulm." (Tolstoy L. War and Peace. Retrieved from https://www.gutenberg.org/files/2600/2600-h/2600-h.htm). *Italics by me (Vasily K. Belozerov)*

The further development of strategy as a science followed the "military" path for a long time. Works containing "strategy" in their names were mostly dedicated to military strategy. Nevertheless, there was no clarity in the works of this period in determining the content of military strategy. European authors for a long time shied away from defining the content of strategy. A.A. Svechin explained it by the unquestioned authority of the author of the book "On War", drawing attention to the fact that "… the very word "strategist", which Clausewitz used to address persons who abused terminology, received in his mouth an offensive meaning close to charlatan. The next generations of writers after Clausewitz were afraid to even put the word "strategy" in the titles of their works" [Svechin 1935: 220].

Moving Towards a Higher Strategy

Pre-revolutionary Russia is an example of how a holistic understanding of military reality required political analysis, which was supposed to provide a high level of generalization. As early as in 1819, General I.G. Burtsov (1794–1829), stating the infantile state of military theory, noted that "all political sciences that affect the security of the people, as adjacent to the military, and, on the other hand, all moral sciences that set rules to control the human heart should be part of a general, extensive theory that governs the actions of true commanders" [Beskrovny 1960: 49].

The Russian followers of Clausewitz believed that the study of war was incomplete if it was emancipated from politics. Baron N.V. Medem (1798–1870) was the first professor of strategy at the military academy founded in 1832. When developing a course on strategy, he proceeded from the need to comprehend it precisely from the point of view of political considerations, reasonably believing that "war implies some kind of a political goal. The art of directing all military means in the most advantageous way to achieve this goal is the subject of *strategy*" [Beskrovny 1960: 86]. N.V. Medem considered it advisable and heuristic to oppose strategy as an art to strategy as a science. He very accurately described how strategy emerged as a system of scientific knowledge: "Strategy, in its essence, as an art, existed at all times whenever there was war. As a science, it appeared only when strategic considerations acquired significant importance in the actions of the war and became more complex and difficult" [Beskrovny 1960: 99].

Subsequently, the point of view dominating in Russia was that strategy represented a knowledge system which allowed to achieve the highest level of generalization of military reality. A well-known military theorist, General G.A. Leer (1829–1904) substantiated this status of strategy, since it "is the synthesis, the integration of the entire military art, its generalization, its philosophy" [Beskrovny 1960: 307]. Hence, he considered strategy "the science of all military sciences", the philosophy of military affairs. However, if we proceed from the subtitle of Leer's work "Strategy" ("Tactics of the Theatre of War"), we can conclude that his vision of strategy had a spatial limitation.

An example of the radicalization of Leer's views is the position of N.A. Korf (1866–1924). He devoted his work, published in 1897, to substantiating Strategy (with

a capital letter) as a new science superior to all others, including philosophy and military policy [Korf 2012].

As a result, it was necessary to distinguish a special part of strategy. P.A. Yazykov (1800–1869) had already declared the existence of a "higher part of strategy", which included not only the actions of the troops, but also the entire people [Beskrovny 1960: 152]. The introduction of the concept of "higher strategy" in Russia and its substantiation took place on the eve of the First World War. In fact, it referred to a purposeful and long-term political course focused on national interests. Military force was seen as a necessary, but not the only instrument of politics. Similarly, the most far-sighted representatives of the Russian officer corps, warning against entering into an unnecessary war and assessing the political course of the country, advocated the need to make it independent and purposeful and get rid of the influence of conditions, momentary considerations and external manipulations.

In 1913, V.Ya. Novitsky (1885 — after 1939) attempted to theoretically elaborate on the concept of higher strategy, which aims "to ensure the independent existence and further development of the state, in accordance with its political, economic, historical and cultural interests" [Novickij 1913: 1]. The interests of higher strategy, according to Novitsky, also required skillful handling of military power.

In the same year, A.E. Vandam (1867–1933) published "The Greatest of the Arts (Review of the Current International Situation in the Light of Higher Strategy)" [Vandam 2002]. According to Vandam, a country's higher strategy had a geopolitical determination, it required a coalition of land powers (Russia, Germany and France) aimed against the "refined despotism" of the Anglo-Saxons.

The ideas of the higher strategy of Russia are also found in other thinkers of that time. Unfortunately, they were not accepted, calls to develop a long-term political course and follow it were ignored, and the Russian Empire eventually ceased to exist.

The Politicization of Strategy

The subsequent conceptualization of strategy went in the direction of filling it with political meanings.

Soon after the Civil War ended Russian thinkers came to the conclusion that limiting strategy to the framework of military struggle was wrong. A.E. Snesarev drew the attention of A.A. Svechin, the author of the book "Strategy" (published in 1926), stating that there was no lull in the confrontation of the parties in between military operations, since "strategy does not operate with a sword, but through other means, even if they are alien — agitation, crushing the enemy's economy, overtaking in the reconstruction of one's own forces, etc." [Svechin 2003: 631].

Gradually, the understanding of strategy as a holistic and at the same time complex, multicomponent phenomenon took hold. After the Second World War, English researcher B. Liddel-Hart began to characterize state policy as a higher (grand) strategy that sets the direction for both the preparation and use of military force. He recognized the complexity of embracing and understanding grand strategy, since it is also related to the solution of issues of the post-war structure, and therefore

"unlike strategy, the essence of grand strategy is mostly terra incognita and needs further study and development" [Liddel-Hart 1999: 369].

The perception of strategy as a political phenomenon became widespread. In Russia, the relatively independent segment of state policy in the field of strategic planning has recently been formalized,[3] and the theoretical and methodological foundations of this policy are being developed [Nazarov 2022]. Intellectual efforts are being made in the field of strategic planning for Russia's foreign policy [Meshkov 2019].

The emerging synthesis of strategy and politics determines the clarification of their relationship. It seems that the use of the word "strategy" intends to respond to the developing domestic and international processes and reflects the demand of society, its elite and government leadership for a purposeful, long-term, sustainable, consistent and predictable political course.

The development and implementation of such a course requires following the project approach, which involves the construction of a remote future, and quite a substantive one at that. Hence, it can be argued that *strategy in politics means a purposeful and long-term program of actions implemented to achieve a projected result*. To confirm this position and the practical significance of having a detailed image of the future, which guides the detailed program of actions, let us cite A.A. Svechin, according to whom strategy is "the definition of the result to be achieved. … If to administer means to foresee, then in strategy to administer means to foresee far ahead" [Svechin 2003: 19, 25]. Moreover, among the past and present theorists of strategy, there are supporters of a radical position, for which the goal (given result) plays an absolute, dominating role in relation to its achievement, up to ignoring the means and resources available. The Prussian philosopher of war should also be referred to such authors: "Creating means by which war is waged is not of interest to Clausewitz. Clausewitz regards domestic politics mainly as an inevitable overhead" [Svechin 1935: 258].

At present, a different, more balanced understanding of strategy is widespread, primarily in the West. According to English researcher L. Freedman, strategy is "the science of maintaining a balance between goals, methods and means; the science of setting goals, as well as the resources and methods for achieving them" [Freedman 2018: 9]. Other authors agree with him [Raschke, Tils 2013; Stupka 2008]. Assessing this approach allows to express doubt and raise the following question: how then does strategy differ, for example, from management and logistics, which also require coordination of efforts in time and space, correlation of goals and means?

Relatively recently, studies devoted to understanding state strategy began to appear [Kovač, Marček 2013]. In this case, Freedman's constructive approach implies that within the framework of state strategy military force is naturally included among the consistent policy means and resources. With this

[3] The Decree of the President of the Russian Federation dated November 8, 2021 No. 633 "On Approval of the Fundamentals of State Policy in the Sphere of Strategic Planning in the Russian Federation". Retrieved March 26, from http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/47244

understanding, military strategy acts not only as the highest level of military art, but also as an integral component of state strategy. Moreover, as L. Freedman admits, "the concept of the strategy of 'using all available means to achieve the goal' arose relatively recently, but has already become widespread in military circles" [Freedman 2018: 681]. And you can find plenty of evidence for this. Meanwhile, the uncontrolled spread of this approach can, under certain conditions, lead to rejecting the primacy of politics over the military sphere and bring to the establishment of the ideology and practice of militarism, with all the ensuing consequences.

We are yet to see the conceptualization of actual political strategy in its expanded form. At the turn of the 2010s German political scientists made a serious bid for its formation [Raschke, Tils 2010; 2013]. Meanwhile in Russia, the problem of political strategy was only stated as a philosophical one [Shevchenko 2011]. No other attempts focusing on the theoretical understanding of political strategy and the development of its definition could be found.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it should be noted that the use of the word "strategy" in political and scientific discourse is intended to indicate a long-term and purposeful, organized activity. The development of a full-fledged and detailed concept of political strategy seems to be heuristic and promising in both theoretical and applied terms. The domestic scientific community has the potential to prove itself in this field.

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About the author:

Vasily K. Belozerov — Doctor of Sciences (Politics), Professor, Head of the Department of Political Sciences, Moscow State Linguistic University; Leading Researcher, Research Laboratory of the Study of Global and Regional Socio-Political Processes, Dobrolyubov Linguistics University of Nizhny Novgorod (e-mail: vk_belozerov@mail.ru) (ORCID: 0000-0003-4875-5878)